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Grief as Medicine for Grief:
Complaint Poetry in Early Modern England, 1559-1609

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ABSTRACT

Grief as Medicine for Grief:
Early Modern Complaint Poetry in England, 1559-1609

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This dissertation traces the meaning and scope of early modern complaint poetry. I argue that what I understand as a secular “poetics of dissatisfaction” arose to fill the void left when religious auricular confession was no longer an institutionalized practice, and that this mode of literary expression was itself shaped by the evolving legal discourse of complaining. These articulations of dissatisfaction cross genre, style, and medium, but they all share a common language with two prominent discourses: the penitential literature of the Reformation, which worked to refigure confession when it was no longer a sacrament; and juridical testimony, which regularly blurred the line between auricular confession in the ecclesiastical courts and secular jurisprudence in the common law courts. Complaint poetry investigates questions about evidence, sincerity, and the impossibility of ever doing—or saying—enough about despair; it also considers the imaginative implications of a post-Reformation world in which the remedy for despair might be its poetic expression.

Critics have long seen emergent interiority as a defining characteristic of early modern poetry; however, I argue that complaint poems are argumentative, highly emotional, and committed to revealing a shattered self in publicly staged distress. In doing so, complaint poems not only trouble the borders of poetic subjectivity, but also provide a generative critique of cultural institutions that failed to provide consolation, supplanting those institutions with the possibilities of confessional expression and consolation in print and performance.

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I dedicate this work to my parents, John and Marianne Diaz, whose appreciation for higher education inspires me to work hard every day, and to Jason Reblando, who offers a sympathetic ear and provides much consolation for all my complaints, literary and otherwise.

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Introduction
The Poetics of Dissatisfaction in Early Modern England



Figure 1. Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, Full-length portrait of a woman in Oriental dress, late sixteenth century. *Source:* The Royal Collection.

In the 1590s in England, the most fashionable court portraitist, Marcus Gheeraert the Younger, painted a picture of an unknown lady. The full-length portrait echoes his Ditchley portrait of Queen Elizabeth, also painted at around this time, but here, the unknown lady is positioned in a pastoral scene. To her right stands a stag whose bowed head suggests the sorrow of the lady, and to the right of the stag stands a tree, inscribed with three mottoes: *dolor est medicina e dolori* (grief is medicine for grief), *iniusti lуста querela* (a just complaint of injustice) and *mea sic mihi* (thus to me, my...). Although the lady appears to stand passively in a formal posture of great composure, the sonnet displayed at her feet shows that she is, in fact, doing something quite common in the early modern period: she is complaining.

The portrait features a complaint sonnet, in a cartouche the bottom right of the frame. In the sonnet, the speaker of the poem takes the voice of the woman in Persian dress.¹ The lady compares herself with the “restless swallow” (1) in the background of the painting, explaining that both she and the swallow share “just complaints of cruelty unkind” (3). In the next stanza, the lady continues her projection onto the natural world, comparing her “sighs unknown” to the silent tears of the “weeping stag” (5, 7). The only remedy that can alleviate the symptoms of her suffering is the music of her complaints and the tears that she sheds in the final couplet of the poem. These tears and complaints, then, are generative in a world that provides no other form of consolation. Gheeraert’s portrait derives much of its rhetorical force from the motto “grief is medicine for grief.” Complainants in the poems popular between 1559-1609 rely on this proverbial notion that

¹ For speculations on the significance of the woman’s Persian dress and the perceptions of Persia in early modern England, see Roy Strong, “‘My weeping Stagg I crowne’: The Persian Lady Reconsidered” in *The Art of the Emblem: Essays in Honor of Karl Josef Holtgen*, ed. Michael Bath, John Manning, and Alan R. Young (New York: AMS Press, 1993). Several of Gheeraert’s most well-known portraits include mottoes or emblems, but with the exception of the Ditchley portrait, this is the only one of Gheeraert’s portraits that includes a cartouche and sonnet. Karen Heart and Rica Jones, *Marcus Gheeraerts II: Elizabethan Artist; In Focus* (London: Tate Publishing, 2002).

“grief is lessened when imparted to others.”² Proverbial wisdom that endorsed the sharing of grief appeared with astonishing frequency in the poetry of the period, suggesting that the complainant’s articulation of griefs to a listening poet might provide them with consolation.

In this project I locate the discourse of complaining at the meeting point of two stories of change in the culture. As the practice of auricular confession was desacralized and renegotiated in the years after Henry VIII’s break with the Catholic Church, there was separately a rise in the appearance of secular complaints in the legal courts. My project examines the outburst of literary complaints at the axis of where these two other cultural sites meet. Early modern writers refigured and reframed their arguments against church, state, and fellow Englishmen in complaint poetry, a mode that pervades every early modern written and spoken discourse.³ Complaint is present in written expression that investigates—and surpasses—confessional expression, the consolation of grief, and the possibility of juridical redress in the early modern period. In the literary realm, the use of declamations, invectives, and catalogues of blame were substantive enough to comprise a mode of expression that had dissatisfaction at its center.⁴ In the

² For the numerous references to this proverbial phrase elsewhere in the early modern period, see Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950). Tilley cites several other related proverbs, such as “There is no curing of a grief concealed (C923),” “The greater grief drives out the less (G446),” “Grief pent up will break the heart (G449),” and “That grief is light which is capable of counsel (G450).” The early modern poet Thomas Howell, a consummate complainer, uses the motto “Sorrowe disclosed, somewhat eased” as the title for one of his many complaint poems in *His Devises, for his owne exercise, and his Friends pleasure* (London: 1581), E2v-3v.

³ In calling complaint a “mode” of expression, I borrow from Mary Jo Kietzman, who argues that complaint “extends to a wide range of narrative kinds including medieval tragedy, allegory, epic, prose history, and picaresque.” “‘Means to Mourn Some Newer Way’: The Role of the Complaint in Early-Modern Narrative” (Ph.D. Diss., Boston College, 1993), 1-2.

⁴ As Donald Kelley has observed, early modern literary energies presented “many voices and many messages: thundering denunciations and insidious threats, shrill complaints and reasoned arguments, naïve appeals and outrageous demands, brave exhortations and pitiful lamentations,” all forms of literary expression that are easily overlooked by those critics who focus on “the ‘good letters’ of humanist tradition and vernacular innovation.” Donald R. Kelley, “Ideas of Resistance before Elizabeth,” in *The Historical Renaissance: New Essays on Tudor and*

extra-literary realm, too, early modern subjects voiced their complaints in verbal and written testimonies in the Court of Star Chamber, the ecclesiastical “bawdy” courts, and other courts that relied on both written and oral expression. Complaint poetry, like revenge tragedies (many of which include complaints), is a mode that feeds on itself. It calls not only for “repetition but also for increase, exaggeration, overdoing.”⁵ Complainants stubbornly insist on their subjection in language, repeat their grievances, try to cure the incurable, and in doing so, find—and create—pleasure through literary repetition.

Many critics and historians have characterized the early modern era as one that privileged restraint and moderation of emotions. In *The Civilizing Process*, Norbert Elias argues that early modern European culture created “systems of restraint and decorum” that transformed educated subjects into disciplined, bureaucratized individuals.⁶ As the poems that I examine demonstrate, however, complainants in the poems and dramatic texts of the period show a preoccupation with the purging of emotional excess as a form of consolation and redress. Complainants cannot do or say enough about their despair, and neither the rituals of auricular confession nor the rhetoric of juridical testimony can accommodate their grief. Ultimately, the literary and dramatic expression of grief and rage provide complainants with some form of consolation, even if the poem or playtext does not create a change in the condition of the complainant.⁷

Stuart Literature and Culture, ed. Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 49.

⁵ Heather Hirschfield, ““Taking Vengeance of Our Selves”” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America, Philadelphia, PA, April 2006).

⁶ Jonathan Goldberg, *Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 41. See Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Urizen Books, 1978-82).

⁷ Natalie Zemon Davis’s study of letters of remission in early modern France demonstrates the importance of those documents as therapeutic exercises: “Turning a terrible action into a story is a way to distance oneself from it, at

Complainants in the poems I discuss here are preoccupied with their excesses, the thoroughness of their confessions, and how they will be received, all concerns that appear regularly in the shifting discourses of despair and consolation in the late medieval and early modern periods. Complaint literature is as old as written poetry, with roots in the Lamentations of Jeremiah and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible, the epistolary laments of Virgil and Ovid, the complaints of Chaucer and Hoccleve, and the *planctus* that were central to Christian meditation and worship in the medieval period, all of which were significant source texts for early modern poets. However, early modern complaint poetry carried extra resonance in an age where confessional expression held an ambivalent position in the culture. The speakers in these poems can do very little to console themselves; but they can say a great deal, and their writers can write ad infinitum. Cynthia Marshall rightly observes that “literary pleasure, at least as we have come to know it since the Renaissance, is bound up with a conjunction of pleasure and pain. Standard literary devices, such as formal repetition, replacement through the tropes, and redefinition of people and experiences, come into new focus in the light of this analysis as the conventions necessary to deliver pleasure.”⁸ Marshall’s observations about the repetition compulsion, both psychoanalytically and formally, informs much of my work in this project, which fuses formalism and historicism in order to examine how and why a poetics of dissatisfaction was a dominant force in the literature of the early modern period.

worst a form of self-deception, at best a way to pardon the self” (*Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987], 114). In the poems and plays that I discuss in this project, however, complainants derive pleasure from retelling the story of their demise and show no interest in distancing themselves from their narratives of extreme distress. Repeating and remembering the details both shatter and construct them as cohesive figures. As Daniel writes in *Delia* sonnet XLVIII, “I doubt to finde such pleasure in my gayning,/As nowe I taste in compasse of complayning” (13-14). From *The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Samuel Daniel*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963).

⁸ *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 53.

From auricular confession to juridical testimony

Complaint poetry is a distinct mode that borrows from and reimagines the rituals of auricular confession and the rhetoric of juridical testimony, two overlapping forms of confessional expression in a period during which confession was an increasingly secularized practice. In the years before Henry VIII's break with the Catholic Church, auricular confession was a ritual of self-representation that ministered "to the privation caused by sin by restoring to the penitent an original wholeness."⁹ The ritual of the sacrament provided an institutional and spiritual language that allowed subjects to reach beyond themselves and hope for consolation from another subject, but the nature of that reaching and its reception by the priest were always points of contention. In the years following the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, a vast penitential literature evolved in both Latin and vernacular languages which offered priests information and advice about sin, confession, confessors, penitents, contrition, satisfaction, and correction.¹⁰ Medieval *summa* were encyclopedic in their charting of every gradation of sin, operating as guides for priests who functioned increasingly as judges of sincerity and doctors who could offer the medicine of consolation to sinners. Priests were required to ask for good, *complete* confessions from sinners,¹¹ to tell sexual sins as explicitly as possible, and to look for signs of sincerity: facial expressions, hand gestures, and physical postures that would indicate that inner sorrow of the sinner.¹² This semiotics of confession was about more than just hearing a

⁹ Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (London: Routledge, 1991), 385.

¹⁰ Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 47.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹² Anne Thayer, "Judge and Doctor: Images of the Confessor in Printed Model Sermon Collections, 1450-1520" in *Penitence in the Age of Reformations* (Aldershot: Aldgate, 2000). In the late medieval period, "the most universal

confession with the ear: it involved the priest's full attention as he watched, heard, and interpreted the penitent's signs of despair.

In order to understand the discourse that I term the "poetics of dissatisfaction," it is useful to first examine the etymological roots of satisfaction, and the eventual overlapping of satisfaction with the structures of complaint. The first usage of the term "satisfaction" in the English language was in its ecclesiastical context. The ostensible goal of satisfaction was embedded in the etymology of the word, from the Latin *satisfacere*, which meant doing enough to expiate the sins of the penitent subject.¹³ This physical *doing* of satisfaction, coupled with the specific expressions of deep sorrow during confession, would produce the effect of satisfaction for the priest and God. *Satisfaction*, then, was a theological concept, but even in the earliest years of the Catholic Church, *satisfaction* had legal overtones. The early Christian theologian Tertullian borrowed the term *satisfacere* from Roman law and incorporated it into the early theology surrounding auricular confession: to *satisfy* a creditor required the paying back of a debt or obligation in Roman law, and in the early church, satisfaction was the final of three essential stages in the sacrament of penance.¹⁴ I have described satisfaction as the final stage of a sacrament in which the penitent subject pays for his or her sins through physical acts of repentance. Throughout this project, I isolate and examine moments of poetic dis-satisfaction when complainants cannot *say* enough about their despair.

expectation conveyed to sinners is that they must make a full confession; only what is confessed can be forgiven...The preachers are adamant that nothing be omitted..." (14).

¹³ Before the English Reformation, "satisfaction" referred to "the performance by a penitent of the penal and meritorious acts enjoined by his confessor as payment of the temporal punishment due to his sin: the last of the constituent parts of the sacrament of penance." *OED*, s.v. "satisfaction," I.2.

¹⁴ My thanks to Heather Hirschfield, who first brought Tertullian to my attention in her presentation "Taking Vengeance of Our Selves."

The sacrament of penance was desacralized during the English Reformation; even so, its desacralization did not diminish its importance as a means of consolation in the culture. Throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Protestant theologians focused on redefining the important rituals of auricular confession. Protestant writers such as John Norden, William Perkins, and Robert Burton examined the nature of conscience, despair, and the possibility of consolation in the years after auricular confession was desacralized and the status of confessional expression was ambivalent at best. In addition to this refiguring of confession as consolation, the ecclesiastical courts continued to use rituals of both juridical testimony and public penance as methods of punishment and means for finding redress. Because there was no separation between church and state in early modern England, subjects were regulated by both the ecclesiastical and common law courts.¹⁵ As Lorna Hutson observes, there was a shift in the thinking about the conscience in common law, “which, in turn, permitted the increase in the common law’s prestige and moral authority.”¹⁶ Lawyers, juries, complainants and defendants all relied on a forensic rhetoric to frame the narratives of cases and provide sufficient evidence for that case. This forensic narrating and gathering raised awareness of evidential concepts beyond the courtroom. As Hutson demonstrates in her readings of plays as varied as *Titus Andronicus* and *The Comedy of Errors*, this increased awareness of forensic reasoning in the legal sphere

¹⁵ Lorna Hutson observes that “after the English Reformation, the relationship of English common law to the jurisdiction of the church changed. This is not to say that the church courts declined, as an older historical narrative once declared, but that the vigorous revival of church court business in the latter half of the sixteenth century should be seen as part of the intensification of popular litigiousness and of local moral governance, rather than as a precise continuation of the pre-Reformation jurisdiction over the internal forum, the soul, by means of mandatory annual confession.” *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

permeated other discourses as well.¹⁷ In a culture increasingly obsessed with slander, defamation, and sexual scandal, juridical case-making refigured the uses of confessional expression in both the legal and literary realms and became a central component of justice in the period.

Complaint poetry represents a field of literary expression in which complainants consider the impossibility of achieving satisfaction through confessional expression. This dissatisfaction appears when complainants frame their stories as narratives told to a forlorn poet; when complainants articulate their distress in the unmediated epistolary form; and in dramatic texts, when complainants repeat their complaints against corrupted kings and find consolation in their articulations. Complaint literature considers the imaginative implications of a post-Reformation world in which consolation might be possible to attain through literary expression. This possibility is central to understanding complaint as a mode of excess that, in its generation and repetition, can provide satisfaction.

Gender and Genre

Critics have suggested that the “female” complaint is a uniquely gendered sub-genre, one that announces the dissatisfaction of dishonored women in a patriarchal social context.¹⁸

Certainly, gender is a concern in these poems: the complaints of women against sexual defamation were commonplace in the ecclesiastical courts of the period, and the complaint tradition frequently addresses issues of gender, particularly in the complaints voiced by women and written by men, from Ovid’s *Heroides* up through Shakespeare’s *A Lover’s Complaint*. John Kerrigan observes that male authors have traditionally voiced complaint through female figures

¹⁷ Hutson devotes a chapter to each of these playtexts in *The Invention of Suspicion*.

¹⁸ Lauren Berlant, “The Female Complaint,” *Social Text*, 19/20 (1988): 237-259, 243. John Kerrigan also sees the female-gendered complainant as the most important component of the “female” complaint. See his introduction to *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and the ‘Female’ Complaint; A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

in order to “reinforce commonly held fallacies about uninterrupted female garrulity” among a largely male readership.¹⁹ To call these complaints “female,” however, is to ignore the male complaints that appear in numerous texts in the period, as well as the male complaints that are embedded within and around ostensibly “female” complaints—in the frame of the poem, in which a male poet or narrator announces himself; and in the poem itself, when a male character utters his own complaint.

This focus on complaints as “female” also eludes a larger problem of fluidity in the rhetoric of the period. Lynn Enterline focuses on Ovid’s frequent ventriloquizing of female voices in *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses*, observing that it is difficult to clearly identify Ovid’s characters are strictly male or female: “as soon as Ovid’s poems provoke the Barthesian question—‘whose voice is this?’—one can no longer say, with any certainty, whose ‘experience’ of violence or desire the text is representing, or for whom its stories may be said to ‘speak.’”²⁰ Enterline argues that the rhetorical training that schoolboys received in the sixteenth century regularly blurred the line between male and female voices. As they translated Ovid’s ventriloquized texts and then performed them as exercises in *declamatio*, schoolboys were encouraged to regularly cross between male and female identities in order to provide the most convincing performances. Gendering these complaints as “female,” then, might say more about

¹⁹ *Motives of Woe*, 11. Elizabeth Harvey points to this phenomenon as form of “transvestite ventriloquism” in *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), and Wendy Wall also examines this phenomenon in *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). I am indebted to this attention to the relationships between gender, poetic voice, and literary authority in the early modern period; however, gender is not the only point of entry for these affective performances. In fact, the focus on gender unnecessarily deemphasizes the rhetorical effects of—and intersections between—confession, juridical testimony, and poetic complaint in the period.

²⁰ In *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 11.

the needs of later periods to anthologize and classify these complaints in gendered terms than about the cultural moment in which they were written.

The Chapters

This project is comprised of five chapters. In Chapter One, “‘The rufull Register of mischief and mishap’: Penance and Juridical Testimony in *The Mirror for Magistrates*,” I argue that complaint is a mode that subverts didactic aims in favor of repeatedly articulating dissatisfaction. The *Mirror for Magistrates* is a multi-authored compilation meant to function as a didactic “mirror” into which rulers can look for advice on ethical governance. Sometimes the complainants are abject and penitent, desiring some relief from their misery; some represent themselves as incompetent, revealing that they were not fit for the office that they inherited; and still others are outraged that they have been slandered or at least misrepresented by other historians. As varied as these complainants are, they all engage with the didactic *de casibus* tradition as they narrate their falls from power and offer themselves as examples of what to avoid. Even so, the complainants often subvert the didactic aims of their poems, preferring instead to express their rage against the forces that led to their falls, and to turn the complaint into an invective against other corrupt officials. In each of the complaints in this collection, the gestures and postures of ghosts of fallen figures are very prescribed. The editors of the compilation preface each poem with introductory material that prepares the reader for a dramatic performance. The ghosts of fallen figures enter and speak, and their testimonies function as both penitential expression and juridical defense as the complainants both rue their own actions and bring others to task. Complaining requires a performance situation and a rhetorical attempt at persuasion, both in the juridical arena and in confession. My contribution in this chapter is to show how the performance of emotional excess so important to complaining complicates the

traditional understanding of *The Mirror* as a morally instructive historiography. In my close readings of Jane Shore's and Richard III's complaints, I use legal complaining and auricular confession to tease out the contradictory stances in postures of complaining in *The Mirror*.

The complaints in *The Mirror for Magistrates* influenced much of the erotic complaint poetry of the period. In Chapter Two, "'Nor gives it satisfaction to our blood': The Case for the Literary in *A Lover's Complaint* and *The Complaint of Rosamond*," I argue that "lover's complaints" constitute an imaginative response to the dissolution of the sacrament of confession and to the proliferation of bills of complaint and defamation law suits in the Court of Star Chamber and "bawdy" courts. The complainants who weep and wail in these poems use blood-inked letters as "proof" of the transgressions that have dishonored them, as if presenting evidence in a court of law. Complainants feel a compulsion to reveal all to their confessors in the late medieval confessional model; additionally, these complainants try to create cases, accuse the people who have dishonored them, and defend themselves from rebuke, just as complainants would have as they prepared their bills of complaint for the Court of Star Chamber. This conflation imaginatively foregrounds the ways in which auricular confession and early modern jurisprudence found their rhetorical expression in complaint poetry.

Spenser's *Ruines of Time*, *Tears of the Muses*, and *The Shepheardes Calender* explore the possibilities of curing grief by speaking about it recursively. In Chapter Three, "'A dolefull case desires a dolefull song': Edmund Spenser's Emblems and the Poetics of Dissatisfaction," I examine Spenser's use of emblems as storehouses of grief. In Spenser's *Complaints*, the Genius of Verulamium and the Nine Muses ask Spenser-as-narrator to record of their misery as they wail and shriek in pastoral settings. The complaints allow Spenser to position himself as a kind of confessor in some poems and judge in others, not in ecclesiastical terms, but in secular,

authorial terms that grant the writing subject the license to transform confessional expression into literary output. In *The Shepheardes Calender*, Spenser presents Colin as a male complainant whose only consolation is the singing of his songs of dissatisfaction. With the excessive emotion of their bodies and voices, the distress of these complainants can only be consoled by the poet, who not only watches but also listens to their misery, and creates a written register of their woes as a literary response.

In Chapter Four, I shift to a more rigorous focus on the status of forensic rhetoric in complaint poetry. In “‘This hateful Scroule’: The Epistolary Complaint as Forensic Evidence in the *Heroides*, *Matilda*, and *Englands Heroicall Epistles*,” I argue that epistolary complaints draw from the forensic rhetoric of letter-writing manuals in order to foreground the letter as proof of emotional distress. Unlike Shakespeare’s *A Lovers Complaint* and Samuel Daniel’s *Complaint of Rosamond*, which establish a relationship between a priestlike listener and a confessing complainant in the frame of the poem, epistolary complaints signal a shift toward a more secularized mode of confessional expression in the poetry of the period by deploying juridical language and structure in the letters of the complainants. These complaints challenge the line between body and page with metaphors that turn blood into ink, faces into pages, and bodies into books. In doing so, they both provide a critique of the limits of written material and an attempt to surpass those limits. I begin the chapter with a consideration of what Gary Schneider has referred to as the “culture of epistolarity” in early modern England, focusing on passages from Erasmus’ *De conscribendis epistolis* and Angel Day’s *The English Secretary*. I then focus on the importance of Ovid’s *Heroides* to the early modern complaint tradition, reading several of George Turberville’s most compelling translations from the *Heroycall Epistles of the Learned Poet Publius Ovidius Naso*. I examine Michael Drayton’s *Matilda* and selections from *Englands*

Heroicall Epistles, which repeatedly signals its debt to the Ovidian complaint tradition. Finally, I point to the afterlife of the early modern epistolary complaint in *Les Lettres Portugaises*, translated into English as *Five love-letters from a nun to a cavalier*.

Complaints that were adapted for the Renaissance stage demonstrate that the performance of extreme dissatisfaction, even when it was not crucial to the play's plot, was central to the development of tragedies in the Elizabethan period. In Chapter Five, "“You hold too heinous a respect of grief”: The Uses of Complaint on the Early Modern Stage," I argue that the scenes of complaint in *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine*, Shakespeare's *Richard III*, and other plays borrow from the rhetorical and performative excess of Hecuba in order to present argumentative, highly emotional, and revelatory stagings of complaint. In these staged complaints, lamentation—over the death of a loved one or over a political or romantic injustice—and anger converge. These complaints share formal and rhetorical similarities with complaint on the page, but onstage, complainants find consolation as they make their distress legible physically as well as verbally. I examine texts by Thomas Wright and John Bulwer, authors who examine the legibility and transferability of emotion through word and gesture. I then consider how Hecuba, the most extreme of complainants, functions as a classical precedent against which early modern complainants gauge their distress. In my reading of *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine*, I focus on the status of Humber as a didactic emblem of distress and on complaint as generative of pity and love between Elstred and Locrine. In *Richard III*, I consider the lamentations of Queen Elizabeth, Queen Margaret, and the Duchess of York and isolate the moments at which lamentation becomes a source of invective and interrogation. These plays emphasize the point at which extreme emotional distress becomes crucial to effective testimony while at the same time providing consolation to those who utter complaint. The exposure of emotional distress, rather

than its restraint, is crucial to the staging of plays that privileged complaint as a site of juridical case-making.

The Formal Turn

In recent years, critics have shown a revived interest in the formal aspects of early modern poetry.²¹ Mark David Rasmussen observes that this return to formalism is a response to criticism that has been dominated by historical treatments of literary texts. According to Rasmussen, New Historicist critics have moved too far away from the emotive and social power of forms “in favor of modes of analysis that...for all of their methodological sophistication, tend to interpret Renaissance works as bundles of historical or cultural content, without much attention to the ways that their meanings are shaped and enabled by the possibilities of form.”²² In this dissertation, I use what James Breslin has termed “an historically informed formalist criticism.”²³ I draw my methodology from recent criticism that blends formal and historical concerns to provide innovative critiques of literary texts. As Susan J. Wolfson observes, formal properties of literary texts matter, “not just as local articulations, or even as local articulations radiating into and unsettling the ground on which they stand, but as constitutive of the works at

²¹ The examples of historical formalism that have been integral to my understanding of complaint in the period have been Brian Cumming’s *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Heather Dubrow’s *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and Its Counterdiscourses* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), Lynn Enterline’s *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Lorna Hutson’s *The Invention of Suspicion*, and Cynthia Marshall’s *Shattering of the Self*.

²² “Introduction: New Formalisms?” in *Renaissance Literature and Its Formal Engagements*, ed. Mark David Rasmussen (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 1. Marshall echoes Rasmussen’s concern, arguing that Stephen Greenblatt’s notion of “Renaissance self-fashioning” affirmed the narrative of emergent subjectivity in the early modern period. In addition, she feels that New Historicist reading methods underread the power of fantasy and the imagination. She writes that “the new historicist idea that texts do the work of culture and manifest power within it collapses textuality into culture, denying the imaginative space of writing.” *The Shattering of the Self*, 2.

²³ James Breslin, *From Modern to Contemporary: American Poetry, 1945-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), xiv.

large.”²⁴ In my treatments of primarily juridical and ecclesiastical texts, I focus on those rhetorical and formal components that share an affinity with complaint poems; and in my treatments of poetry, I examine the juridical and ecclesiastical language and postures, the tensions and instabilities of rime royal stanzas, long narrative structures of each complaint, and the allusive quality of complaints that respond to and try to outbid other poems. In doing so, I foreground a poetics of dissatisfaction that I hope will prove useful to readers of revenge tragedies, histories, chronicle texts, epistolary poems, sonnet sequences, and emblem books of the period.

²⁴ “Reading for Form.” *Modern Language Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2000): 1-16, 11.

Chapter One
‘The ruffull Register of mischief and mishap’:
Penance and Juridical Testimony in *The Mirror for Magistrates*

Introduction

In the dedicatory sonnet that precedes Thomas Wyatt’s *Penitentiall Psalms*, Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, suggests that Wyatt’s translations might be capable of influencing the rulers of nations. By reading of David’s “parfite penitence...Rewlers may se in a myrrour clere/The bitter frewte of false concupicense” (9-11).¹ The final couplet of Surrey’s sonnet critiques those princes who make excuses for their poor behavior. Surrey hopes that Wyatt’s translations might transform those princes: “In Prynces hartes goddess scourge yprynted depe/Might them awake out of their synfull slepe” (13-14). Surrey’s poem positions Wyatt’s psalms in the *de casibus* tradition, a tradition that allows great figures to announce the conditions of their falls from power. By reflecting upon the troubles of David and the productivity of his “parfite penitence” as if the collection poems were a mirror, princes might become more judicious in their private and public lives.

Surrey’s poem highlights the paradox of David’s penitential psalms: they are the private lamentations of a public king who has eaten the “bitter frewte of false concupicense.” David is a symbol for the conflation between public and private, between political and erotic, and the ways in which public figures are held to a more stringent moral standard. Surrey figures Wyatt’s poems as “myrrours” that might allow early modern princes to carefully monitor their behavior. He also refers to the “imprint” that the poems can make on the hearts of vulnerable leaders. The

¹ From *The Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, ed. Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1969), 98.

physiological imprinting of the heart is a powerful mnemonic device for fallible humans who too easily forget the valuable lessons of erotic and political transgression.

Surrey clearly establishes a connection between David's ancient model and the rulers of early modern England. As John Kerrigan observes, the confessional nature of David's penitential psalms "gave immediacy to a David figure, the fallen prince as Everyman."² David's narrative was analogous to those stories of early modern kings, princes, and counselors who succumbed to greed and lust.³ The didacticism of Surrey's sonnet also resonated with the literary project of *The Mirror for Magistrates*, a vast and ambitious literary effort that featured complaints spoken by dozens of fallen figures from English history who lamented the often gruesome acts that led to their respective falls from power. *The Mirror* was one of the most popular poetic texts of the sixteenth century, and its publication history is proof of its popularity and the opportunities it provided its many compilers. The *Mirror's* "progressive and cumulative"⁴ publication over the course of seven significantly revised and expanded editions, coupled with the political and

² Readers of the Geneva Bible would have recognized David as a complainant. Several of the prefaces to the psalms refer to the psalms in this way; for example, the introductory lines for Psalm 69 read: "The complaints, prayers, fervent zeale & great anguish, of David is set forthe" (249). *The Bible and Holy Scriptures conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament. Translated according to the Ebrue and Greke, and conferred with the best translations in diuers languges* (Geneva: Rouland Hall, 1560).

³ In *The mirrour of mutability* (1579), Anthony Munday describes David as a "comely personage...attired in the weeds of a Gentlemen" (preface to "The Complaint of David," page unnumbered), thereby updating the ancient Hebrew David in early modern garb. Kerrigan observes that "Wyatt's David, indeed, set back and scrutinized by the narrator, resembles Edward IV, Loctrinus, Vortiger, and those other adulterous and faulty monarchs" as they are characterized in the *Mirror for Magistrates*. *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and the 'Female' Complaint; A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 25.

⁴ Lily B. Campbell, introduction to *The Mirror for Magistrates: Edited from the Original Texts in the Huntington Library* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1938), 4. *The Mirror* was first published in 1559, with a total of nineteen complaints written and edited by William Baldwin and other poets. It was then published in several varied and expanded editions by John Higgins and Thomas Blennerhasset, and then expanded into its final edition published in 1610 by Richard Niccols. Many scholars have diligently attended to the intricacies of the *Mirror's* publication history, most notably Lily Campbell in her introduction; Paul Budra in *The Mirror for Magistrates and the de casibus Tradition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); and Scott Campbell Lucas, "Tragical Poetry as Political Resistance: A Mirror for Magistrates, 1554-1563" (Ph.D. Diss., Duke University, 1997).

philosophical scope of each of its poems, provided a “polyvocal”⁵ reading experience. Not only did readers engage with the speakers of each individual complaint, but they also witnessed the editorial interventions that preceded and followed the poems with commentaries and observations on literary collaboration, religious devotion, poetic decorum, and national destiny.

The complaints in *The Mirror for Magistrates* necessarily elicit contradictory emotions and identifications. The prose frames that precede each complaint prepare the reader for the confessional expression of each complainant’s performance while also providing a space in which poets respond to and judge the complaints, as if the complainants are providing juridical testimony. As the ghosts of fallen figures enter and speak, their testimonies function as both penitential expression and juridical defense as the complainants rue their own actions and bring other fallen figures to task. The penitential and juridical language in these poems intersects and overlaps, and the tension created in that intersection produces a highly complex mode for expressing grief and dissatisfaction in the political, religious, and erotic realms. This blurring of auricular confession and legal complaint demonstrates the central connection between ecclesiastical and juridical rhetoric in a period during which literary texts negotiated the role of the body and outpouring of emotion as proof of transgression. My contribution in this chapter is to show how the performance of emotional excess complicates the traditional understanding of this book as historiographical record. As both penitential and juridical testimony, then, *The Mirror* provided readers and writers with an opportunity to meditate on the nature and abuse of power and allowed those same subjects to contemplate the radical religious and juridical changes of the period.

⁵ Budra, *The Mirror for Magistrates*, 35.

Critical treatments of *The Mirror* have not adequately examined how its various editions foreground a poetics of dissatisfaction that was crucial to the poetic developments of the period. Some critics provide a reading of the text as a contribution to early modern historiography; some explain the text's significance as a didactic and fairly transparent guide to political doctrine in the period; and others quickly reference the text as source material for Shakespeare's great tragedies and histories.⁶ Certainly, much of the material in the *Mirror for Magistrates* reifies the importance of political stability, hierarchical order, and complete loyalty to the monarchy. Its poems provided numerous exempla and proverbial wisdom spoken by poets and historical figures that, once compiled and read as a whole, offer didactic counsel to kings, courtiers, and diplomats. Additionally, the work's significance as a creative re-imagining of Tudor destiny and English nationalism is noteworthy, especially with Shakespeare's dramatic works in mind.⁷ But the *Mirror for Magistrates'* historical and didactic ambitions have, for the most part, obscured the centrality of complaint as a formal and rhetorical innovation that contributed to an early modern poetics of dissatisfaction.

Critics have necessarily overlooked the dramatic and affective dimensions of these poems in order to make them fit a humanist model of civility. What is most remarkable about the poems is their reiteration of emotional excess and affect in order to portray complaining figures as both

⁶ For more on the *Mirror* as a primarily historiographical document, see Mary Jo Kietzman, "Means to Mourn Some Newer Way': The Role of the Complaint in Early-Modern Narrative" (Ph.D. Diss., Boston College, 1993). According to Kietzman, the complaints in the *Mirror* were used "to create a form of popular historiography that challenged the univocal representation of state commissioned histories" (78). For more on the *Mirror* as a guide to early modern doctrine on governance, see Lily Campbell's introduction to *The Mirror for Magistrates*. For coverage of *The Mirror* as source material for Shakespeare, see E.M.W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1944).

⁷ It is likely that Shakespeare would have been familiar with the *Mirror's* most compelling poems, including *Howe kyng Richarde the seconde was for his evyll governaunce deposed from his seat; Howe Owen Glendour seduced by false prophecies tooke upon him to be prince of Wales; and Cordila shewes how by despair when she was in prison she slue herselfe*, among others. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*.

penitents and plaintiffs in a theater of dissatisfaction. The *Mirror* is not a consistent or coherent literary effort in which the authors attempt to present a unified vision of English history or political turmoil, but as is true with all complaint literature, these poems present themselves as texts that straddle the rhetorics of auricular confession and juridical testimony. Complainants repeatedly point to and describe their distressed bodies and their falls from power. In their rhetoric, male and female complainants claim that their personal narrative is the most accurate one, and that their thorough retellings of their crimes, and the crimes of others, will provide a record that can affect the behavior of Tudor rulers. In doing so, they emphasize the theatrical nature of complaints that trouble the generic distinctions between poetry and drama; they frequently subvert the didactic aims of their narratives by casting blame on other figures through the use of invective language; and they suggest that the literary expression of their complaints might provide the consolation and redress that they desire.

The poems in *The Mirror* stage a provocative revision of the complaints in John Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* (c. 1430s), the translation and expansion of Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium* that would have been most familiar to English readers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The *Mirror* authors adopt Lydgate's model, but reframe the *Mirror* narratives by shifting the complaints from the third person perspective to the first person perspective. This shift foregrounds the theatrical performance of each complainant and creates a sense of intimacy between the "I" of the speaker and the "you" of the reader. As John Kerrigan observes, the dialectic between the "I" of the complainant and the "you" of the poet and reader is provocative as a device that generates "interpretive instability."⁸ Even as the complainants ask

⁸ *Motives of Woe*, 12.

readers to rely on their personal narratives as the most accurate ones, they use the rhetoric of invective to cast blame on other historical figures, thereby complicating the reliability of their narrative. These complaints stage a process of self-interpretation, complaint, and accusation that forces intersections between the public and the private, the religious and the juridical, the erotic and the political.

The *Mirror's* recursive expressions of complaint enact visual and aural performances that straddle two related, if highly contested, discourses: that of auricular confession, which was desacralized during the reign of Henry VIII; and juridical complaint, the performance of which rose exponentially in both the civil and ecclesiastical courts. The complaint poems I examine here borrow from and improve upon ecclesiastical and juridical forms of confession, thereby privileging the literary performance of complaint as an idealized mode of expression. In my discussion of late medieval and early modern historiographies, I show how the authors of the *Mirror* rely on a repetitive narrative formula that reflects their cyclical view of history. My treatment of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* follows from this cultural context and offers an examination of how early modern poets borrowed from and extended Lydgate's translation to accommodate their new material. I provide readings of several poems from *The Mirror* with a special focus on the complaints of Richard III and Jane Shore, certainly two of the most memorable complainants in the volume. The juxtaposition between these two characters highlights the tenuous line between confession and complaint, between admission of guilt and blame of others, and the way in which both male and female complainants are preoccupied with the "bruite" of ill-report.

My focus on just a few of the *Mirror* poems is necessarily incomplete; however, an attempt to provide a comprehensive treatment of the *Mirror* as a unified literary effort would

deemphasize its status as a miscellany compiled by as many as seven authors over a period of four decades, all of whom may have had various and incommensurate theories of statehood, sovereignty, justice, and the uses and powers of poetic texts.⁹ *The Mirror* provides complainants who tell their stories as a process, a kind of working-through that necessarily relies on self-interpretation and the judgment (whether positive or negative) of the editors in the prose frames.¹⁰ Like the “scourge” that is “yprynted depe” in the mind of a ruler in Surrey’s poem, the complaints in *The Mirror* function as memory devices for the complainants who can gain understanding and self-knowledge through their complaints, and for poets whose objective is to create a didactic exemplum for readers.

Historical Repetition in *The Mirror for Magistrates*

The Mirror for Magistrates presents narratives that all follow the cyclical pattern of the *de casibus* narrative: a great figure returns from the dead, tells the story of his or her fall into ignominy, and offers a didactic warning to readers so that they can avoid the same fate. Nearly all of the poems are written in rime royal,¹¹ and show the ways in which personal decisions affect larger historical events. In these narratives, individual trauma also becomes historical trauma

⁹ William Baldwin announces that the “chiefest ende” of the *Mirror* is to provide exempla to princes and governors; however, the actual poems in the *Mirror* are consistently at odds with this objective; as Jessica Winston and others have observed, “it is not clear how all of the parts of the work contribute to this goal.” “A *Mirror for Magistrates* and Public Political Discourse in Elizabethan England.” *Studies in Philology* 101, no. 4 (2004): 381-400, 381.

¹⁰ In his discussion of the changes in psychoanalytic practice, Freud highlights the power of remembering for patients for resist the conditions of psychoanalytic therapy. I do not intend to psychoanalyze *The Mirror’s* historical characters; however, I am persuaded that these historical narratives, which are so similar in their narrative arc and forms of rhetorical expression, do provide a “working through” that provides some mastery to complainants, poets, and readers. For more on Freud’s theories of remembering, resistance, and self-mastery, see “Remembering, Repeating, and Working-through” and “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” in the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 12:147–56 and 18:7-64.

¹¹ Rime royal is a common stanzaic form for sixteenth-century complaint poetry. The seven-line stanza has two effects: its odd-lined asymmetry is capable of creating a sense of psychological instability in the speaker, which is frequently juxtaposed against the symmetry of the final rhyming couplet, which often creates epigrammatic closure.

through poetic performances that are engaged with both juridical and religious discourses. The *de casibus* tradition, then, provides a cyclical movement that is repeated multiple times in the *Mirror* complaints that I discuss here. But how did the multiplicity of complaint poems appeal to early modern readers and writers? What aesthetic pleasure could they have derived from this movement from greatness to abjection, from stability to turmoil, especially in a culture of tremendous political and religious change?

In his famous analysis of the Fort/Da game, Freud suggested that by repeating an unpleasant experience, children take an active part in what would otherwise be a passive experience. People continue to repeat and remember painful acts from the past because that repetition allows the subject to achieve mastery of unpleasant acts in order to prevent or master traumas in the future.¹² The act of repeating is not only pleasurable in and of itself, however; as Lacan later observed, this compulsion to repeat is constitutive of our very existence, which is predicated upon a mapping and remapping of the networks of the unconscious.¹³ In Lacan's view, the compulsion to repeat is not merely tied to trauma theory or recovery of repressed feelings, but "is something that comes to us from the structural necessities, something humble, born at the level of the lowest encounters and of all the talking crowd that precedes us."¹⁴

The compulsion to repeat as a way of remembering extends to literary works and dramatic performances of complaining figures. The reappearance of rhetorical tropes, forms, and

¹² "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," 30.

¹³ Lacan writes of the repetition compulsion as part of the network of meaning-making in the unconscious: "One goes back and forth over one's ground, one crosses one's path, one cross-checks it always in the same way." "Of the Network of Signifiers" in *Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981), 45.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

narrative arcs across multiple poems in *The Mirror* provides an opportunity for the figures to perform their individual complaints against a larger framework of other complaints. Repetition of the cyclical shape of these poems, coupled with the repetition of multiple postures of grief, anger, and disfigurement, result in portraits of both personal and public trauma. The formal and rhetorical repetition in these poems makes “what is in itself unpleasurable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind.”¹⁵ Repeated trauma, and, in the case of the *Mirror for Magistrates*, narratives that fuse personal with national trauma, are not part of a wish fulfillment, but are instead a way to master and derive pleasure from that trauma.

It may seem anachronistic to cite Freud in order to better understand the unique literary properties of an early modern compilation like *Mirror for Magistrates*. However, Freud’s theory of the repetition compulsion shares similarities with the theories of history that were paradigmatic in the early modern period. The *Mirror for Magistrates* and the various mirror texts that followed its initial publication were part of an early modern effort to negotiate a past that continued to shape early modern politics and culture. Complaining figures from ancient and medieval history continue to have relevance in these poems, where history is not merely a propagandistic recounting of the past in order to illustrate the glories of the present, but a way to rework and master past events for present political and ethical application, especially in an era in which the trauma—and pleasure—of radical change had to be constantly negotiated by early modern subjects.

Late medieval and early modern subjects did not necessarily conceive of history as a series of events that could lead to progressive improvement of cultural conditions; rather, history

¹⁵ Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” 17.

was often figured as a narrative that defied completion or satisfaction of any kind. Certainly, there were competing accounts and theories of historical change, and some medieval historiographers envisioned history as an “incessant and unerring engine of downfall.”¹⁶ For the most part, however, early modern historians developed a cyclical framework through which to understand historical phenomena, one that emphasized the power of Fortune’s wheel to thrust a subject into fame or dishonor. Giving a cyclical shape to historical narratives allowed historians to treat nature as a force of constancy across eras and to consider time as it related to the change in days, months, seasons, and years.¹⁷ Of course, early modern subjects understood that history was not always exactly the same, but the fact that “the same patterns were repeated throughout history allowed the prudent observer to draw lessons about the present and sometimes even to give warnings about the future.”¹⁸ This privileging of a cyclical movement of history allowed the poems in the *Mirror for Magistrates* to span across several time periods, and many other texts in the *Mirror’s* wake took advantage of this flexibility and universality of the human condition that cyclical movement afforded.¹⁹ Additionally, it allowed the authors to draw from and reinvent the *de casibus* tradition in English as it originated with Livy, continued through Boccaccio and Laurent, and finally came into the English language with Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes*.²⁰ With

¹⁶ Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 81.

¹⁷ Achsah Guibbory, *The Map of Time: Seventeenth-Century English Literature and Ideas of Pattern in History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 8-9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁹ For example, Richard Robinson’s *Rewarde for Wickednesse* (1574) includes complaints by everyone from Helen of Troy to Pope Joan; and Anthony Munday’s *Mirror of Mutabilitie* (1579) features complaints by Nebudchadnezzar, Samson, King David, and King Solomon.

²⁰ For more on the medieval significance of the *de casibus* tradition, see Winston, “A *Mirror for Magistrates* and Public Political Discourse in Elizabethan England,” Budra, *The Mirror for Magistrates and the ‘de casibus’*

increasing frequency, the Tudor histories of the sixteenth century privileged more consolidated, unified narratives of past struggles in order to further legitimate the Tudor dynasty. This consolidation emerged in every form of written expression, including sermons, lyric poems, and pamphlets of all kinds.²¹ *The Mirror for Magistrates* is an important part of this larger historiographical trend toward instructive didacticism. However, its authors depart from chronicle histories in their attention to the personal voices and performances of complainants, thereby foregrounding the importance of theatricality to the history of England's nation-building project.

The Legacy of Boccaccio and Lydgate

The Boccaccian *de casibus* tradition, which manifests itself in every poem of *The Mirror*, is predicated upon the need for repetitive and cyclical movement, a fact that was not lost on early modern writers who wanted to both borrow from the medieval historiographical tradition and innovate new approaches to that tradition.²² In his introduction to Book Two of *De casibus virorum illustrium*, Boccaccio acknowledges the need for reinforcement through repetition, suggesting that moral instruction has a physiological, and even combative, component. Lydgate's

Tradition; and Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*. For more on the continuation of the *de casibus* tradition in the English vernacular tradition, see Willard Farnham, "The Progeny of *A Mirror for Magistrates*." *Modern Philology* 29, no. 4 (1932): 395-410.

²¹ For more on this consolidation, see Budra, *Mirror for Magistrates*, 15. For an example of a sermon that affirms the legitimacy of the Tudors, see *An exhortacion, concerning good ordre and obedience, to rules and magistrates in Certayne Sermons, or Homelies, appointed by the kynges Maiestie, to bee declared and redde, by all persones, Vicars, or Curates, every Sondaye in their Churches, where they have cure.* (1547).

²² For the purposes of this chapter, I am only focusing on the mirror tradition and have not included a discussion of the chronicle tradition. I am more interested in the way that poetic complaints call attention to and critique historical events and individual behavior as precedents in these poems, something that is not as prominent in the chronicle tradition. For a nuanced discussion of the differences between the chronicle and mirror traditions, see Richard Helgerson's *Adulterous Alliances: Home, State, and History in Early Modern European Drama and Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). For more on the complex interweaving among late medieval and early modern *de casibus* texts, see Nigel Mortimer's *Fall of Princes: Narrative Tragedy in Its Literary and Political Contexts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

translation and reworking of Boccaccio's *De casibus* in his *Fall of Princes* captures this physiological effect of repetition. In response to those who might think that Book One provided enough examples of fallen men, Lydgate writes in the preface to Book 2:

The rounde dropis off the smothe reyn,
Which that discende & falle from aloft
On stonys harde, at eye as it is sen,
Perceth ther hardnesse with ther falling offte,
Al-be in touching, water is but soffte;
The Percyng caused be force nor puissaunce,
But off falling be long contynuaunce.

Semblabli, off riht I dar reherse,
Offte reedyng on bookis fructuous
The hertis sholde off prudent pryncis perse,
Synke in ther mynde & make hem virtuous
Teschewe all thyng that is vicious:
For what availeth thexamples that thei reede,
To ther reedyng yiff contraire be the deed? (1.106-119)²³

Drops of rain are, with repetition, capable of piercing the hardest stone; likewise, Boccaccio-via-Lydgate must repeatedly “perce” his reader with exempla that will penetrate his conscience. The “long contynuaunce” of frequent examples is the only way to ensure that princes will consider a more virtuous path. Boccaccio writes numerous exempla to “perse” the prince so that he will be open to the moral messages that must “synke” into his mind. This formal characteristic of repetition and recursivity for political ends foregrounds the power of the *de casibus* tradition to effect change in its readers.

Lydgate's objectives allow him more creative license to interpret the motives of the most corrupt rulers and the effects of their demise. Lydgate employs rhetorical questions, projections, and speculations about individual cases, thereby introducing interpretive doubt for writer and

²³ All quotations from *The Fall of Princes* come from *Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen (Washington, DC: The Carnegie Institution, 1923).

reader alike. Consider, for example, the history of Jocasta, Queene of Thebes. Lydgate describes Jocasta's sorrow after Laius tells her to abandon the infant Oedipus:

The mooder, allas, fill amost in a rage,
 Seyng hir child, so inli fair off face,
 Shal thus be ded, and dede no trespase.

Litil wonder thowh she felte smerte!
 To all women I report me,
 And onto moodres that be tendre off herte,
 In this mater iuges for to be.
 Was it nat routhe, was it nat pite,
 That a prynsesse and a queen, allas,
 Sholde knowyn hir child devoured in such cas! (1.3218-3227)

In this passage, Lydgate figures the misery of Jocasta to be beyond his descriptive powers. He transfers the responsibility of description and interpretation to the mothers who might have words for the extremity of this woe. Lydgate continues to use rhetorical questions and indeterminate speculation to position himself as an interpreter throughout *The Fall of Princes*, regularly engaging with the reader-as-judge of each case.

To some extent, Boccaccio is a prisoner to the recursivity of complaint; several times in *The Fall of Princes*, Lydgate describes Boccaccio's desire to stop writing out of sheer exhaustion, but his complainants will not let him rest. Every time he tries to set down his pen and end the day's work, he is surrounded by more complaining figures. Lydgate, in his frame for Boccaccio's narratives, emphasizes the physical toll that these encounters take on Boccaccio.

After Boccaccio's narration of the fall of Xerxes, Lydgate writes:

Next these tragedies, wepyng & dolorous,
 Whil Bochas stynte, & wolde ha been in pes,
 A knyht appered called Artabanus,
 Which hadde afor[n] moordred kyng Xerses;
 And gan his compleynt for to putte in pres,
 Ful concluding, to speke in wordes pleyn,
 Who useth moordre, bi moordre he shal be slayn. (3.2640-2646)

Boccaccio “styntes,” or stops writing, wishing for some peace from the noise of his many complainants. The etymology of “stynte” from the Old English *styntan* links the word to dull, blunt action. Boccaccio’s “stynte,” then, indicates that he wishes for a respite from the sharp “percing” that his narratives must achieve in their incisive commentary.²⁴ Boccaccio must always “putte in pres” the downfalls of great men, and in doing so is “pressed” with the urgency of their laments.²⁵ His intermediary status requires that he function as creator, interpreter, and respondent, and his work is seemingly endless in a world of dissatisfaction. There is no end to the complaining that men and women will do, and Boccaccio’s work will always be in demand.

Like Boccaccio’s *De casibus virorum illustrium* and Lydgate’s *The Fall of Princes*, *The Mirror for Magistrates* uses the repetitive movement in the rise and fall of princes’ fortunes, then multiplies that movement by moving back and forth through time, from one narrative to the next, reinforcing the ways in which moral values consistently affect the lives of great figures. *The Mirror* clearly signals its debt to Boccaccio’s *De casibus* and John Lydgate’s translation and adaptation in *The Fall of Princes*. In “A Briefe Memorial of sundrye Vnfortunate Englishe men: William Baldwin to the Reader,” the compiler of *The Mirror* looks forward to a project that can provide guidance to powerful figures:

Whan the Printer had purposed with hym selfe to printe Lidgates booke of the fall of Princes, and had made priuye thereto, many both honourable and worshipfull, he was counsailed by dyuers of them, to procure to haue the storye contynewed from where as Bochas lefte, vnto this presente time, chiefly of such as Fortune had dalyed with here in

²⁴ *OED*, s.v. “stint,” v.

²⁵ Wendy Wall has examined several early modern texts in which authors are “pressed” or undergo a “pressing.” See her introduction to *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

this ylande: which might be as a myrroure for al men as well noble as others, to shewe the slippery deceytes of the waueryng lady, and the due rewarde of all kinds of vices. (1-8)²⁶

From these opening lines, Baldwin emphasizes the moral lesson of the book, and his hope that Fortune's "slippery deceytes" might be made apparent by the complainant's narratives. *De casibus virorum illustrium* and *The Fall of Princes* focus on a variety of classical and continental examples of falls from Fortune, but Baldwin emphatically reminds his readers that England has produced plenty of its own examples in recent years. In his dedication "To the nobilitye and all other in office," Baldwin writes,

I nede not go eyther to the Romans or Grekes for prooffe hereof, neyther yet to the Iewes, or other nacions: whose common weales have alway flourished while their officers were good, and decayed and ranne to ruyne, whan noughty men had the regiment, Our owne cuntrye stories (if we reade & marke them) will shewe vs examples ynow, would God we had not seen moe then ynowe. (27-32)

So many English rulers have "dalyed" with "all kinds of vices" that Baldwin and his fellow poets can easily provide examples from their native history. Baldwin positions *The Mirror* as a volume that can, and must, provoke corrupted rulers to change their ways: "For here as in a loking glas, you shall see (if any vice be in you) howe the like hath bene punished in other heretofore, whereby admonished, I trust it will be a good occasion to move you to the soner amendment" (57-60). Baldwin's literary project foregrounds the mistakes of past rulers as warnings to present and future magistrates. The poems in *The Mirror* rework and attempt to manage the shattering that is the precondition of national unity and individual subjectivity.

The Challenges of Didacticism

The *Mirror's* complaint poems reiterate and rework the narrative *exempla* tradition to announce the shortcomings of personal narrative, confession, and juridical testimony in the

²⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations come from the Campbell edition of *The Mirror for Magistrates*.

complaint tradition. To some extent, *exempla* are narratives that affirm what are seemingly universal truths; however, their constant need for reiteration indicates that their moral significance is contingent upon the consensus and reinforcement of a willing group of listeners.²⁷ Like the public *exempla* of the late medieval period, the complaint poems in *Mirror* present speakers whose stories confirm the need for better judgment on the part of great men. However, just as frequently, the poems disrupt the expectations of the *exempla* in order to emphasize the poem's insufficiency as a rhetorical mode. Indeed, the title page of the 1559 edition (and of subsequent editions) announces "A *Myrroure* for Magistrates. Wherein may be seen by example of other, with how grievous plages vices are punished."²⁸ Sometimes these poems are seemingly transparent "mirrors" of repentance; but just as often, the speakers function as "negative exemplars illustrating...how not to act."²⁹ These poems have a third function too: to provide a kind of talking cure for despair in the face of these seemingly apparent truths, a working-through of morally complex material that consoles the speaker.

While many poems in *The Mirror* subvert the didactic aims of the volume, and while these are the focus of this chapter, some poems do follow a strictly didactic, and even propagandistic, formula. The poems in *Mirror for Magistrates* do not only rely on the complainant's proverbial words of wisdom and admissions of guilt. After many of the complainants are finished with their speeches, the poets repeat the didactic message of the complainant's story in the prose frames between each poem. Consider these final lines from

²⁷ In *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, Scanlon characterizes the public *exempla* of the medieval period as "narratives which demonstrate the efficacy of their *sententiae* by [occasionally] enacting violations of them" (81).

²⁸ Reprinted in Campbell, *Mirror for Magistrates*, 62.

²⁹ Kietzman, "The Means to Mourn Some Newer Way," 81.

The Complaint of Jack Cade, a poem based on the life of a rebel who, during the reign of Henry VI, issued his own complaint against the government titled “The Complaint of the Poor Commons of Kent” in 1450.³⁰ Cade uses himself as an example to remind readers that treason never ends well:

And therefore Baldwin warne men folow reason
 Subdue theyr wylles, and be no Fortunes slaues,
 A troublous ende doth ever folowe treason,
 There is no trust in rebelles, raskall knaves,
 In Fortune lesse, which wurketh as the waves:
 From whose assautes who lyst to stande at large,
 Must folowe skylle, and flye all worldly charge. (162-168)

This is a highly reactionary passage from a figure who was responsible for profound political upheaval; nevertheless, in the framework of *The Mirror*, Jack Cade’s legend is revised to suit the needs of these didactic poems surrounding it. It is as if the compilers of *The Mirror* sense that Cade’s initial statements of regret are not sufficient and require additional editorial reinforcement. With these final words, Baldwin turns this poem into an explicitly conservative political message that reaffirms Tudor cohesion and legitimacy.

Jack Cade’s complaint is followed by a prose frame that reminds the reader of the import of his speech: “And therefore whosoever rebelleth agaynst any ruler either good or bad, rebelleth against GOD, and shalbe sure of a wretched ende” (9-11). Regardless of the editorial intervention and reception of this complaint, though, Jack Cade has made a useful point: while it might be true that “A troublous end doth ever folowe treason,” the production and dissemination of Jack Cade’s complaint guarantees that his transgression is remembered and acknowledged.

³⁰ The irony of writing a complaint in the voice of a man who had written a political and highly public complaint against the king was probably not lost on the author of the poem or his readers. This focus on Jack Cade as an actual complaining figure within a complaint poem signals the poem’s inheritance of the complaint-within-a-complaint, a common rhetorical device in complaint poetry from the Book of Job through the early modern period.

The layers of reception in *The Mirror* might temporarily obscure the fact that Jack Cade did successfully register a complaint and stage a rebellion against Henry VI; still, Cade's recounting of events guarantees that his will live on long after his death.

Though Cade's poem functions as an *exemplum* that affirms Tudor power, many of the poems subvert the volume's didactic aims, even as the compilers continue to suggest that the poems provide important moral lessons. This is due to several factors, one of which is the *Mirror's* shift from a third-person narration as it existed in Boccaccio's *De casibus* and Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* to a first-person monologue for each complainant. This shift allows the complainants to express their desires, presumptions, and motives with an immediacy and intimacy that the third-person narration simply could not allow. Judith Butler has observed that if readers "reconsider the 'I' as that which represents its bodily life in language, we see a different notion of representation at work, or, rather, a relation between body and language that puts into crisis the very relation of representation presumed by the sovereign and intentional 'I.'"³¹

Butler's attention to the use of first-person narration foregrounds its importance to the theatrical presentation of the speaker. In many of the complaints in *The Mirror*, the complainant first announces him or herself as an actor in a performance while also calling on Baldwin to enact that performance. Consider the opening lines of "How George Plantagenet third sonne of the Duke of Yorke, was by his brother king Edward wrongfully imprisoned, and by his brother Richard miserably murdered." At first, George wishes that his shame could be shrouded by his silence, but acknowledges that as long as he is reticent, "fame blowen vp the blast of all abuse" (4), and

³¹ Afterword to *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J.L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages* by Shoshana Felman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 114, 115.

exacerbates the historiographical treatment of his crimes. George appeals to Baldwin so that together, they can tell the story appropriately:

And therefore Baldwin hartely I the beseche.
 To pause awhile vpon my heauy playnt,
 And though vnnet I vtter spedy speech,
 No fault of wit, or folly maketh me faint:
 No heady drinckes have geuen my tounge attaynte
 Through quaffing craft, yet wine my wits confound
 Not which I dranke of, but wherin I dround. (8-14)

Using the first person perspective, George “hartely...beseches” Baldwin to listen to his complaint. As a ghost returning from the dead, George, though limited in his rhetorical gifts, is figured as reliable because he has nothing left to lose. Even so, his complaint is full of invectives against those in court who deceived him, especially his brother Richard Plantagenet. This need for both the admission of his faults and the blaming of other agents subverts the genre’s ostensibly didactic aims. Complainants seem prepared to confess their wrongdoings, and the compilers of the collection present each case as a mirror for present-day advisors and courtiers. However, the first-person perspective foregrounds the complaint as a kind of highly theatrical speech act, a form of address “to one who is not transparently there, who is known only in profile or through the voice.”³² Public history and private complaint, then, are consistently conflated with the use of the first-person narrative in a way that necessarily subverts the didacticism of the mirror tradition; in addition, history takes on a theatrical element as the complainant speaks to the “one who is not transparently there.”

³² Judith Butler, afterword to *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, 120.

Precedent and Penance

The Mirror departs from Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* with the use of the first-person perspective; however, it does borrow from and extend other elements of Lydgate's work, particularly his use of juridical rhetoric. The complainants in *The Mirror for Magistrates* repeatedly frame their tales of woe as cases, examining and justifying the causes of moral and political failures with "a quasi-legal, as well as psychological, manoeuvre."³³ As John Kerrigan observes in his treatment of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, "To glance back at Lydgate is to be reminded that plainants are 'plaintiffs,' 'effects' of other 'causes' presenting quasi-legal 'causes.'" Like a lawyer or judge, Lydgate's Boccaccio calls evidence against complainants, "trying to elicit 'confessioun.'"³⁴ Early modern complaint poems inherit and extend the *de casibus* tradition, deliberately conflating the meaning of "'case' in the penitential sense...with *de casibus* and psychological 'causation.'"³⁵ The use of "case" and "cause" in these and other early modern complaint poems points to an important intersection between legal and confessional case-making in the period.

Throughout the collection, complainants measure the validity of their "cause" and their need to defend their cases. The complaint titled "Howe the two Rogers, surnamed Mortimers, for they sundry vices ended theyr lyues vnfortunatlye" measures the cyclical effects of Fortune and proposes that all men should have a right to a hearing in order to prevent the "reeling" of Fortune's "fatall threede" (3). Roger Mortimer, the speaker of the poem, first appears to the authors "full of woundes, miserably mangled, with a pale countenance, and grisly looke" ("To

³³ Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*, 28.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

the Reader,” 14-15). He returns from the dead to chart the fall of his grandfather, who, he claims, was wrongly punished for crimes he did not commit. Roger Mortimer wants Baldwin the poet to understand that though he shares his great-grandfather’s name, he is not the same man who was punished during Edward III’s reign:

The fynall cause why I this processe tell,
Is that I may be knowen from this other,
My lyke in name, vnlyke me though he fell,
Whiche was I thinke my graund sier or his brother... (50-53)

For Roger Mortimer, complaining is a “processe” that requires several narrative steps. First, he must explain the burden of his lineage, and in doing so, he expresses his dissatisfaction with the corruption of the proceedings that led to his hanging:

For why the attaynder of my elder Roger,
(whose shamefull death I tolde you but of late)
was founde to be vniust, and passed ouer
Agaynst the lawe, by those that bare hym hate.
For where by lawe the lowest of free estate
Should personally be heard ere iudgement passe,
They barred hym this, where through destroyed he was. (64-70)

Roger Mortimer utters his complaint about legal proceedings as if he is in a court of law, and his complaint functions as a kind of transcript for what actually happened. At the end of the poem, when he complains against the Irish who ultimately defeat and kill him, Roger lists their transgressions as part of his “geast,” or process, that will help rulers learn from his mistakes in war (120-126). Roger describes his readers as “riders of the rolyng wheele” of Fortune, and his own complaint contains at least two wheels of Fortune that of his “britell lyfe” (142). Roger’s complaint provides an example of how the mode can be used as a corrective for rumors from the past. Even as Roger Mortimer presents himself as a defender of the truth, however, his personal

testimony reveals the limits of truth-telling: that his great-grandfather was in fact, responsible for a rebellion against, and the murder of, Edward II.

The poems in *The Mirror* are exercises in juridical case-making, but they also engage with the language of penitence and confession as part of a larger poetic exploration and critique of both rhetorics in the years after the English Reformation. In doing so, the poems regularly shift from a broad ideological project to the examination of individual consciences, further complicating the distinctions between public and private grievance and transgression. This crafting of a persona through a narrative that straddles both discourses results in a highly self-conscious, often ironic speaker. In “How the lord Clyfford for his straunge and abhominable cruelty, came to as straunge and sodayne a death,” the reader has the opportunity to see this self-consciousness evolve. Lord Henry Clyfford, the son of John Clifford, laments what he sees as the unjust death of his father at the battle of St. Albans during the War of the Roses. In retribution for his father’s murder, Henry Clyfford proceeds to avenge his father’s death by killing the Duke of York’s son. In the prose frame that precedes the poem, Baldwin has a vision of Lord Clyfford as he was when he was killed in the Battle of Towton: “All armed save his head, with his brest plate all gore bloud running from his throte, wherein an hedles arrow sticketh” (12-14).³⁶

Through the wound in his throat, Lord Clyfford speaks from the dead, prepared to admit to his wrongdoing:

Open confession axeth open penaunce,
And wisdom would a man his shame to hide:
Yet sith forgeuenes cummeth through repentaunce

³⁶ The visibility of wounds appear elsewhere in *The Mirror*. In another example, King Richard II is presented as “mangled, with blew woundes, lying pale and wanne al naked upon the cold stones in Paules church...(22-23). Perhaps, as Cynthia Marshall suggests, these violent presentations are crucial in order for the text to “enable masochistic jouissance.” *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 11.

I thinke it best that men their crimes ascried,
 For nought so secrete but at length is spied:
 For cover fire, and it wil neuer linne
 Til it breake furth, in like case shame and sinne. (1-7)

Though our modern usage of “open” suggests liberation from rules or constraints, Clifford’s use of “open” twice in the first line of this stanza indicates a crisis in rhetorical expression and public exposure. In this context, an “open confession” might lead to unwanted access to the speaker’s interior.³⁷ Lord Clyfford’s anxiety over an “open penance” implies that its public nature would be an unwanted exposure of his crimes, and that his utterance will prevent the narratives of others from destroying his reputation. His concern is a valid one that appears with regularity in the period. Historians of the English Reformation often assume that the medieval rituals of public penance faded out of fashion after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 mandated annual private confession with a priest. In fact, public confession was a regular, if unpleasant, occurrence in parishes throughout England. Confession in the ecclesiastical courts of law, and the use of public confession in the aftermath of court proceedings, were a persistent preoccupation for early modern subjects.³⁸

Central to Lord Clyfford’s confession is the emphasis on—and necessity of—bringing the words outside and beyond his mortally wounded body. This is not a meditative poem that privileges an emergent privacy or interiority; rather, it is an expression of outrage that reveals the complainant’s struggle with his crimes. Indeed, the public nature of Clifford’s sins is palpable:

As for my selfe my faultes be out so playne
 And published so brode in every place,
 That though I would I can not hide a grayne,

³⁷ OED, s.v. “open,” adj.

³⁸ For more on public penance, see Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), esp. Chapter 8.

All care is bootles in a cureles case,
 To learne by others grief sum have the grace,
 And therefore Baldwin write my wretched fall,
 The brief wherof I briefly utter shall. (8-14)

In the poem's first stanza, Clyfford acknowledges that it is best if a man "ascries"—publishes, or proclaims³⁹—his crimes in "open penance" in order to achieve forgiveness. However, in this second stanza, Clyfford's story has already been "ascried" so plainly by others, "published so brode in every place" that his crimes have been completely exposed, a problem for numerous complainants in the volume. In his quasi-legal briefing, Clyfford's confession is an attempt to set the record straight; however, he feels compelled to confess after his story has already been published, and in that way is not entirely free.

For Clyfford, the self-publication of repentance is the only alternative to an ignominious death.⁴⁰ Unlike so many other complainants in the *Mirror*, however, Clifford does accept responsibility for his crimes:

I am the same that slue duke Richardes childe
 The lovely babe that begged life with teares.
 Whervy my honour fowly I defiled.
 Poore selly lambes the Lyon neuer teares:
 The feble mouse may lye among the beares:
 But wrath of man his rancour to requite,
 Forgets all reason, ruth, and vertue quite. (15-21)

Even as Clyfford asks for "ruth," he acknowledges that he forgot "all reason, ruth, and vertue" when pursuing his murderous plan. Later in the poem, after Clyfford has confessed to the atrocity he has committed, he insists again that he is entirely responsible. He describes his death in battle, not as an accident, but as "just award" for his brutality:

³⁹ OED, s.v. "ascry," v.

⁴⁰ Clyfford acknowledges that he died unshriven: his death was so "sodayn" that it "bereft [his] tounge the power,/To aske fore pardon at [his] dying hower" (62-63).

Was this a chaunce? No suer, gods iust award,
 Wherein due iustice plainly doth appere:
 An headles arrowe payed me my reward,
 For heading Richard lying on the bere. (57-60)

Clyfford cannot be a “suer,” as if in a court of law, because his actions have no defense.⁴¹ He readily admits that he committed the atrocious crime of killing a young prince even after he had surrendered. Certainly, the cause of his rancor is not unique; as he says, the desire to avenge the death of one’s father has a deep hold on any son, and that was what spurred him to commit his crime:

I mean by rancour the parentall wreke
 Surnamed a vertue (as the vicious say)
 But litle know the wicked what they speak,
 In boldning vs our enmyes kin to slay,
 To punishe sinne, is good, it is no nay.
 They wreke not sinne, but merit wreke for sinne,
 That wreke the father’s faultes vpon his kin. (22-28)

This excerpt highlights a moment in which the “wreke,” or wreck, of a single individual—the brutal murder of Clyfford’s father—results in fracturing and shattering for others, and a breaking that is also disastrous to the state. As Clyfford admits, the power of vengeance was for him, as for others, incredibly seductive:

Because my father lord John Clifford died
 Slayne at S. Albons, in his princes ayde,
 Agaynst the duke my hart for malice fryed
 So that I could from wreke no way be stayed. (29-32)

Clyfford’s heart “fries,” or seethes, with such intense malice that “wreke,” or utter destruction, is his only alternative. To some extent, Clyfford’s “wreke” is necessary for England’s eventual and always erratic national formation. England’s national myth is predicated upon many such

⁴¹ OED, s.v. “suer,” n.

“wrekes,” precedents that, at least in propagandistic historiographies, divide and annihilate in order to form a more cohesive whole.

Henry Clyfford’s complaint is a unique example of a poem that provides some admission of guilt, or at least responsibility. More frequently, complainants manipulate the rituals of penance in order to build a case in their own defense and place blame on others. Lorna Hutson has argued that the preparation for early modern juridical testimony—that is, the crafting of a narrative that had to fulfill the formal requirements of a forensic investigation—became a rhetorical act of virtuosity, as the defendant or complainant gave shape to a narrative that might have been affected by many factors.⁴² This is certainly true of Lord Clyfford’s complaint, which, even if it does not absolve the complainant certainly provides a compelling *narratio* for his crimes.

If Lord Clyfford’s blood-soaked complaint foregrounds the importance of confession as a kind of purgation, the first complaint in the 1559 edition, spoken by “Robert Tresilian, chiefe Justice of Englande,” conflates the rhetoric of confession and juridical testimony in order to ironize that expression. From beginning to end, Tresilian’s complaint is an exercise in rhetorical manipulation. He and his colleagues were so talented in the practice of law that lawsuits came to them like fish into a net.⁴³ In the first two stanzas, Tresilian seems prepared to confess the wrongs that he and other lawyers committed during the reign of Richard II. He opens the poem by asking Baldwin to transcribe not only his story but those of fallen lawyers and judges who have been trapped by “unfriendly Fortune”:

⁴² Lorna Hutson, “‘What do these facts mean?’: Judicial *Narratio* and Shakespearean Mimesis” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America, San Diego, April 2007).

⁴³ “Whereby with easye paine, so great gaine we did get,/That every thing was fishe that came vnto our net” (41-2).

In the ruffull Register of mischief and mishap,
 Baldwin we beseche thee in our names to begin,
 Whom vnfrendly Fortune did trayne unto a trap,
 When we thought our state most stable to haue bin,
 So lightly leese they all which all do ween to wyn:
 Learne by vs ye Lawyers and Iudges of the lande
 Vncorrupt and vpright in doome alway to stande. (1-7)

Tresilian returns to the mantra that appears in so many complaint poems from this and other poetic works of the period: he desires a “ruffull Register” that can include the contents of his “mischief and mishap,” but then he subverts that request, blaming the cyclical movement of Fortune’s “trap” for what he and others clearly did wrong. “Rue” was synonymous with sorrow and repentance from the thirteenth century on; it was also referred to as the “herb of repentance” and “herb of grace” in some contexts.⁴⁴ Tresilian imbues his “register,” then, with qualities associated with auricular confession. He also suggests that the permanence of a registered complaint might provide some use for future readers:

And print it for a president to remayne for euer,
 Enroll and recorde it in tables made of brasse,
 Engrave it in marble that may be razed neuer,
 Where Iudges and Iusticers may see, as in a glasse,
 What fee is for falshode, and what our wages was
 Who for our princes pleasure corrupt with meed and awe
 Wittngly and wretchedly did wrest the sence of lawe. (8-14)

This stanza characterizes the complaint as a permanent written “president” for future generations. This preoccupation with the written, enrolled, and engraved materials of complaint extends through many of the poems in *The Mirror* as well as to “female” complaints in sonnet sequences, miscellanies, and epistolary collections.⁴⁵ Tresilian emphasizes the physical qualities of the

⁴⁴ *OED*, s.v. “rue,” n.

⁴⁵ See Chapter Two for my coverage of registers in Shakespeare’s *A Lover’s Complaint* and Samuel Daniel’s *Complaint of Rosamond* as examples of this phenomenon.

written materials that will preserve his message, and extends this attention to the physicality of his wrongdoing. Not only did he and his associates “corrupt” the meaning of the law, they “wretchedly did wrest” it from its essential meaning. This “wresting” suggests that there is a physical cost to this form of manipulation as well as a spiritual one.

In “William Baldwin to the Reader,” Baldwin clearly states the objective of these complaints: for the reader to “to take heed of wrong Judgementes, mysconstruyng of lawes, or wresting the same to serve the princes turnes, which ryghtfullye brought them to a miserable ende, which they may justly lament in maner ensuing” (61-63). Even so, Tresilian is not willing to entirely blame himself. In his version of events, Tresilian and his colleagues were “trapped” by Fortune and seem to have had no agency in the wrongs that they committed against fellow Englishmen. He has fallen from the highest position of power to the lowest, and now he pleads his case like a common plaintiff. The man who was once a “counsaylor” is now a “client” (18). Tresilian must provide his own defense “full lowe” (20) before the poets and readers who will judge and interpret his case. When Tresilian remembers his misdeeds, he recalls the way in which he and other lawyers easily manipulated the law to their own ends:

...wurds that wer most plaine whan thei by vs were skande
 We turned by construction...
 Wherby many one both lyfe and land dyd lose...
 To serue kings in al pointes men must sumwhile breke rules (73-77).

In these lines, Tresilian calls attention to the rhetorical practice of “construction,” or the careful treatment of syntax between and among parts of speech.⁴⁶ This “construction,” coupled with the lawyer’s scanning of each word, is proof of the violence that Tresilian is capable of committing through language. Even as Tresilian acknowledges his sleights-of-hand in the courtroom, he

⁴⁶ *OED*, s.v. “construction,” 5b.

transfers blame from himself onto other forces. They were born into good families with impeccable reputations, but Tresilian and his colleagues were too greedy in their easy manipulation of the law. As a result, many people lost their lands and lives; but, as Tresilian observes, the rules have to be bent a little when one is in the service of an all-powerful king who is not “raygning but raging by youthful insolence” (93). Tresilian blames “vayne promocion” (69), “sinister aduyce” (110), and “stynkyng lucre” (121), but he never explicitly accepts responsibility for his transgressions.

In this and dozens of other *Mirror* poems, the complainant blames Fortune for his ruin, as if agency for criminal acts exists outside of himself when he committed them. Complainants variously blame the Seven Deadly Sins and mythological figures from classical texts. In “Howe the Lorde Mowbray promoted by the Kyng Richarde the seconde,” for example, Lord Mowbray blames “vyce, with her stoute strengthles arme,/Doth cause the harte to euyl to encline,/Which I alas, doo fynde to true by myne” (12-14). In refusing to take responsibility for his actions, he suggests that they were inevitable and subverts the didactic aims of his message. In “Locrinus the eldest sonne of Brutus, declareth his slaughter to have happened for his evill life,” Locrinus blames Cupid for the dart that afflicted him with desire for Elstred; later in the poem, he explains that he had to take Corinaeus’s daughter as a matter of policy and power, not because he wanted to (112-119); and in the complaint of King Humber, the king tries to cast blame on rumor and report: “But I must blame report, the chiefest cause/Of my decaye: beware of rashe report.”⁴⁷ Certainly, bonds are deformed that destabilize the history of these fallen men and women;

⁴⁷ For my discussion of the complaints of Locrine and Humber, and their adaptation for the early modern stage, see Chapter Five.

formally, too, the “reports” carry back and echo one another, creating an echo chamber of discontent among these ruined figures.⁴⁸

These poems continually—and variously—shift the blame from themselves onto other forces and individuals, even as they claim that they present their stories as exempla and accept responsibility for the wrongs they have done. On the one hand, these complainants feel compelled to confess and ask forgiveness; on the other hand, once Baldwin provides them with the opportunity to confess, they thwart the chance for a thorough confession by critiquing forces that are apparently beyond their control. Jessica Winston writes that “the status of [these complaints] as *positions* rather than as definitive pieces of advice is evident in the way that some of the verses contradict each other in the counsel that they offer [her emphasis].” Some complainants blame God, some blame Fortune, and some blame themselves so that with each new complaint, “the writers take a series of positions on questions dealing with princely virtue and vice, individual action, and the extent to which one can control one’s destiny.”⁴⁹ This unreliability of confessional expression complicates the aims of the thorough and contrite confession and the effort to get to the truth through testimonial expression.

Richard III

Perhaps no other pair of complaint poems shows this rhetorical complexity more clearly than the complaints of Richard III and Mistress Jane Shore. The complainants in these poems figure their responsibility, the responsibility of others, and their reputations differently, each

⁴⁸ “Report” in the early modern period has a strong presence in the political poetry and drama of the period. “Report” is derived from the Latin for “carried back,” and as Kenneth Gross has observed, these reports “deform and reinvent bonds” in plays and poems where the private and the public necessarily intersect. Kenneth Gross observes this effect of “report” in a number of Shakespearean texts, including *Cymbeline*. For his reading of report, see *Shakespeare’s Noise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 8-9.

⁴⁹ Winston, “A *Mirror for Magistrates* and Public Political Discourse in Elizabethan England,” 393.

negotiating the line between confessional expression and juridical testimony. By working through and interpreting their respective stories, both complainants contribute exercises in the examination of blame, defamation, and agency in complaint poetry and in the culture at large.

Like all of the complaint poems in *The Mirror*, Richard III's complaint is preceded and followed by prose frames that comment on the complainant's narrative.⁵⁰ The multi-layered quality of each narrative provides the reader with imaginative opportunities for rethinking the nature of shame, guilt, confession, and power in the late medieval and early modern periods. Complainants present themselves as examples of rhetorical virtuosity—and occasionally rhetorical failure—in which the Boccaccian *de casibus* tradition becomes, in the hands of English writers, a poetics of legal, penitential, and aesthetic case-making. The prose frame that precedes Richard III's complaint provides a note of proverbial wisdom. Baldwin writes that “as all thinges worke to the best in them that be good, so best thinges heape vp mischiefe in the wicked, and all to hasten theyr utter destruction” (20-22). Baldwin hopes that Richard's downfall “might be a warning for ever, to al in authoritye to beware howe they vsurpe or abuse theyr offices” (25-27). Complaining in all early modern texts requires a theatrical performance situation and a rhetorical attempt at persuasion to some listener, both in the juridical arena and in confession. Baldwin exploits this theatricality in his prefatory comments. At first, Baldwin sets out tentatively, looking for encouragement from other contributors in order to retell the story:

⁵⁰ The formal construction of the *Mirror* is predicated upon layers of listening and interpretation of poetic performance. Winston has identified four layers of reception in *The Mirror*:

The first layer is Baldwin, to whom each verse is directly addressed; the second is the assembled group of writers who watch the performers and comment on the stories; the third is ‘the Reader’ to whom Baldwin addresses the prose narrative; and the fourth is the nobility, who receive the work and the counsel contained in it after it has passed through a network of individuals and groups...such layering self-consciously depicts the reception of the tragedies and draws ‘the reader’ into the author’s conversation about governance.

“A *Mirror for Magistrates* and Public Political Discourse in Elizabethan England.” 397.

I haue here (quoth I) king Richards tragedie. Reade it wee pray you (quoth they). With a good will (quoth I) For the better vnderstanding whereof, imagine that you see him tormented with Dives in the diepe pit of Hell, and thence howlinge this that followeth. (27-30).

Baldwin asks his fellow writers—and his readers—to see, hear, and meditate upon the physical performance of Richard’s punishment. It is as if Baldwin has turned up the volume of the poem; he emphasizes that Richard is “howling this which followeth,” a howling over which he seems to have little control as author. This is an imaginative and interpretive exercise, one that will be heightened as the reader uses his or her imagination to envision the poem as a stage for Richard’s noisy performance of excess emotion. The prefatory material reminds the reader that speaking is, “in part, a *bodily* act...the body is not ‘outside’ the speech act.”⁵¹ The body is “at once the precondition for the speech act and that which is indexed in the act itself, without which the act could not be the act at all.”⁵²

Richard appeals to his listeners for sympathy while also striking a defiant pose. His rhetorical question at the beginning is an invitation from a figure who has been characterized by Tudor historians as a tyrant, a vicious brute and a manipulator who will do anything for power: “What hart so hard, but doth abhorre to heare/The ruful raygne of me the thyrd Rychard?” (1-2). The rhetorical question, or *percontatio*, is commonly employed in complaint poetry “for purposes of rhetorical effect instead of a positive statement.”⁵³ Here, Richard uses the *percontatio* to convince readers that they should soften their hearts to read his narrative. Richard is a violent tyrant, but he strikes a pose of incredulity to draw his reader in. Richard describes the

⁵¹ Judith Butler, afterword to *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, 114, 115.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵³ M.B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 219.

gory details of the murders of his brother and nephews; he recounts the unfortunate details of the battle of Bosworth, most of which early modern readers would have already known; and when he is slain at the end of the poem, he puts himself on display, describing his mortal wounds in detail. Why would readers want to finish this poem, especially when they already know the circumstances of Richard's fall? Perhaps Richard's presentation of his "ruffull"⁵⁴ case might finally present a penitent version of the hated king, one who could offer a salve to the country's political and religious turmoil.

Richard does at first seem willing to accept blame for his wrongdoing. Like Lord Clyfford, Richard admits his wrongdoing at first, confessing that it was he who arranged the murders of his two young nephews:

My brothers children were right heyres vnto the crowne
Whom nature rather bound to defend than distroy,
But I not regardinge theyr ryght nor my renowne
My whole care and study to this ende did employe,
The crowne to obtayne, and them both to put downe:
Wherein I God offended, prouoking iust his yre,
For this my attempt and most wicked desyre. (43-49)

This and other stanzas are full of direct, active verbs: I employed, I put them both down, I offended God, I provoked his ire. Richard's forthright presentation of the facts, and his willingness to accept responsibility, are part of his attempt to create "a president" (22) for other princes so that they might avoid his mistakes. However, he does not remain consistent in his testimony; early on, he shifts from accepting the blame to transferring it on to other forces:

Desyre of rule made me alas to rewe,
My fatall fall I could it not forsee,
Puft vp in pryde, to hawtie then I grewe,
That none my peare I though now could be,
Disdayining such as were of hygh degree:

⁵⁴ Richard uses the words "rue" and "ruffull" three times in the beginning of the poem (2, 25, and 64).

Thus dayly rising and pulling other downe,
At last I thot how to win the crowne. (64-70)

Richard combines his bald contempt for the peers who elected him Lord Protector with a characterization of himself as a victim of ambition. He claims that he could not have foreseen his “fatall fall,” when only a few lines earlier he seemed completely committed to accepting responsibility for his own choices. In the third-to-last stanza of the poem, Richard advises princes to avoid the seduction of ambition: “But desire to rule alas dyd me so blinde,/Which caused me to do agaynst nature and kinde” (293-294). This ambivalence regarding agency and blame, coupled with the ironic juxtaposition between apparent self-awareness and the creation of a rueful “case” (50), results in a messy “case.” Richard’s complaint does not easily fit into the tidy confines of the *de casibus* formula in part because it ranges between acknowledgment and denial, between “rue” and defiance.

Baldwin characterizes Richard as a noisy complainant, but a great deal of “bruite” comes from other agents in this poem as well. Like Lord Clyfford, Richard has to contend with the “bruite” that “blowen in the peoples eares” (118) after the brutal murder of Edward’s much-loved young sons. Later, when Richard is convinced that he is secure in his kingship, he hears that Buckingham is ready to confront him on the battlefield: “And sodaynly a bruyte abrode was blowen,/That Buckingham the duke both sterne and stout,/In fyeld was ready” (155-157). The “bruyte” of Buckingham’s preparation and defiance come to Richard as readily as the “bruyte” of the nation’s tears upon hearing of the murders of the two young princes. In complaint poetry, “brute” rarely refers to an innocuous “public utterance” or a benign dissemination of

information.⁵⁵ It is insidious, out of control, highly contagious, and capable of making even the most brutal tyrant a victim of its power.

Ultimately, Richard's performance becomes an example of what *not* to do or be as king. Defiant in tone, unremittingly ambitious to the end, Richard admits that his was not the best course of action, but he remains unrepentant, stubbornly insisting on his noisy, inappropriately metered outcry. Reading Richard's complaint alongside Shore's wife's complaint, however, reveals just how inept Richard was as a ruler. Even if he does not acknowledge it explicitly in his account, he sacrificed the lives of many men because his army was ill-prepared (160-161); he never attended to the needs of the common people, as Shore's wife encouraged Edward to during his reign; and he did not articulate a vision for his nation beyond his own bald ambition. Jane Shore, a merchant's wife, seems to have a better theory of governance than Richard ever could have.

Jane Shore's Noise

In the prose frame that follows Richard's complaint, the authors seem to critique Richard's performance, noting that "the meter was mysliked almost of all" (4). Richard's extra half-foot at the end of each line disrupts the tightly controlled iambic pentameter that exists throughout the rest of the collection. This imbalance in Richard's meter symbolizes that tyrant's lack of decorum, and his state in hell: the writers agree that

kyng Rychard never kept measure in any of his doings, seing also he speaketh in Hel, whereas is no order: it were agaynst the *decorum* of his personage, to vse eyther good Meter or order. And therefore, if his oracion were far wurse, in my opinion it were more fyt for him. Mars and the Muses did never agree. (8-13)

⁵⁵ *OED*, s.v. "bruite," n. In the early modern period, "bruite" usually referred to a "report noised abroad," a "rumour of tidings" that could be innocuous, though in complaint poetry it is usually a defamatory rumor. For more on the significance of "bruite," see Kenneth Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise*, 12 and 18.

Richard's poor choice of indecorous meter may reveal his moral and political flaws, but his imbalance is quickly followed by the complaint of Jane Shore, an "eloquent wench" (27) whose regular iambs "furnishe out both in meter and matter, that which could not comlily be sayd in [Richard's] person" (28).

Of all the complainants in the many versions of *The Mirror*, Jane Shore was most frequently reinvented by authors during and after the early modern period. Her presence in the literature of the period is so pervasive that even when she is omitted as a character in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, she still functions as a ghostly presence that spurs Richard into action against his brother and the Lord Hastings.⁵⁶ Thomas Churchyard wrote "How Shores wife, Edwarde the fowerthes concubine, was by king Richard despoiled of all her goodes, and forced to do open penance" for the 1578 edition of *The Mirror*; he expanded the poem and it appeared again in *Churchyard's Challenge* (1593); and Jane Shore played a major, and poignant, role in the anonymously written drama *The True Tragedy of Richard III* (1594). Richard Helgerson has argued that the story of Jane Shore was summoned forth "by tensions within the culture that craved a medium through which to express themselves," such as questions about chastity, marriage, and power relations in early modern England."⁵⁷ Perhaps, though, Jane Shore's complaint does more than provide a steam-valve for early modern emotions. In what follows, I argue that Jane Shore's complaint manages and responds to the "bruite" of defamation that has

⁵⁶ There are several references to "Mistress Shore" in the text of *Richard III*. In Laurence Olivier's *Richard III*, actress Pamela Brown makes a cameo appearance as Jane Shore, even though Shakespeare wrote no lines for her in that play. *Richard III*, dir. Laurence Olivier (London Films, 1955).

⁵⁷ Helgerson, *Adulterous Alliances*, 35.

humiliated her, and the remembering and retelling of her public penance provides her with consolation in a poem that straddles juridical and ecclesiastical modes of expression.

The complaint of Shore's wife continues, extends, and problematizes the "bruite" of the complaint of Richard the Third. Shore's complaint is preoccupied with noise, rumor, and report, and Jane Shore hopes that if she is provided with an adequate hearing, she might be able to correct the misinformation that her story has generated. In the prose frame that precedes her complaint in the 1587 edition of *Mirror*, Jane Shore asks Churchyard to listen to her tale, thereby opening the first ear of the poem:

I now appeare to him that fyrst set mee forth...whose name is *Churchyard*: he shall not only haue the fame of his owne worke...but likewise haue all the glory I can gieue him, if he lend mee the hearing of my woefull tale, a matter scarce fit for womans shamefastnes to bewray. But since without blushing I haue so long beene a talkatiue wench (whose words a world hath delighted in) I will now goe on boldly with my audacious manner: and so step I on the stage in my shrowdeing sheete as I was buried. (372n)

In these prefatory lines, Shore calls attention to herself as a ghost, "appearing" so that the author might "set her forth." Shore is also an actor, stepping onto the stage in the costume of a dead woman. Shore's "appearance" to Churchyard has a purpose: not only will Churchyard provide Shore with the "hearing" she wants for her "woefull tale," but her story will provide the poet "with all the glory" she can give him. In exchange for Churchyard lending his ear, Shore will "step...on the stage" to boldly "bewray" the transgressions that led to her downfall, providing a narrative so compelling that the poet will feel as if he were actually there, in the past, witnessing her demise. The word "bewray" is derived from the Old Norse stem "rog," meaning "slander" or "strife." In this passage, Shore uses "bewray" to suggest that she will expose all of the details of her story for Churchyard.

Jane Shore “bewrays” several times in her complaint, thereby foregrounding the links between defamation, confession, and the expression of complaint.⁵⁸ “Bewraying” also carries connotations of exposure and revelation that affect reception and criticism of her complaint. Richard Danson Brown has suggested that Jane Shore’s “rhetorical audacity” has the “flavour of ‘light’ relief: as a staged performer reciting her story for the audiences’ delectation, Mistress Shore becomes a kind of poetic stripper.”⁵⁹ In describing Shore as a “poetic stripper,” Brown ignores three important components of Shore’s complaint. Shore’s “stripping” has much in common with the “laying bare” of many other complainants in the volume as they prepare for juridical testimony; her recounting of her public penance functions as a negotiation of the status of penance in the years after the Reformation; and, perhaps most significantly, Brown overlooks Shore’s powerful political commentary and her interest in the well-being of the common English people, which stands in stark contrast to that of Richard III. Shore’s physical presence in the poem is a physical manifestation of the ethical and emotional contradictions of her narrative, but it is not merely “‘light’ relief.” If Richard III wanted spectators to be seduced by Shore’s skimpy kirtle and undone hair, his plan backfired. As Wall observes, “Shore’s demure manner was interpreted as modesty and ‘womanly’ shame instead of wantonness, and thus a ritual designed to produce her ‘shame’ instead implied her innocence.”⁶⁰ At stake in the narrative of Jane Shore, then, is “who controls memory and what is lost in particular acts of forgetfulness.”⁶¹

⁵⁸ *OED*, s.v. “bewray,” v.

⁵⁹ Brown examines these linkages in “‘A Talkative Wench (Whose Words a World Hath Delighted in)’: Mistress Shore and the Elizabethan Complaint.” *The Review of English Studies, New Series* 49, no. 196 (1998): 395-415, 402.

⁶⁰ “Forgetting and Keeping: Jane Shore and the English Domestication of History.” *Renaissance Drama* 27 (1996): 123-56, 128.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

Shore's "hearing" with Churchyard places an emphasis on the physicality of the listening conditions that result in the poem's production. Her "hearing" requires an implied presence of character and author, a witnessing on the part of the reader and Churchyard's fellow authors, and a laying out of evidence that will build her case. During this period, the word "hearing" was undergoing a shift that increasingly emphasized its juridical uses. By 1576, Abraham Fleming uses the term to refer to "The listening to evidence and pleadings in a court of law,"⁶² and in 1603, Shakespeare used the term in *Measure for Measure*, when Angelo says to Escalus, "I'll take my leave,/And leave you to the hearing of the cause" (2.1.78). "Hearing" also took on a decidedly theatrical meaning, as it was used when referring to "the action of actively giving ear" during a lecture, sermon, or play.⁶³ By the time one of the Players in *Hamlet* says to the audience, "We beg your hearing patiently" (3.2.161), the word "hearing" had regular usage in the theatrical, the ecclesiastical, and the juridical realms. The situation of hearing in Shore's utterance, then, relies upon the active engagement, presence, and performance of both speaker and listener, and certainly emphasizes its theatrical production and reception.

In the early stanzas of the poem, Jane Shore promises a complete and thorough confession, borrowing from the rhetoric of late medieval auricular confession. The actual rituals of confession required penitents to release their confessions willingly and for priests to open themselves to that confession. Even if early modern subjects were no longer required to go to a priest for confession, much of the poetry of the period provides confessional situations that

⁶² *Panoply of Epistles* (London: Ralph Newberie, 1576).

⁶³ *OED*, s.v. "hearing," vbl. n.

resemble the pre-Reformation sacrament. Shore acknowledges that Churchyard is an earnest listener, and prepares him for the narrative that he will hear:

Because the truth shal witenesse wel with thee,
I wil rehearse in order as it fell,
My life, my death, my dolefull destenie,
My wealth, my woe, my doing every deale,
My bitter blisse, wherein I long did dwell:
A whole discourse of me Shores wife by name,
Now shalt thou heare as thou hadst sene the same. (57-63)

To receive consolation, Jane Shore needs to be heard and seen, to know that someone will absorb her complaint, even if her actual conditions cannot change. In this context, “hearing” is a “means of active inquiry...[a] method of orienting oneself in the world.”⁶⁴ Complaint poetry reaches beyond its borders to appeal not only to the listening writer, but the listening reader. The complainant forms his or her subjectivity in the process of articulating dissatisfaction; so too does the writer absorb and synthesize that expression, transforming it into a literary artifact to be received and interpreted by readers and audiences.

Jane Shore testifies to Richard’s cruelty with the language of slander. Each of her lines foregrounds the noise of defamation and its physiological effects on Shore, even in death:

Among the rest by Fortune overthrown,
I am not least, that most may wayle her fate:
My fame and brute abrode the world is blowen,
Who can forget a thing thus done so late:
My greate mischaunce, my fall, and heauy state,
Is such a marke whereat eche tounge doth shote,
That my good name is pluckt vp by the roote. (1-7)

Tongues are points of contagion in this passage, and Shore’s “bruite,” like the bruite in Richard III’s complaint, is characterized as a disease that easily moves around the world as quickly as the

⁶⁴Jonathan Ree, *I See a Voice: Deafness, Language, and the Senses* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999), 53.

wind. “Buite” blows in the wind, tongues shoot at and about her misfortune, and Shore’s name is plucked from its humble foundations. These multidirectional fissures are a demonstration of Jane Shore’s splitting, her shattering at the hands of slander and defamation. Interestingly, Shore’s use of the *percontatio*—“Who can forget a thing thus done so late?”—presents itself as an obvious observation: anyone familiar with the events from Richard’s despotic reign would understand and sympathize with her. Even so, Shore continues to describe the terms of her ignominy: her case is the target for the dart-like tongues of rumor; and the violence done to her name is analogous to the uprooting of a healthy plant. The poem, then, is charged with not only providing the news of Shore’s fall, but also with restoring the good name of the speaker.

Jane Shore seems prepared to provide a complete narrative of her wrongdoings and to “bewray” the wrongs of others. Even so, she is by no means ready to completely accept responsibility for her fall. Like Robert Tresilian, she accuses cruel Fortune, who provided the “wyles” that led to her ruin:

This wandryng worlde bewitched me with wyles,
 And wonne my wittes wyth wanton sugred ioyes,
 In Fortunes frekes, who trustes her when shee smyles,
 Shall fynde her false, and full of fyckle toyes,
 Her tryumphs al but fyl our eares wyth noyse,
 Her flattryng gyftes are pleasures myxt wyth payne,
 Yea, all her wordes are thunders threatening rayne. (8-14)

This stanza creates a gendered embodiment of Fortune as changeable, “wanton” and full of deceitful “wyles.”⁶⁵ Shore consistently positions herself in an agonistic engagement with the world. Her struggle against Fortune takes on a material, even meteorological reality in its

⁶⁵ *OED*, s.v. “wile,” n. The “fickleness” of Fortune is a common characterization, and fickleness is frequently used to describe wanton women. See Chapter 2 for Shakespeare’s characterization of the “fickle maid” in *A Lover’s Complaint*. See too *OED*, s.v. “fickle,” a.

“thunder threatening rayne.” The “noyse” of Fortune fills the ears of those “frekes” who champion Fortune’s “sugred joyes.”⁶⁶ Fortune’s “noyse” represents a sound in which “language interferes with itself, assumes the power of its own disorder—especially if we recall the word’s older associations with disturbance, quarrel, and scandal.”⁶⁷ The “wordes” of Fortune may sound like “flattring giftes” but are actually “pleasures mixt with payne” and “thunders threatening rayne.” Fortune’s words, like those of slander and rumor in the first stanza, are “words whose force depends exactly on how they are repeated, obscured, interrupted, stolen, buried, or misheard by those who hear them.”⁶⁸

Shore continues to extend and transfer her emotional distress onto the environment, using proverbial wisdom to provide some context for her story and to universalize the conditions of her ruin:

The fond desire, that we in glory set,
Doth thirle our hearts, to hope in slipper happe:
A blast of pompe is all the fruyte we get,
And vnder that lyes hidde a sodayne clappe:
In seeking rest vnwares wee fall in trappe.
In groping flowers with Nettels stong wee are,
In labouring long, we reape the crop of care. (15-21)

Shore’s geohumoral⁶⁹ comparisons between desire and nettles, between suffering and “crops of care” create a turbulent environment which emblemize the aural, visual, and tactile irritants of

⁶⁶ There are several other passages in the poem that refer to ringing ears (45), the “loud reproach” of defamation after her death (39), and the loud “voice of the people” in her ears (48).

⁶⁷ Gross, *Shakespeare’s Noise*, 1. Gross goes on to observe other significant examples of noise in *Hamlet*, including the moment at which Claudius “shows a striking fear of what others will hear in certain words...as when he complains that ‘buzzers’ have ‘infected’ the ear of Laertes after he returns to find his father dead” (13).

⁶⁸ *Shakespeare’s Noise*, 1-2.

⁶⁹ I am borrowing this phrase from Mary Floyd-Wilson’s *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) as shorthand for Jane Shore’s extension beyond the borders of her body and consciousness onto the landscape.

the speaker. Jane Shore is deeply and inextricably connected to the environment, even as a disembodied ghost speaking from the dead to the living. This attachment is painful, but also productive; in fact, she seems to derive some pleasure from it. Consider her apostrophe to “darke deceyt,” which resonates directly with the final apostrophic stanza of Shakespeare’s *A Lover’s Complaint*:⁷⁰

Oh darke disceyt, with paynted face for showe,
 Oh poysned baite, that makes vs egre styll,
 Oh fayned frende, deceyuing people so,
 Oh world, of thée we cannot speake to yll,
 Yet fooles we are that bende so to thy skyll,
 The plage and skourge that thousandes dayly feele,
 Should warne the wise to shun thy whyrling whele. (22-28)

In this lament on the “poysned baytes” of deceite, Fortune’s tempting call to disaster is a compelling one, a driving force that, at least for a fragile, easily shattered subject, is as powerful as any force of nature. This passage acknowledges that a didactic message can never achieve its goal: “Thus bound we are in worldly yokes to drawe,/And cannot stay, nor turne againe in time,/Nor learne of those that sought to high to clime” (33-35). Even as *The Mirror* presents itself as an “example,” no number of examples can prevent ruin, in the end.

Jane Shore presents herself as “proof” of the disgrace that led to her fall, but the poem’s logic is perplexing: Shore seems to suggest that *because* we are bound to fail, she must tell her story. In fact, Shore decides to emerge from her grave in large part because she heard the stories being told about her after her death, but also because she heard that *The Mirror* was being created and compiled. Certainly, Shore was often moved “to playne before this daye” (44), but it was the rumors of others, coupled with the possibility of a literary correction, that compelled her to present her “proof” to the world and show her piteous case (36-42). Alone, Shore’s complaint

⁷⁰ See Chapter Two for the rhetorical similarities between this poem and that complaint.

among the “noise” of rumor and defamation seemed impossible to articulate, but among the chorus of complainers in *The Mirror*, her utterance seems possible.

Jane Shore has promised the poet an exact replication of what happened in her narrative, but the telling of that story features numerous instances of rhetorical irony. In recounting her seduction by King Edward, Shore’s *percontatio* points to the inevitability of her seduction:

The Egles force, subdues eche byrd that flyes,
 What mettall may resist the flaming fyre?
 Doth not the sonne, dasill the clearest eyes,
 And melt the ise, and make the frost retire?
 Who can withstand the puissaunt kynges desyre?
 The stiffest stonnes are perced through with tooles,
 The wisest are with princes made but fooles. (85-91)

Jane Shore’s questions are almost identical to Rosamond’s in *Complaint of Rosamond* and the fickle maid’s in *A Lover’s Complaint*. Instead of accepting at least some responsibility in her adulterous relationship with Edward IV, she transfers blame onto the fact that no one can say no to a king. This complaint creates a situation in which the erotic history of kings and their concubines intersects with the political and military decisions of kings. Kietzman observes that Jane Shore’s rhetoric in this and other passages complicates “a simple narrative of cause and effect. Although the speakers almost always repent and admit to certain moral shortcomings, their repentance, incorporated into the complaint, is qualified by a “yes, but” structure.”⁷¹ Shore implicates the poet and reader in her narrative as well, suggesting that they, too, would do the same if put in her position.

One of the unintended consequences of Shore’s affair with King Edward IV was that she had access to and occasionally enjoyed some amount of power. Jane Shore’s complaint is one of

⁷¹ Kietzman, “A Means to Mourn Some Newer Way,” 114.

several texts that contributes to a polemical and even propagandistic history of Richard III, one that was initiated in the early works of Polydor Vergil and Thomas More and would continue in the dramatic works of William Shakespeare (*Richard III*) and Thomas Heywood (*Edward IV*).⁷² Jane Shore has more of a political mind—and desire for political reform—than Richard III, at least within the world of *The Mirror*. Consider her sense of justice in these lines:

My power was prest to right to poore mans wrong,
My hands were free to geve where need requyred,
To watch for grace I never thought it long,
To do men good I nede not be desyred.
Nor yet with gyfts my hart was never hyred.
But when the ball was at my foote to guyde,
I played to those that fortune did abyde. (204-210)⁷³

The active voice of this stanza stands in direct contrast with the more passive voice that Shore adopted when trying to transfer her blame onto other forces earlier in the poem. Here, she acknowledges her agency in the court: she says, “I did upholde,” “I had delight,” “I did prefer,” “I played to those,” accepting responsibility for the commonwealth of the English people and her influence on the king. There are problems with this agency, however: after her description of her access to power in court, she writes, “I sate in earthly pleasures clad, and for the tyme a Goddesse place I had” (216-217). What’s most exciting about Shore is her access to the king’s ear and her ability to “speak for others of her class, and work towards establishing a more equitable commonwealth.”⁷⁴ Even so, she is figured as a vain woman who draws self-satisfaction

⁷² For more on the uses of Jane Shore for propagandistic ends, see Maria Scott, *Re-Presenting “Jane” Shore: Harlot and Heroine* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 54-66, and Brown, “A Talkative Wench.”

⁷³ In his treatment of Jane Shore, Thomas More describes Jane Shore’s eloquent appeals to the king: “where the king took displeasure, she would mitigate & appease his mind: where men were out of favour, she wold bring them in his grace.” *The Complete Works of Thomas More*, ed. R.S. Sylvester (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 2.56.

⁷⁴ Kietzman, “A Means to Mourn Some Newer Way,” 123.

from the power she enjoyed. Just as Jane Shore begins to enjoy her newfound access to power and her ability to inform policy in the realm, Fortune frustrates her ascent:

But I had not so sone this lyef possest,
But my good happe began to slyp asyde.
And fortune then dyd me so sore molest,
That vnto playnts was touned all my pride. (218-221)

In this passage, Shore continues her engagement with metaphors of natural growth and meteorological disorder, comparing her fall from power to a proverbial rowing against the tide (222); the fickleness of Fortune to the speedy decline of trifling flowers (229-231); raw ambition to grain “that is so rashly sowen” (236); and the fragility of political power to “the smallest braunches” that are blown by the rigor of storms (244-245). Shore’s grief reaches beyond the borders of her own subjectivity, extending to the outside world to create a landscape of grief and turmoil. Just as the personal is fused with the political in complaint poetry, so too does the complainant’s interior landscape reach out to and affect the exterior landscape.

Immediately following the death of King Edward, Richard III, the Lord Protector, forces Shore “to do open penance.” According to historical accounts, Richard did confiscate Mistress Shore’s goods and charge her with witchcraft. Interestingly, though, it seems as if Richard was unable to build a compelling case for that charge, and changed the charge to “impurity,” due to Shore’s adulterous relations with Edward and a rumored affair with Lord Hastings.⁷⁵ Jane Shore does perform public penance in the poem, but it does not necessarily have the intended effects upon its spectators:

⁷⁵ As Scott observes, “One of Richard’s strategies in promoting his own rules was his championship of purity and virtue over vice, and Shore’s conviction provided a not-so-subtle critique of the previous reign’s licentiousness, not to mention of Hastings” (*Re-Presenting “Jane” Shore*, 11). According to these same records, Shore was ordered to do public penance and was then returned to prison, but little is known of her actual death or the circumstances of her life after what might have been a limited term of penance. .

Before the world I sufferd open shame,
 Where people were as thicke as is the sand,
 I penaunce tooke with taper in my hand.

Ech iye did stare, and looke me in the face,
 As I past by the rumours on me ranne,
 But Patience then had lent me such a grace,
 My quiete lookes were praysed of every man:
 The shamefast bloud brought me such colour than,
 That thousands sayde, which saw my sobre chere,
 It is great ruth to see this woman here. (306-315)⁷⁶

Just as Lord Clyfford risked unpleasant exposure in his “open penaunce,” so too is Shore appalled by her own “open shame.” Shore continues her self-assessment, referring to the “paire of Beades” about her neck, the book of David’s penitential psalms in her hand, the “lynnen cloth” that she wore around her hair, a “ragged Goun” that covered her body, the “Dish that clapt” to remind the community of her transgressions, and a “stayinge staffe” that she bore “as witness of [her] fall” (365-371). Shore’s public penance is meant to provide an example of what how immoral behavior is punished. Instead, her performance of penance has the opposite effect on the spectators who see her “sobre chere” as proof of her endurance.

Shore’s status as a penitent outcast gives her license to articulate her outrage toward Richard III. With the “peoples pity” (316), Jane Shore’s case against Richard III has some validity. In her account, he is a “raginge Wolfe” (317) that should never have been born:

I ask of God a vengeance on thy bones,

⁷⁶ Thomas More described Shore’s public penance in detail, emphasizing the pity that it aroused among the people who saw her:

she went in countenance & pace demure so womanly, & albeit she were out of al array save her kyrtle only: yet went she so fair & lovely, namelye while the wondering of the people caste a comly rud in her chekes (of which she before had most misse) that her great shame wan her much praise, among those yt were more amorous of her body then curious of her soule. And many good folke also yt hated her living, & glad were to se sin corrected, yet pitied thei more her penaunce, then rejoiced therein, when thei considred that ye Protector procured it, more of a corrupt intent than ani vertuous affeccion.” (*The Complete Works of Thomas More*, 2.55)

Thy stinking corps corrupts they ayre I knowe:
 They shameful death no earthly wyght bemones,
 For in thy lyfe thy workes were hated so,
 That every man dyd wyshe thy overthrowe:
 Wherefore I may, though perciall now I am,
 Curse every cause whereof thy body came. (318-329)

Of all of the complaints against Richard in *The Mirror* (those spoken by Woodville, Hastings, Henry Stafford, and Collingbourne), Jane Shore is the only character to explicitly curse the king. Nothing in the historiographies that mention Mistress Shore indicate that she cursed Richard III during her public penance. Churchyard, then, uses Shore's complaint to participate "in the historiographical hazing of one of England's most unpopular monarchs."⁷⁷ As Steible observes, Jane's cursing would have been considered highly contestable language in early modern England: to curse against a monarch was essentially an act of treason.⁷⁸ Jane Shore's curses necessarily defame the king in order to defend herself, but they are also lobbied at a monarch, however universally despised he might have been in Tudor England. Forced into beggary, starved until she looks "like a corse" (375), and exhausted from her rant against Richard, Shore becomes "perciall," incomplete,⁷⁹ only half-alive on the edges of subjectivity. She is no longer identified with the larger good; instead, she exists on the borders of the society that she was once so eager to reform.

Ultimately, Jane Shore never admits to or accepts responsibility for her downfall. Her final message of penitence and remorse is more in line with the *contemptus mundi* theme of Spenser's *Theatre for Worldlings* than anything substantive or unique her case: "Defye this

⁷⁷ "Jane Shore and the Politics of Cursing." *SEL* 43, no. 1 (2003): 1-17, 2.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁹ OED, s.v. "partial," adj.

world, and all his wanton wayes, /Beware by me, that spent so yll her dayes” (391-392). This sentiment contradicts much of what Shore has already argued in the poem. Jane Shore was forced into an arranged marriage, seduced by a king whom she could not refuse, and shamed by a tyrant who saw her involvement at court and interest in the commonweal as dangerous to the state. Even so, her complaint is rhetorically rich and compelling; in the prose frame that follows Churchyard’s poem, Baldwin and his fellow poets acknowledge its power and hope that Churchyard will “penne as manye moe of the remainder” (3) of *The Mirror* poems as possible.

Certainly, the story of Jane Shore had a long afterlife.⁸⁰ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Shore would return in the anonymous *True Tragedy of Richard III* (1594); as Anthony Chute’s follow-up poem to Churchyard’s, titled *Beawtie dishonoured written under the Title of Shores Wife* (1593); as the epistolary figure in Drayton’s *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (1598); as the female protagonist of Heywood’s dramatic text *Edward IV* (1599); for a few brief references in Shakespeare’s *Richard III* (1591), in various ballads and broadsides, such as *The Wofull Lamentation of Mistris Jane Shore* (1597).⁸¹ As Richard Helgerson has observed, “Shore’s wife is a representative figure whose troubling encounter with history suggests the possibility that tragic emotion may not be the exclusive province of the great.”⁸² Perhaps, too, Shore’s narrative as it appeared in the “first humanist history to emerge from the English Renaissance” could be categorized as “the first ‘antipolitical history,’ a commoners’ history to set against the royal

⁸⁰ For more on the Jane Shore ballad tradition and Chute’s poem, see Scott, *Re-Presenting “Jane” Shore*, 28-38. Ultimately, though, Shore went on to become a heroine that fit the uses of the Augustan stage in Nicholas Rowe’s *Tragedy of Jane Shore* (1714).

⁸¹ Jane Shore’s appearance continued in the broadside tradition through the eighteenth century; the Roxburghe ballad collection at the British Library includes *The wofull lamentation of Mrs. Jane Shore, a Gold-Smith’s wife of London* (c. 1700).

⁸² Helgerson, *Adulterous Alliances*, 38.

history of Richard III.”⁸³ In addition, though, her status as a penitent in the public sphere made her an enormously sympathetic character, and suggested that the affective power of penitential postures was still compelling to audiences and readers long after the penance was desacralized.

Conclusion

In *The Mirror for Magistrates*, complainants appear in various states of abjection to state their cases. The narratives of these great fallen figures are figured as staged performance in which bodily presentation and the situation of listening are central. With the prose frames that precede and follow each complaint in the *Mirror*, complainants in these poems ask for the ears of the writers as well as the ears of the readers.⁸⁴ Once they are allowed a hearing by the poets, these complainants repeatedly refer to their cases, to the proof of their wrongdoing, and the transgressions of others, and to the uses of their confessions as “precedents” for future magistrates to avoid. Cynthia Marshall has observed that much early modern literature features violent death and dismemberment, suggesting that “textual pleasure depended upon a significant charge of violence,” a charge that may have been crucial to a “textual aesthetic of excess”⁸⁵ in

⁸³ Ibid. Helgerson continues: “Moving compassion, as Jane Shore does, is the stuff of she-tragedy, of sentimental romance, of domestic melodrama, of what the eighteenth century would enjoy and condemn as weeping comedy...It is a threat that the nation will be taken over by the values of a newly promoted class and a newly promoted gender” (53).

⁸⁴ Winston argues that “the obviously fictional nature of the frame highlights the significance of its presence; it makes the *Mirror* appear as the record of a collaborative conversation about the governance of the commonwealth, a discussion in which the authors take different positions on the role of providence, fortune, rebellion, obedience, and individual and collective action in creating a stable state.” “*A Mirror for Magistrates* and Public Political Discourse in Elizabethan England,” 395.

⁸⁵ Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self*, 5, 2. In her examination of violence and literary generation in the early modern period, Lynn Enterline comes to a similar conclusion, arguing that “the violated and fractured body is the place where...aesthetics and violence converge, where the usually separated realms of the rhetorical and the sexual most insistently meet.” *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.

the period's poetics. Nowhere is that more true than in the *Mirror's* complaints, in which violence is the necessary precondition for the complainant's utterance.

Jane Shore's complaint in *The Mirror for Magistrates* continues, extends, and problematizes the "bruite" of slander and ill-report that leads to her downfall. In doing so, her complaint becomes more than a mere lament for her past wrongs: Shore subverts her didactic aims as she tells her story with great dramatic flair. However horrible her circumstances may have been, she relishes the retelling of her demise, a rhetorical position that continues in much of the complaint poetry of the sixteenth century. Complaint poems in the *Mirror* tradition continued to appear in miscellaneous collections for decades to come, and their powerful utterances influence a proliferation of "lover's" complaints that would appear in the 1590s, as final narrative poems in printed sonnet sequences.

Chapter Two
‘Nor gives it satisfaction to our blood’: The Case for Literary Consolation
in *A Lover’s Complaint* and *The Complaint of Rosamond*

Introduction

A study of the complexities of early modern complaint as a mode of confessional expression could easily begin with Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*. In Act 5, Scene 1, Isabella kneels before Vincentio, Duke of Vienna, in hopes of finding some redress for her woeful case. Her brother Claudio has been sentenced to death, and Isabella’s only hope of saving her brother is to compromise her own chastity. Isabella pleads with the Duke, the final arbiter who can provide her with an appropriate hearing, and perhaps justice:

Justice, O royal Duke! Vail your regard
 Upon a wronged—I would fain have said, a maid.
 O worthy prince, dishonor not your eye
 By throwing it on any other object,
 Till you have heard me in my true complaint
 And given me justice, justice, justice, justice!...
 ...Hear me, O hear me, hear! (5.1.20-25, 32)¹

Throughout much of the play, the Duke has been disguised as a priest and has learned of Isabella’s predicament through her confessional expressions. After spending much of the play disguised in priestly vestments, the Duke returns to his royal clothing to judge Isabella’s case. Initially, he seems resistant, and even hostile, to Isabella’s request for a hearing: “Relate your wrongs. In what? By whom? Be brief” (5.1.26). Ultimately, though, the Duke does provide Isabella with justice: he releases Isabella’s brother Claudio so that he can marry Juliet, he

¹ From *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: Norton, 1997).

couples Angelo with Mariana, and he offers Isabella his own hand in marriage, hastily providing closure through matrimony.

The Duke is able to provide a sympathetic ear to Isabella's case, but only because he has had access to what Katharine Eisaman Maus describes as "the concealed realm of motives and intentions, a privilege usually reserved for a confessor."² *Measure for Measure* stages a fantasy resolution to an impossible problem: In a play that is deeply concerned about the nature of auricular confession, who hears it, and how a confessant might find consolation or redress once the confession has been uttered, a complainant easily finds redress, and actually enacts a change in her condition and the conditions of others. Isabella achieves in the literary realm what was often difficult or impossible to achieve in the extra-literary world of jurisprudence: an opportunity for a hearing from a sympathetic listener who could absorb, interpret, and appropriately judge the details of her case.

Shakespeare's preoccupation with the uses of confessional expression and juridical complaint extends to his poetic texts as well. *A Lover's Complaint*, a long narrative poem that appears in the same collection as his *Sonnets* (1609), presents an unnamed "fickle maid" who engages with the rhetoric of auricular confession and juridical testimony in her expressions of grief, rage, and despair. Shakespeare's complaint poem is directly inspired by Samuel Daniel's *Complaint of Rosamond*, the first long narrative complaint to follow a popular sonnet sequence (in this case, his *Delia* of 1592). Critics have rightly positioned complaint poetry as an emergent poetic field for early modern authorship, as a rich and diverse poetic tradition that refigures and ventriloquizes concerns about gender, and as a generic preoccupation in a culture where poets

² Introduction to *Measure for Measure* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2027.

repeatedly experimented with the uses of narrative poetry. However, no critic has adequately addressed the ways in which complaint poems of the period engage with, critique, and supplant both auricular confession and early modern juridical discourses.³ Complaint poems are not only spoken by women figures ventriloquized by male poets. They feature male and female complainants who rail against a wide range of abuses in the social, erotic, and historic realms. In the *Mirror for Magistrates*, male and female complainants ostensibly tell the stories of their demise as didactic exempla, when in fact they derive pleasure from recounting their falls and casting blame onto others. In the two “female” complaints that I address in this chapter, the complaints of women *and* men are woven together to provide a critique of institutional models of confession that are unsatisfactory. These poems conflate legal testimony and auricular confession when complainants lay out the details of their cases. Each complainant presents her narrative to a single sympathetic listener who, after witnessing the complainant’s performance of grief, can create a written register that will provide the complainant with some consolation through poetry instead of justice by law or satisfaction through penance.

³ For more on early modern authorship, see Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); for more on gendered voices as the distinctive property of complaint poems, see John Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and the ‘Female Complaint’; A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); for more on the generic properties of complaint, see Mary Jo Kietzman, “‘Means to Mourn Some Newer Way’: The Role of the Complaint in Early-Modern Narrative” (Ph.D. Diss., Boston College, 1993). Katherine Craik comes closest to arguing for the ways in which *A Lover’s Complaint* investigates the status of auricular confession in the early modern period. In her consideration of the poem alongside reconstructed confessions of female criminals that appeared in ballads in the early seventeenth century, she reveals how Shakespeare imagined “the experimental genre of male-authored, female-voiced lament as inseparable from the unruliness of female confession” (Katherine Craik, “Shakespeare’s *A Lover’s Complaint* and Early Modern Criminal Confession” (*Shakespeare Quarterly* 53 [2002]: 437-59, 468). Craik’s treatment assumes that complaint is always a ventriloquized form that foregrounds concerns about gender, and her treatment of ballads does not attend to mid- to late-sixteenth century poetic texts that explored the highly contested status of auricular confession in the years after Henry VIII’s break with the Catholic Church; nor does she consider the rhetorical expression of dissatisfaction as it appeared in the bills of complaint that were submitted for consideration to the Star Chamber or the “bawdy courts” that handled so many cases of slander and sexual misconduct in the period.

Complaints feature subjects who confess the wrongs done to them as well as the wrongs they have done, sometimes to the author who is willing to transcribe and reiterate the complainant's story, and sometimes to a "reverend father" that is present in the poem. Like the bills of complaint that clogged the Star Chamber and the slander suits that preoccupied the ecclesiastical "bawdy" courts,⁴ these poems demonstrate that the rhetorical expression—and written transcription—of complaint is as significant as the transgression itself for readers, writers, and speakers. What makes complaint poems unique, though, is their ability to allow complainants to perform emotional excess, even if their complaints do not alter their condition. The complaining itself is generative, and suggests that the expression of grief is part of its consolation. In the case of Samuel Daniels' *Complaint of Rosamond* (1594), both poet and complainant feel some consolation for what has transpired in language; in the case of Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint* (1609), it is the "fickle" maid who feels "reconciled" at the end of her long narrative. These complainants reenact, critique, and re-imagine the conditions of auricular confession and legal complaint in order to show the inadequacies of both forms of expression. In these poems, confession is rarely a private revelation of the speaker's interiority, but a highly performative act full of rhetorical ironies and effects. Ultimately, neither the religious model of auricular confession nor the legal model of complaint provided adequate consolation to the despairing subject. Only the *articulation* of complaint through the register of poetic expression provides consolation to these figures, especially if no priest or judge will offer redress or consolation for their sins or the sins of others. Expressing dissatisfaction provides

⁴ The phrase "bawdy courts" was a common one by the early seventeenth century, largely as a result of the astonishing increase in defamation suits heard by the ecclesiastical courts, and the sexually charged details that could be heard in those proceedings. See Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (New York: Schocken, 1964), 322-323.

some emotional solace to these speakers. The poems themselves become registers of their grief, suggesting that the poetic devices of echo, repetition, and layering of ecclesiastical and juridical metaphors are the most satisfying mode for the registering of complaint.

The desire of complainants to describe their miserable stories in detail is not an exact reenactment of auricular confession in the Catholic tradition; nor do complaints replicate the work of bills of complaint in the Court of Star Chamber and testimonies of the ecclesiastical courts. Rather, complaint poems represent a secularization of these rituals for poetic ends. In these poems, complainants feel a compulsion to reveal all to their confessors in the late medieval confessional model; additionally, they want to create a case, accuse the people who have dishonored them, and defend themselves from rebuke and ill-report, just as complainants would have wanted as they prepared their bills of complaint for the Court of Star Chamber. With increasing frequency throughout the period, complainants demonstrate an interest in the rhetoric of juridical testimony, of laying out and describing the conditions of their despair, not for religious satisfaction, but for secular justice of some kind. With echoes that resound against the hillside, apostrophic exclamations, rhetorical questions, and conditional wishes that simultaneously announce and deflect responsibility, these poetic complainants find effective rhetorical expression through literary productivity and virtuosity.

In what follows, I will first consider the rhetorical components of bills of complaint in the Court of Star Chamber as well as the ecclesiastical courts managed by the church. I will then demonstrate the ways in which Daniel's and Shakespeare's poems call attention to the rhetorical difficulties inherent to confessional expression by analyzing four formal components: the arrangement of echoes and narrational frameworks at the beginnings of the poems; the staging of the complainants' confessions to a "reverend man" and the poet, respectively; the male

complaints-within-the-complaint, which further complicate the double-voicedness of the poems; and the poems' frequent turns from the conditions of auricular confession to juridical testimony. Together, these features position complaint poetry as a satisfying form of expression for complainants. When the rituals of auricular confession fail, complainants in these poems position themselves as precedents, building their case with "proofs" of their dishonor in poems that are double-voiced by both complainant and narrator, responded to with further complaints from other figures, and repeated in the echoes of the landscape and through written material. Implicit in these features of complaint poetry is a claim for the privileging of literary expression as a strategy for consolation.

The Bill of Complaint in the Court of Star Chamber

For a variety of reasons, reputation and good name were a central consideration in the period, and slander was an especially serious threat, a "natural disaster of language whose calamitous effects [could] barely be avoided."⁵ Historians have documented a significant rise in early modern slander suits and theorize that this rise might have been related to the culture's obsession with the importance of reputation.⁶ Between 1544 and 1594, the number of total lawsuits in England doubled; in that same period, defamation suits quadrupled. J.A. Sharpe and other historians have suggested that this increase reflects two major cultural shifts in the period:

⁵ Lindsay Kaplan, *The Culture of Slander in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 21.

⁶ Lawrence Stone, *Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 25. J.A. Guy speculates that this proliferation of complaint—and especially of defamation suits—might have signaled "the recovery of direction and strength by the Tudor monarch after the uncertainties of the 1550s," though at the time the increase might have had negative implications as well. *The Court of Star Chamber and Its Records to the Reign of Elizabeth I* (London: HMSO, 1985), 9.

the desire to resolve conflict through language and jurisdiction instead of violence, and the premium placed upon chastity for women and honor for men.⁷

It is difficult to distinguish completely between the rhetoric and procedures of early modern courts and imaginative literary texts, in part because literary texts were sometimes the grounds for juridical complaint. Lindsay Kaplan has observed that poetry was regularly used by complainants as evidence in defamation suits: “doggerel rhyme, ballads and satire became such popular expressions of detraction that defamation [was] increasingly associated with poetry.”⁸ Early modern subjects regularly used examples of ballads, bawdy jokes, and rumors as evidence that they had been defamed; conversely, many of the ballads and broadsides published in the sixteenth century have a quasi-legal style that replicated some of the work of bills of complaint and other written materials from the juridical realm.⁹

By all accounts, the Elizabethan period was a remarkably litigious one,¹⁰ and the Court of Star Chamber was one of several venues to which complainants could take their grievances

⁷ J.A. Sharpe, *Defamation and Sexual Slander in Early Modern England: The Church Courts at York* (Bothwick Papers, no. 58, 1980), 4, 24. Martin Ingram confirms these statistics in *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 28.

⁸ *The Culture of Slander*, 30. See, too, F.G. Emmison’s transcription of the Chelmsford ballads in *Elizabethan Life: Disorder* (Chelmsford: Essex County Council, 1970), 72-73.

⁹ Consider for example Thomas Churchyard’s poetic debate with Thomas Camell, which originally appeared in individual broadsides and reproduced in *The Contention betwyxte Churchyard and Camell, upon David Dycers Dreame* (1560). Over the course of several broadsides, the two poets engaged in a lengthy argument in which they defamed one another’s work and personal character. Their printed performance of complaint—the use of invective, the titles that include rejoinders and replications—derives its power in large part from the status of slander and defamation in the period, and the written material that these suits generated in the courts. For other similar debates, see Steve Mentz’s “Day Labor: Thomas Nashe and the Practice of Prose in Early Modern England.” In *Early Modern Prose Fiction: The Cultural Politics of Reading*, ed. Naomi Conn Liebler (New York and London: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁰ During Elizabeth’s reign, the Court of Star Chamber saw five times more bills of complaint than during the reigns of Mary, Edward, or Henry VIII. During Henry VIII’s reign, the Court considered 150 suits per year; during Edward VI’s reign, 145 per year; during Mary’s reign, 147 per year; and during Elizabeth’s reign, 732 suits per year. Guy, *The Court of Star Chamber and Its Records*, 9. See also Sharpe, *Defamation and Sexual Slander*.

relating to slander and defamation. In total, there were six courts that dealt with written pleadings and proofs instead of oral testimony: the High Court of Chancery, the Court of Star Chamber, the Exchequer, the court of Requests, the court of Wards and Liveries, and the court of the Duchy Chamber of Lancaster. Of these courts, though, it was the Star Chamber that handled many written cases of defamation, especially during Elizabeth's reign. The Court, which was comprised of members of the king or queen's Privy Council, met in the Star Chamber for several weeks out of every year to handle various kinds of bills of complaint. Lynne Magnusson and Jonathan Goldberg have emphasized the "important role of the personal letter in transacting the state's business in sixteenth-century England,"¹¹ but public letters, especially bills of complaint, also reveal that the framing of one's self and desires in public letters was just as integral to understandings of self-presentation.

Complainants seemed compelled to write narratives of humiliation, violence, and defamation in hopes of garnering the sympathy of the court. These bills were submitted by individual subjects who had specific grievances and demanded redress, but it is clear from the Star Chamber's guidelines that complainants were capable of writing exhaustive, and sometimes excessive, accounts of the crimes committed against them.¹² After a complainant submitted his bill, the defendant was expected to provide a response in his own defense, usually in writing.

¹¹ Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 99 and Goldberg, *Writing Matters: From the Hands of the English Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 255-259. For more on early modern epistolarity, see Chapter Four of this dissertation.

¹² The Court established limits on the length of bills in order to manage the excess of complaint that filled its limited space. Complainants and defendants were so voluminous in their accounts that bills could be no more than fifteen pages long, with fifteen lines on each page, in order to restrict their seemingly endless litanies of woe. Even with these limits, however, the complainants used heightened emotional language. Cora Scofield, *A Study of the Court of Star Chamber: Largely Based on Manuscripts in the British Museum and Public Record Office* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900), 73.

These responses, which could be quite lengthy, were full of suspicion of—and invective against—a complaint that they usually characterized as insufficient, unjust, and untrue.¹³ If the defendant did not want to admit to wrongdoing, the letter writing would continue through a series of replications, rejoinders, taking of proofs, and final decisions by the judges of the Court.¹⁴ Paradoxically, then, the defendant had to employ as much or more rhetorical excess than the complainant, not only to proclaim his innocence but also to elaborate upon the unreliability of the complainant.

Elizabethan bills of complaint emphasized the complainant's extreme conditions of distress, an urge to recount the transgression in detail (however exaggerated or misremembered),¹⁵ and a wish for a formal hearing in which the complainant might receive some form of consolation, either in the form of financial reimbursement or through the physical punishment and humiliation of the defendant.¹⁶ Highly formalized and prescribed in their rhetoric and procedure, these bills were submitted by individual subjects who had specific grievances and demanded redress, but it is clear from the Star Chamber's guidelines that

¹³ *Select Cases before the King's Council in the Star Chamber, commonly called the Court of Star Chamber: A.D. 1477-[1544]*, ed. I.S. Leadam (London, 1903-1911), 1:xxix.

¹⁴ Complainants also had the option of producing witnesses as “proofs” to the transgressions they railed against, but it was also difficult to determine the veracity of a witness's claims. *The Court of Star Chamber and Its Records*, 29.

¹⁵ Guy observes that “bills were sometimes filed years after the events complained of,” which inevitably led to doubts about the circumstances of the transgression. *The Court of Star Chamber and Its Records*, 23.

¹⁶ The Court of Star Chamber did not consider cases of treason or murder, nor did it sentence any defendant to death. Most corporal punishments included “whippings, pillory, branding, cutting off of ears, wearing declarations of guilt on hats, [and] public humiliation of all sorts, including for women.” Edward P. Cheney, “The Court of Star Chamber,” *The American Historical Review* 18, no. 4 (1913): 727-750, 743. Eventually, the use and powers of the Star Chamber were critiqued, and the institution was ultimately dissolved along with the Privy Council in 1641. By then, the court had come to be perceived as a vehicle of state power (particularly as a means to root out seditious speech) that served the needs of the king. But throughout the sixteenth century and well into the seventeenth, the Court of Star Chamber allowed early modern British subjects to register complaints, demand confessions, and at least attempt to find some form of redress.

complainants were capable of writing exhaustive, and sometimes excessive, accounts of the crimes committed against them. Complainants and defendants were so voluminous in their accounts and responses that bills could be no more than fifteen pages long, with fifteen lines on each page, in order to restrict the seemingly endless litany of woes.¹⁷

In their responses to charges of riot and slander, defendants repeatedly called attention to the insufficiency of complainant's claims, suggesting that they had no proof for what supposedly transpired. When, in the case of *Walterkyn v. Letice*, Thomas Walterkyn complained against four rioters who, in "riottuos wise and in maner of warre," broke into Walterkyn's house, the defendants described Walterkyn's complaint as "ne sufficient to be answerid unto" and "imaged onely to sclaudre vexe and trobull"¹⁸ the defendants. "Insufficiency" and "uncertainty" are consistent preoccupations in these bills and the answers to them. A defendant referred to a complaint as insufficient when he believed that the complaint was false or had no witnesses to prove that a violation had occurred.¹⁹

This reverberation of complaint from both complainants and defendants raised various interpretive problems. The veracity of a complainant's account was always doubtful at best, which called attention to the unreliability of confessional expression in the first place. Consider, for example, Thomas Adene's complaint against Rafe Ryder, Richard Ryder, and others:

To the kyng our soverayn lord

¹⁷ Scofield, *A Study of the Court of Star Chamber*, 73.

¹⁸ *Select Cases before the King's Council in the Star Chamber*, 1:165-166.

¹⁹ For example, in *Smythe v. Broke*, the defendant writes that "the seid bill is insufficient and uncerten to be answer unto and the mater surmitted therein false" (1:43). We see the recurrence of insufficiency in numerous other answers to bills of complaint, including *Carter v. Malmysbury* (1: 122); *Halle v. Essex* (1:175); *Powe and Another v. Newman* (1:229); *Byland, Abbot, &c. of. v. Warcroppe* (in which Robert Warcroppe had several bills of complaint against him, all of which he claimed were "insufficient, uncerten & untrew, and also Sclanederusly Fayned" [1:261]); *Pynson & Others v. Squyer & Others* (1:116); and so on. *Select Cases before the King's Council in the Star Chamber*.

Lamentably compleyneng shewith unto your highnes your true and feithfull Subiect Thomas Adene that where your seid Subiect beyng in goddes peace and your graces at Kynsulton in the countie of Cestre the second day of July last past, one Rafe Ryde, Richard Ryder, Rafe Conresse, John Ryde, John Walton and William Morgan, with other evil disposed parsons to your Subiect unknowen at Kynsulton aforseid in riotouse maner, that is to say with bowes and arrowes, billis, swordes and staves, assembled and then and there betwene ix and xth of the clocke in the nyght of the second day of July upon your Subiect did make a[s] sawte and hym sore bete, grevously maymed, and wounded, thugh the which he was in great perill of death, and most graciouse soverayn lord, the seid riotouse persons not with that contentid dayly do lye in wayte in dyverse and sondry places within the seid countie to murder and sle your seid Subiect, in exchueng whereof he dareth not abyde in his natyve countre to travvell for his pore lyving...²⁰

Adene complains “lamentably” because the “evil disposed parsons” who attacked him behaved in a “riotouse maner...with bowes and arrows, billis, swordes and staves” and “grievously maimed and wounded” him. Not only did these men put Adene “in peril of death,” but they also continued to “lye in wayte” to “murder and sle” him. The problem with these accusations is that judges would have to rely on the written word—and little else—in order to understand and judge what really happened. Adene and many other complainants understood this and may have exaggerated the dramatic recounting of the event in writing, showing the damage done to the complainant physically and emotionally, however inaccurate or misremembered. It was very common for complainants to exaggerate the violence of the transgression against them, usually with heightened rhetoric of abuse. Adene’s riot charge might have been completely fabricated in order to heighten the drama of his narrative.²¹ If Adene did take some license in his account of “riot,” he was only conforming to a standard usage of the term in the Court of Star Chamber.

²⁰ STAC 2/1/35, reprinted in Guy, *The Court of Star Chamber and Its Records*, 25-26.

²¹ J.A. Guy observes that “in Star Chamber, the most common ingredient in the complaint was the almost mechanical allegation of riot, forcible entry or assault...the object was to catch the court’s attention and to persuade the judges that the matter reported was within the orbit of royal jurisdiction.” Guy, *The Court of Star Chamber and Its Records*, 26. For more on the role of performance in early modern evidence and sincerity, see Barbara J. Shapiro, “Classical Rhetoric and the English Law of Evidence” in *Rhetoric and Law in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Victoria Kahn and Lorna Hutson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 67-68.

Bills of complaint, then, were epistolary registers of grievance that necessitated a seemingly endless loop of rejoinders, replications, confessions, and judgments. At each stage of the legal proceedings, complainants were expected to generate a rhetoric that described the exact circumstances of the transgression, demand a confession from the defendant, and persuade the audience of the sufficiency of the complaint. These cases foreground the rhetorical performance of complainants who are dissatisfied with juridical rhetoric and anxious about the effects and reception of complaint. These bills were also opportunities for complainants and defendants at least attempt to get the story right, to revise and amend events using words instead of knives to resolve difference without violence.²² This rhetorical performance and the frustrations over written bills of complaint in the Star Chamber is by no means identical to the performance of dissatisfaction in complaint poetry; however, complaint poetry draws its power from its ability to surpass the limits of legal complaint. In complaint poems, complainants can critique auricular confession as a limited model of self-expression and use literary testimony as a self-ironizing defense of their actions. In doing so, literary complainants foreground the limits of litigiousness and the desire for an additional register of grief in early modern culture.

The Ecclesiastical “Bawdy” Courts

In the years after the Civil War and Restoration, the ecclesiastical and juridical would come to inhabit increasingly separate rhetorical spheres, but in the Elizabethan period, they were not discrete; as Martin Ingram observes, “the notions of ‘sin’ and ‘crime’ were not clearly

²² J.A. Sharpe contends that this trend toward legal action for slander indicates “that the Englishman of the period regarded a suit at law as an acceptable alternative to violence in defence of his own or a kinswoman’s good name; once again, we are reminded of how a taste for litigation, and perhaps even a respect for the law, had permeated deep into English society by this period.” *Defamation and Sexual Slander in Early Modern England*, 23.

differentiated” in this period.²³ The Church had positioned confessional expression as the path to truth-telling both in the private confessional, in public penance, and in the courtroom. In the years after the desacralization of penance, the status of confessional expression necessarily shifted, and ecclesiastical courts handled many of the matters that priests used to handle in the private confessional.²⁴

Both public and private confession was integral to the efficient functioning of ecclesiastical and common courts. Protestant ministers encouraged despairing penitents to come to them for private advice and consolation, and public penance did continue, with varying levels of frequency, through the sixteenth century.²⁵ Private confession was a necessity for individual subjects who searched for consolation through counsel with a minister, and public penance was of use to small communities who wanted to see justice executed in the form of public embarrassment, especially sexual misconduct and other transgressions.²⁶ Confession in the ecclesiastical courts of law, and the use of public confession in the aftermath of court proceedings, were a persistent preoccupation for subjects in the period.²⁷

In the years after Henry VIII’s break with the Catholic Church, the ecclesiastical or “bawdy” courts functioned much in the same way they had for centuries. After the Reformation, canon law was allowed “to remain in force in so far as it was not repugnant to the statutes of the

²³ *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage in England*, 3.

²⁴ Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage in England*, 240.

²⁵ For a literary performance of this public penance, see my treatment of Jane Shore in Chapter One.

²⁶ For my treatment of the ways in which Protestants revised theories of confession after its desacralization, see Chapter Three.

²⁷ Ingram observes that public penance was a penalty regularly imposed by the ecclesiastical courts through the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage in England*, 3.

realm, or to common law.”²⁸ Because everyone in England was ostensibly a member of both the Church of England and the state, every citizen was subject to the jurisdiction of both ecclesiastical and common law courts, both of which handled defamation suits.²⁹ The ecclesiastical courts continued to handle defamation suits well after the Reformation in large part because all crimes were considered sins, and “the ecclesiastical courts could justify that ‘cognizance, examination and correction of every mortal sin’ came within [its] jurisdictional reach.”³⁰ To that end, the church courts were responsible for handling cases of “adultery, whoredom, incest, drunkenness, swearing, ribaldry, [and] usury,”³¹ but the majority of cases that they handled dealt with sexual defamation. The ecclesiastical courts were especially useful in the governance and jurisdiction of women’s bodies, which were, during this period, perceived as unstable and disorderly.³² A woman could easily be accused of “whoredom” based on convincing rumors,³³ and if defendants wanted to convince the judge that they were innocent,

²⁸ Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, 300.

²⁹ E.R.C. Brinkworth, *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court of Stratford* (London: Phillimore, 1972), 3.

³⁰ Kaplan, *The Culture of Slander*, 16.

³¹ Brinkworth, *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court*, 13. See too Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, 301-302.

³² Rosemary Kegl draws a relationship between charges against women and their socio-economic vulnerability: “Not surprisingly, a disproportionate number of the women who were prosecuted lived outside the protection of an economically stable, male-dominated family. These women included the overlapping categories of poor women, widows, elderly ‘spinster,’ unmarried mothers, and women who had moved to towns where they had no relatives.” *The Rhetoric of Concealment: Figuring Gender and Class in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 117. For the instability of women’s bodies, see Gail Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

³³ Brinkworth, *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court*, 14. Both Brinkworth and Kaplan observe that actual evidence didn’t have to exist for a plaintiff to make a sworn statement; all they had to do was believe that the testimony sounded true.

they would be required by the court “to take a formal oath that [they were] innocent of the crime and to find compurgators to swear that they believed he had sworn truly.”³⁴

Compurgation itself was a method of characterization: witnesses who could testify to the general character of the accused could create a profile of a victimized widow or a saucy young wench. Crucial to compurgation is its sense as a purgative, a speech act that could publicly cleanse the reputation of a slandered woman. If found guilty, however, the accused could then be asked to provide a public penance in front of the church. Brinkworth describes a typical scene:

The aim of the Judge in ordering penance was to make the punishment fit the crime. A fully public penance was conducted by the minister standing in the pulpit. The penitent was required to confess the sin in intimate detail, standing on a stool in the middle aisle near the pulpit, clad either in ordinary clothes or, for the most serious offences, enveloped in a white sheet, bareheaded, barefooted, and holding a white rod. The length of time varied too: some had to stand for the whole length of the service, some until the end of the sermon, some only until the end of the second lesson.³⁵

In this example, consolation is not the primary objective of the penance. Rather, public penance shamed penitents into acknowledging the criminality of their sin and the damage it had done to both themselves and the community. Though the ritual of public penance might suggest that the courts’ proceedings were consistent and effective, concepts of early modern slander and its

³⁴ R. H. Helmholz, *Select Cases on Defamation to 1600* (London: The Selden Society, 1985), xxii. Paul Hair defines purgation as “a device for testing the character of defendants when an issue was in doubt. The defendant was required to produce a number of acquaintances, not as witnesses of the act in question, but as testifiers to his general character and therefore to the likelihood that what he had sworn on oath was true.” *Before the Bawdy Court: Selections from Church Court and Other Records Relating to the Correction of Moral Offences in England, Scotland, and New England, 1300-1800* (London: Barnes & Noble, 1972), 6. For more on compurgation and the gradual early modern shift to written evidence, see Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 31-32.

³⁵ Brinkworth, *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court*, 15. Hair documents many similar descriptions of public penance: “The church courts imposed on those found guilty ‘penances’, which were theoretically expressions of moral repentance rather than punishments. They generally involved some form of public confession and humiliation (standing in church in a white sheet or in sack-cloth, processing bare-footed, being publicly flogged, etc.)” *Before the Bawdy Court*, 6. See too Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage in England, 257-259*.

punishment were by no means stable.³⁶ Even so, the procedures of ecclesiastical courts were well-known to both urban and rural subjects, and the emphasis on compurgation, defamation, and public penance found their place in the complaint poetry of the period.

Slander defamed both the complainant and the defendant in what could be a never-ending loop of accusations and invectives.³⁷ Slander was always a two-pronged operation: the victim who was allegedly damaged by another person's slanderous words had to lodge a complaint against that person. In doing so, the complainant had to provide harsh language that could potentially slander the character of the slanderer. If the defamer's accusations proved to be untrue, the defamer could be exposed to the same kind of public ridicule as his or her victim in the ecclesiastical courts: "She or he was required, in public, to repent and apologize to the victim: 'the evident goal [of this punishment was] the public humiliation of the defamer and the restoration, as far as possible, of the reputation of the person defamed.'"³⁸ Because language was usually the only actual evidence that was available to judges in these cases, the speech of all parties, and their actions and intentions, were carefully investigated.³⁹

Judicial Testimony in *The Complaint of Rosamond*

The status of fame, reputation, and honor was a pervasive cultural concern of the early modern period. Even so, the institutionalized rituals of complaint in the Court of Star Chamber and the bawdy courts were problematic. In the public airing of private griefs and disputes, complainants did not often find the redress that they were looking for in court proceedings.

³⁶ Kaplan, *The Culture of Slander*, 13.

³⁷ Kaplan, *The Culture of Slander*, 13.

³⁸ Helmholz, *Select Cases on Defamation*, xl.

³⁹ Kaplan, *The Culture of Slander*, 13.

Complaint poetry, however, presented itself as a generative mode of expression in which complaining figures could vent their frustrations and be assured of at least some literary consolation.

Complaint poetry is not identical to extra-literary bills or spoken words of complaint, but it does draw from the culture's obsession with slander, scandal, and damaged reputations. Men and women speak from the dead—or, in the case of *A Lover's Complaint*, near-death—in order to provide complainants with a chance to characterize and defend themselves when other institutions have failed them. In my discussion of bills of complaint in the Court of Star Chamber, I suggest that the juridical proceedings in that court were part of a pervasive culture of epistolarity that privileged the exchange of complaints, defenses, and the reiteration of dissatisfaction by more than one letter writer. In the *Complaint of Rosamond*, Rosamond comes back from the dead not only to clear her name, but as an offering to Daniel the poet. If he can create a register of her grief, then the transgressions that led to her downfall will become generative for him as a poet, even if his poem cannot change Rosamond's situation. The poem, then, creates a unique opportunity for literary consolation *and* accomplishment.

Daniel's *Complaint of Rosamond* appears as the final poem of Daniel's 1592 *Delia*, a pioneering literary effort that, along with Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, helped to generate what Margreta de Grazia has referred to as the "sonnet craze" of the 1590s.⁴⁰ In *The Complaint of Rosamond*, Rosamond, the long-dead mistress of Henry II who was allegedly murdered by Eleanor of Aquitaine, "solicits" Samuel Daniel so that he might form her "case":

my miserable Ghost...

⁴⁰ Margreta de Grazia, "Fin-de-Siecle Renaissance England," in *Fins de Siecle: English Poetry in 1590, 1690, 1790, 1890, 1990*, ed. Elaine Scarry (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 41.

Comes to sollicite thee, (whilst others faile)
 To take this taske, and in thy wofull Song
 To forme my case, and register my wrong. (29, 33-35)⁴¹

This framing relationship of complainant-speaking-to-poet is similar to frames that fill *The Mirror for Magistrates*. With this frame, Daniel signals his debt to the *Mirror's* complaint tradition; one of his many innovations with this poem, however, is that his complaint appears at the end of a volume that features numerous sonnets by a single author, and that Rosamond's complaint is in part a direct response to the erotic problems that recur through Daniel's sonnet sequence.

Rosamond believes in the justness of her complaint, and suggests that she, with the help of Daniel's poetic virtuosity, might be able to pass from the "infernal deepes" (1) to "Elisean rest" (9). Ultimately, though, Rosamond's ability to tell her story might only provide poet and complainant with momentary consolation, as the end of the poem suggests. Like Jane Shore before her, Rosamond speaks from the in-between, disrupting the border between life and death with the stain of her dishonor. Within this framework, the poet becomes Rosamond's confessor, and his poetic presentation of her lament becomes the testament that she wishes she could have written with her own blood (765-66). Rosamond does not merely posit the poet as a priestlike confessor; she also presents her case as a legal one that is both just—that is, legitimate—and deserving of justice.⁴² If Rosamond can articulate the conditions of her grief, she will be able to

⁴¹ All quotations come from *The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Samuel Daniel*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963).

⁴² Ronald Primeau argues that Rosamond's repentance is contrived, that it arises "less from religious motivation than out of a need for purging herself of the guilt of rejecting a man she knew she ought not in conscience to reject."⁴² Primeau is forgetting the agreement from the beginning of the poem: that Rosamond's telling of her story to the poet might bring relief to both her and the poet, that the reception of her complaint might be as important as its utterance. "Daniel and the *Mirror* Tradition: Dramatic Irony in *The Complaint of Rosamond*." *SEL* 15, no. 1 (1975), 21-36, 30.

justify herself, the wrongs she's done, and the wrongs that have been committed against her.⁴³ It is the expression of complaint and its transcription on the page that will justify the complainant. Rosamond's words, gestures, and awareness of her listeners—including the poet, his object of desire, and readers of the poem in print form—repeatedly call attention to her complaint as a performance to be interpreted and judged as “just” in what becomes a complaint full of juridical rhetoric.

Throughout the opening frame of the poem, Rosamond suggests that a positive reception of her written complaint might result in action. Rosamond reminds Daniel that Jane Shore was “pass'd” from Purgatory to paradise because “Her well-told tale did such compassion finde” (27). Just as Hamlet's father's ghost asked Hamlet to remember him, so too does Rosamond ask the poet to “forme [her] case, and register [her] wrong” (35) so that she will be remembered:

Then write (quoth she) the ruine of my youth,
Report the downe-fall of my slippry state:
Of all my life reveale the simple truth,
To teach to others what I learnt too late.
Exemplifie my frailtie, tell how Fate
Keepes in eternall darke our fortunes hidden,
And ere they come to know them tis forbidden. (64-70)

Like other complaint writers who have gone before him, Daniel's written “register” might generate the sighs that are required for Rosamond to leave Purgatory. Additionally, her speaking grief, and the poet's register of that grief, might “grace” (47) the poet with Delia's attention. In this narrational frame, Rosamond reminds the poet and the reader of the pleasures that written

⁴³ This focus on the “justness” of complaint is not unique to complaint poetry titled as such; as Brian Cummings has observed in his treatment of Wyatt's *Penitentiall Psalmes*, “justness” is a preoccupation for Wyatt as well, particularly in his translation of Psalm 51. See *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 189. One can also see a preoccupation with justness of complaint in other translations of the penitential psalms, including Richard Alison's translation of Psalm 17 (“O Lord giue eare to my iust cause, attend when I complaine” in *The Psalmes of Dauid in meter the plaine song beeing the common tunne to be sung and plaide vpon the lute, orpharyon, citterne or base viol* (London: William Barley, 1599).

remembrances might provide. Delia might have the ability to confer grace and blessings, but the poet must generate the complaint on the page before any of this might be possible. The speech tag “quoth she” signals, too, the explicitly literary and dramatic nature of Daniel’s poetic project. Rosamond reminds the poet that there is a precedent for poetry that actually enacts change in the world, or at least in the world of poetic figures, and might even help to alleviate the grief of the poet, whose lovesickness for Delia has manifested itself in the sonnets. In this passage, literary precedents bolster Rosamond’s case, and the poet is persuaded by the possibilities that his words might create.⁴⁴

Rosamond seems ready to report the reason for her fall, but she insists on subverting the aims of this ostensibly confessional situation. She claims that the story of her fall is a “simple” one, that her ghost has come from the infernal deeps to “plaine” of her “sin.” And Rosamond does allude to her sin throughout the poem: after she seduces Henry, for example, Rosamond admits that her “flesh gan loathe the new-felt touch of sinning” and that “use of sinne did worke in [her] a boldnesse” (459, 463). After Rosamond has been poisoned by Henry’s wife, her greatest sorrow is that no one can hear her confession: “Is this thy glory got, to die forlorne/In Desarts where no eare can heare thee mourne?” (657-8). Rosamond laments that she will die unshriven and will be unable to reveal her guilt, but Rosamond’s desire to confess is ironized by her stronger desire to show off her beauty and to be known to the world:

What greater torment ever could have beene,
Then to inforce the fayre to live retir’d?
For what is beauty if it be not seene?
Or what is’t to be seene if not admir’d?
And though admir’d, unlesse in love desir’d?
Never were cheekes of Roses, locks of Amber,

⁴⁴ Drayton’s *Matilda* provides a similar argument. She cites Rosamond, Lucrece, Shore’s wife, and Elstred as literary precedents, and she wants Drayton to legitimate her suffering by recording her complaint. (29-41).

Ordain'd to live imprison'd in a Chamber. (512-518)

What upsets Rosamond is that Henry kept her hidden in a castle to protect her from Eleanor of Aquitaine. The hiding of her beauty from the world seems to upset her more than the actual imprisonment. Many complaint poems feature a speaker who is trapped by or concealed in a cave or maze that deprives them of their political or social agency. In this passage, however, Rosamond reveals her vanity, rather than her feelings of imprisonment or subjection.

When Rosamond is not subverting the didactic aims of her narrative with comments on her beauty, she is displacing her guilt onto abstract forces. Early in the poem Rosamond blames her “slippery state” on Fate, easily displacing her own sin onto an abstraction to absolve herself of her own dishonor. Rosamond does this later in the poem, too, when she complains against Jealousy, describing it as a “Mirth-marring Monster, borne a subtill lier” (494) that “turnst [her] freedome into captivitie” (508). Rosamond uses rhetorical questions to suggest that she is not to blame for her seduction by the king, and that there was a certain amount of inevitability to that seduction:

What might I then not doe whose powre was such?
 What cannot women doe that know their power?
 What women knowes it not (I feare too much)
 How blisse or bale lyes in theyr laugh or lower? (134-137)

Rosamond posits these questions as if they have obvious answers, suggesting that a young woman has no alternative but to use her charms for seductive ends. Beauty is a “proof” of privilege (161), a proof to which she repeatedly refers in making her “case” to the poet. This is one of several rhetorical questions asked by Rosamond in her presentation of the narrative. Rosamond’s rhetorical questions draw attention to the impossibility of her plight, thereby deflecting any responsibility she may have had in the seduction.

Other Voices

The Complaint of Rosamond does focus in large part on Rosamond's complaint, but her narrative is complicated by the presence of other complainants. Rosamond's lady-in-waiting, the mythological figures painted on her casket, and Henry II's laments complicate the straightforward narration that Rosamond seems to provide. Like the rejoinders and responses that created an endless circuit of complaint in the Court of Star Chamber, these complaints-within-the-complaint provide responses and revisions of Rosamond's story. In addition, though, they stage an excess of emotion and exhaustive accounts of deprivation, lament, and subjugation. These complainants each accomplish different rhetorical effects: the speech of the lady-in-waiting is an exercise in persuasion, the inanimate figures on the casket provide numerous precedents of classical figures who misbehave, and Henry wails and weeps for the loss of his mistress. Lauren Berlant has observed that complaint is a "paradigm of public female discourse" that provides a kind of resistance "to the messages and practices of patriarchal dominance."⁴⁵ My observations of this and other complaint poems, however, expand the possibilities of complaint as a mode of expression for both male and female speakers. Rosamond's complaint is an intricately woven text that incorporates the echoes of both male and female voices but within and outside of the frame of the poem.

Rosamond's lady-in-waiting uses her own story as an example of what to avoid, but instead of speaking as a dishonored woman, she complains that she was *not* seduced, wishes that she had been, and, if given the chance, announces that she would have readily surrendered

⁴⁵ "The Female Complaint." *Social Text* 19/20 (1988): 237-259, 238, 245.

herself to her desires. She uses the “smoothest speech” (219) to warn Rosamond of what might happen if she does not comply with the king’s wishes:

Fie Fondling fie, thou wilt repent too late
The error of thy youth; that canst not see
What is the Fortune that doth follow thee...

I lost my time, and I repent it now.
But were I to beginne my youth againe
I would redeeme the time I spent in vaine. (243-45, 258-9)

In this passage, the lady-in-waiting repents what she did *not* do in order to encourage Rosamond. She speaks from the future to encourage Rosamond to seduce the king, but her encouragement is sinister, and Rosamond knows it, even as the woman is speaking.

The unnamed lady-in-waiting continues her ironic rhetorical stance, suggesting that society’s obsession with respect and “imaginarie lists of Reputation” (268) are “foe[s] to recreation” (270). If Rosamond is so worried about her reputation, she can be assured that her youth will provide her with a “just appeale” (263)—that her elders will forgive her of her impetuous sins because she is so young and lovely. These imperatives to Rosamond are rife with irony. On the one hand, the conventions of the *de casibus* tradition—the poem’s opening lines spoken from Purgatory, the admission of guilt and transgression, the wish for pardon or at least solace—prepares the reader for a narrative that will inevitably lead to ruin. On the other hand, the lady-in-waiting suggests that ruin might be preferable to virtue.⁴⁶ Good reputation is overrated, according to the lady-in-waiting. In her argument, the “Eccho” of Fame is just “an idle

⁴⁶ Brian Vickers observes that this argument is a conventional staging of traditional arguments for the value of *voluptas* over *virtus*. For a discussion of *voluptas* in early modern poetry, see Vickers’ *Shakespeare’s A Lover’s Complaint, and John Davies of Hereford* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 76-93.

voice” (266), but for Rosamond and the reader, it is a sound with actual consequences, a sound that generates the poetic text.

If the lady-in-waiting provides a voice from the future, the figures on Rosamond’s casket offer precedents from the past. The night before King Henry seduces Rosamond, he sends her a “casket richly wrought” (373), featuring pictorial retellings of famous Ovidian myths, including the seduction of Amymone by Neptune and Io’s transformation into a heifer. The casket provides another juridical precedent whose aesthetic value carries moral charge as well.⁴⁷ In the first engraving, Amymone, Danaus’s daughter, is stolen by Neptune, and Rosamond’s ekphrastic description suggests that the engraving is performative, and capable of dynamic movement and emotion:

There might I see described how she lay,
At those proude feete, not satisfied with prayer:
Wayling her heavy hap, cursing the day,
In act so pitious to expresse despaire.
And by how much more griev’d, so much more faire.
Her teares upon her cheekes (poore carefull Gerle)
Did seeme against the Sunne Christall and Pearle.

Whose pure cleere streames (which loe so faire appears)
Wrought hotter flames (O miracle of love
That kindles fire in water, heate in teares,
And makes neglected beautie mightier prove:
Teaching afflicted eyes affects to move;)
To shew that nothing ill becomes the faire,
But cruelty, which yeeldes unto no prayer. (393-406)

The engraver’s exceptional workmanship reveals that “crueltie... yeelds unto no prayer.” No matter how powerful the maid’s struggle against Neptune’s domination, she will succumb to him, and to “piteous...dispaire.” Rosamond is moved by Amymone’s struggle because it so closely

⁴⁷ A casket in this period would have referred to “a small box or chest for jewels, letters, or other things of value, itself often of valuable material and richly ornamented.” *OED*, s.v. “casket,” n. The connotation of “casket” as a coffin doesn’t appear in English until the nineteenth century.

mirrors her own. The engraving of Io has a similar effect: in this image, Rosamond sees Io seduced by Jove, then transformed by him into a heifer so that she will escape Juno's jealous surveillance. These ekphrastic descriptions provide a more explicitly aesthetic synthesis of case-making for Rosamond. Even though the figures do not speak directly to her, they are examples of failed precedents that are powerful, and yet ultimately unpersuasive, even though they so closely resemble Rosamond's case. These precedents could have saved her, but, as powerful as they are, Rosamond feels that her fall is unavoidable:

These presidents presented to my view,
Wherein the presage of my fall was showne,
Might have fore-warn'd me well what would ensue,
And others harmes have made me shun mine owne;
But Fate is not prevented, though fore-knowne. (414-418)

Once again, the poem's syntax is indeterminate: Rosamond says "fate is not prevented," but the passive voice suggests that she has no agency in this decision. The word "precedent" had many of the same legal connotations in the early modern period as it does today. These precedents were presented to Rosamond, as if in a show, and her fall "was showne," as if by an absent agent. The "presage of [her] fall" was shown, and she "might" have been warned to avoid her mistake, but she did not heed the warnings. In this poem that makes an explicit shift toward juridical testimony, it is worth noting that "precedent" would have carried legal connotations for early modern readers, as the term was used in legal rhetoric by 1523. In the 1590s, the term would have been used to refer to "the original from which a copy is made" or "a sign, token, earnest, indication."⁴⁸ "Precedent" also carries with it the sense of its root, "preside," which, in the early modern period, would have alluded to the presiding of a judge or ruler. The "president" in this

⁴⁸ *OED*, s.v. "precedent," n.

context “presides” before Rosamond while also “presenting” her with the “precedents” of fallen figures from the past. The use of “precedent” in *The Complaint of Rosamond* admits to the power of legal precedent, but admits that it cannot be the sole guide of human action, especially in matters of sexual desire.⁴⁹

The passive construction of many of the phrases in this passage are part of Rosamond’s attempt to transfer blame from herself and suggest that the inanimate, but very powerful, casket doesn’t ultimately relate to her case. On one level, Rosamond suggests that fate cannot be changed, even if a subject knows what lies ahead. However, “prevent” had another meaning in the period. Throughout the sixteenth century, “prevent” was frequently used to refer to the spiritual guidance that could “predispose a person to repentance, faith, and good works.”⁵⁰ Rosamond’s idea that no one can “prevent” fate carries the connotation that no one can provide sufficient spiritual guidance. The usage of president, present, and prevent in this brief stanza commingles and conflates the meanings of the words: in such close proximity, “president” takes on a more performative quality, the presentation of examples takes on a legal character, and the prevention of fate takes on a decidedly ecclesiastical tone. None of these layers of meaning are sufficient for Rosamond, though; as powerful as precedent and prevention may be, they cannot stop her from falling into ruin.

⁴⁹ In other passages in the poem, Daniel refers to the stories of Pasiphae, Danae, and Atalanta as precedents. For more on the significance of “Englishing” classical figures in this poem, see Ira Clark, “Samuel Daniel’s ‘*Complaint of Rosamond*.’” *Renaissance Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (1970), 152-162.

⁵⁰ *OED*, s.v. “prevent,” 3n. Early modern subjects regularly encountered this usage in Tyndale’s *Exposition of the fyrste epistle of seynt Jhon* (1531), The Book of Common Prayer (1549), and Tanner’s Sermon preached at Paules Crosse (1597), among other texts.

There is no precedent, however, for the woe that King Henry expresses upon finding Rosamond's poisoned corpse. Within this ostensibly "female" complaint, Henry displays a bodily manifestation of grief that is very similar to the maid's in *A Lover's Complaint*:

At length, extremitie breakes out a way,
Through which, th'imprisoned voice with teares attended,
Wailes out a sound that sorrowes doe bewray:
With armes a-crosse, and eyes to heaven bended,
Vaporing out sighes that to the skies ascended.
Sighes, (the poore ease calamitie affords,)
Which serve for speech when sorrow wanteth words. (799-805)

Henry's despair is an emotional condition that becomes an all-encompassing physical affliction as well. He is "so farre transported that he knowes not whither,/For love and Majestie dwell ill together" (867-868).⁵¹ After several stanzas in which Henry embraces Rosamond's corpse and catalogues her many physical beauties that resulted in the seduction, he ends his reverie. He is able to regain his composure by deciding to bury Rosamond in a casket worthy of her beauty and his love. Rosamond becomes encased in a casket, transformed into an embodiment of both *Amymone's* and *Io's* tragedies. Ultimately, though, her burial results in her oblivion; the poem suggests that only Daniel's poem can provide an aesthetic "precedent" for women.

In the final stanzas of the poem, Rosamond finishes her complaint, leaving Daniel with the task of prosecuting "the tenor of [his] woes" (738). Daniel has a peripheral presence throughout the poem, but at the end, Rosamond reminds him to write her story, thereby reintroducing his poetic voice:

But here an end, I may no longer stay,

⁵¹ This critique of the private pleasures of public men resonates through several complaint poems. Lucrece echoes this sentiment in *The Rape of Lucrece*: "Why should the private pleasure of someone/Become the public plague of many moe?" (1478-1479). In *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: Norton, 1997).

I must returne t'attend at *Stygian* flood:
 Yet ere I goe, this one word more I pray,
 Tell *Delia* now her sigh may doe me good,
 And will her note the frailtie of our blood.
 And if I passe unto those happy bankes,
 Then she must have her praise, thy Pen her thanks. (897-903)

The frame of the narrative points to its potential power: if Daniel writes the story of Rosamond's fall, perhaps Delia will be moved by it, and perhaps then her emotional response will result in absolution for Rosamond. Melancholy with lovesickness at the beginning of the poem, Daniel hoped that Rosamond's story might alleviate some of his own misery; left alone again at the end of the poem, it seems as if he is still divided by his sorrow:

So vanisht she, and left me to returne
 To prosecute the tenor of my woes,
 Eternall matter for my Muse to mourne,
 But (yet) the world hath heard too much of those,
 My youth such errors must no more disclose.
 Ile hide the rest, and grieve for what hath beene,
 Who made me knowne, must make me live unseene. (904-910)

The poet must return from his encounter with Rosamond and provide an echo of her story, but he has already provided the world with too many words of complaint—his “just complaint” has already filled fifty-four sonnets and an ode. There is irony even in these heartfelt words of melancholy. The poet claims that he will “hide the rest” and “live unseene,” but in order to fulfill his contract with Rosamond, he has to publish and disseminate her story, first to Delia, and then to the world. As Wendy Wall observes, Samuel Daniel's text is significant to early modern literary history because he “devised a pseudomorphic form by yoking the genres of sonnet sequence and complaint poem rather than by concealing his authorial identity in a conspicuously edited debut text.”⁵² This final scene in the poem, however, reveals a poet who desires self-

⁵² *The Imprint of Gender*, 250.

abnegation. Even as he wishes for Delia to recognize his literary accomplishments, Daniel is presenting the paradox of authorship: he simultaneously expresses a desire to vanish and create an end to his suffering, at least on the page. *The Complaint of Rosamond* is full of different voices, but with these final lines, it announces its dissatisfaction with the contract that the poet must make with his subject material, and the fact that literary expression might not alter the “tenor of his woes.” Even so, the poem might provide some consolation to both Rosamond and the poet, even if their actual conditions cannot change.

Double Voicing in *A Lover’s Complaint*

Daniel’s desire to “live unseen” is realized in Shakespeare’s *A Lover’s Complaint*, a narrative poem that appears in the same volume as Shakespeare’s 1609 *Sonnets*. *A Lover’s Complaint* is a remarkably sprawling and rhetorically complex poem with an unnamed narrator who provides a narrative lens through which the entire story is told. The poem features the confession of a “fickle maid” who has been dishonored by the gifts and affections of a “young man” who bears a striking resemblance to the young man figure in some of the sonnets. *A Lover’s Complaint* begins, appropriately, with a melancholic narrator who hears the sound of the maid’s complaint before he actually sees her. From the moment the narrator sits down to listen to the maid’s lament, he hears it as an echo, a “double voice” reworded in the “concave womb” of the landscape:

From off a hill whose concave womb reworded
A plaintful story from a sist’ring vale,
My spirits t’attend this double voice accorded,
And down I laid to list the sad-tuned tale,
Ere long espied a fickle maid full pale,

Tearing of papers, breaking rings a-twain,
Storming her world with sorrow's wind and rain. (1-6)⁵³

These opening lines emphasize the slippery nature of a voice that is easily—and necessarily—doubled by the reverberations from both a cave and a “sist’ring vale,” then doubled by the sympathetic ear—and pen—of the melancholic listener. The narrator is arrested by the “plaintful story” and “sad tune” that reverberate among the hills of the pastoral scene, and the displacement of sound—and the doubleness of its reception—suggest that the maid’s expression, however sincere or thorough, will be heard as reworded, a refiguration of her actual condition and the transgressions that she must recount. Unlike the *Complaint of Rosamond*, which offers a direct address from Rosamond’s “I” to the poet’s “you,” *A Lover’s Complaint* comes to the narrator and reader through the rebounding of echoes on the hillside. The doubleness of the echo also emphasizes the artificiality of this maid. She is not a creature “with human coherence, but rather...a literary figure, a site through which that is *simulated* as voice passes.”⁵⁴ She tears at the papers that constitute her misery, then creates a register of grief in the poem itself. She can, and will, dissimulate as easily as simulate the cries and moans that constitute her existence in the poem.

It is significant that *A Lover’s Complaint* begins as a sound that “resounds” in the “concave womb” of the pastoral landscape. The womb in this stanza may be the site of hollowness, of empty resonance, but it is also a site of growth, the original point of redoubling that allows the poem to generate itself. “Womb,” then, is certainly an explicitly gendered term

⁵³ All Shakespeare quotations come from *The Complete Sonnets & Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁵⁴ Jonathan Goldberg, *Voice Terminal Echo: Postmodernism and English Renaissance Texts* (New York and London: Methuen, 1986), 1.

that signifies generation and production of meaning, but it is also easily rhymed and therefore aligned with “tombe” as a site of potential stasis and inactivity. However, this womb’s ability to generate and double complaint bears some resemblance to the voicing of complaint in the Court of Star Chamber. In both juridical and literary practice, echoes and replications of complaint are common characteristics of the mode; in the complaint poems, however, the echoes are seemingly endless, and their acoustic value has generative poetic value as well.

Eventually, the narrator does see the maid who has created such noise in an empty landscape. Her appearance is even more arresting than the echoes of her voice:

Upon her head a plaited hive of straw,
Which fortified her visage from the sun,
Whereon the thought might think sometime it saw
The carcass of a beauty spent and done:
Time had not scythèd all that youth begun,
Nor youth all quit, but, spite of heaven’s fell rage,
Some beauty peeped through lattice of seared age. (7-14)

In the narrator’s reading of the maid’s body, the maid is almost dead even before the poem has begun. Her betrayal and ruin have already been “performed, executed, accomplished, finished, ended, settled.”⁵⁵ The depiction of the maid as a “carcass” is not unique to this poem: these complaints examine physical depletion of figures that have been failed by language, even as they must necessarily deploy language to create their version of the story. The narrator is witness to the maid’s rage against the “registers of lies” that seduced her; in addition, the narrator watches as the maid creates a register of her own dissatisfaction.

This poem opens with detailed descriptions of sound and sight, but as I have already begun to suggest, there are problems with the telling of this story from the beginning. The poem

⁵⁵ *OED*, s.v. “done.”

is not a direct transcription of the maid's tale but an echo, a sound "from a sist'ring vale" that has been "reworded" in the "concave womb" of a nearby hill. The narrative is also double-voiced in its telling and transcription by the unnamed observer, who sees and hears all of the details about the affair, and the maid's discontent over the letter's contents. The narrative is doubled because the maid's complaint has another complaint embedded within it: that of the young man who seduced her. This doubling casts doubt upon not only the transparency of the poem's delivery, but also the intentions of the young maid and focuses attention on a multiplicity or contention of revision as in legal cases I mentioned above. This and many other complaints consistently demonstrate the desire for repetition and doubling. They provide a literary and acoustic pleasure that is emblematic of the mode's emotional and highly dramatic excess. It is not enough for the maid to tell her story in a straightforward I/you dialectic. Her complaint—and the complaints of many others—are regularly framed, reframed, announced and echoed to stage the powerful combination of emotional grief and the pleasure of retelling it.

The maid is a carcass, but she also exhibits a wild abandonment and is capable of generating countless tears on materials carrying the messages that led to her distress. She daubs her eyes with an embroidered napkin, the napkin becomes drenched in tears, and then, after reading the embroidered conceits, she weeps all over again. As she weeps by the river's edge, she throws jet beads into the river,

Upon whose weeping margin she was set,
 Like usury applying wet to wet,
 Or monarch's hands that lets not bounty fall
 Where want cries 'some', but where excess begs all. (39-42)

As Burrow indicates, these tears “augment the already copious streams of the river as interest adds richly to abundant capital.”⁵⁶ In her weeping, the maid becomes nearly indistinguishable from her surroundings. This image of the maid weeping on the river’s “margin” emphasizes her status as a poetic creation, a written figure whose position is necessarily dictated as marginal by the poem’s passive construction. “Upon whose weeping margin she was set” suggests an indeterminate agent at work, not so unlike the written posies that send the maid into despair in the first place. This wet landscape where river water and tears mingle extends to the documents that the maid carries with her.⁵⁷ With her tears, the maid floods “folded schedules,” love letters from the young man:

Of folded schedules had she many a one,
Which she perused, sighed, tore and gave the flood,
Cracked many a ring of poesied gold and bone,
Bidding them find their sepulchres in mud,
Found yet more letters sadly penned in blood,
With sleided silk feat and affectedly
Enswathed and sealed to curious secrecy. (43-49)

In the sixteenth century, the word “schedule” usually referred to “a slip or scroll of parchment or paper containing writing,” which would appear to be a fairly innocuous definition.⁵⁸ But the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s examples of the word’s usage in the early modern period indicate that a schedule often contained expressions of dissatisfaction, as it does in *The Rape of Lucrece*, when Lucrece

...folds up the tenor of her woe,
Her certain sorrow writ uncertainly,

⁵⁶ Burrow, *The Complete Sonnets & Poems*, 697n40.

⁵⁷ This mingling bears a striking resemblance to the Genius of Verulamium in Spenser’s *Ruines of Time* (1591).

⁵⁸ The word “schedule” did not refer to a timetable or plan of events until the late nineteenth century. *OED*, s.v. “schedule, 4.”

By this short schedule Colatine may know
Her grief, but not her griefs true quality....⁵⁹

The schedules that the maid tears are most likely love letters, but “schedules” could also contain allusions to legal documents, such as codicils to wills.⁶⁰ When schedules appear in Shakespeare’s two long narrative complaint poems, they are the reason for grief in one instance, and the material used to record and convey grief in the other, both in passages where the complainant needs to self-consciously relate the story of her dishonor, as if in a court of law.

These bloody letters are not unique to this complaint poem; complaints regularly feature the presence of letters written in blood or the desire for a register that could be written with blood. Throughout *A Lover’s Complaint*, the maid attempts to present the young man’s “schedules” as proof of sincere emotion. Not only does she point to his words as evidence of feeling, but she also responds to those words with intense feeling to demonstrate their persuasiveness. Of all of the mingling and mixing in this passage, it is the “letters sadly penned in blood” that send the maid into a rage. Bloody letters as proof of feeling appear in other complaint poems: in Drayton’s *Matilda*, Matilda receives a message from the king written in blood, ensuring that “the warrant [is] passing good” (756). In *Matilda*, the king intends his bloodied words to be “passing good,” but in *A Lover’s Complaint*, the young man’s “false blood” registers only lies. This conflation between the body’s emanations and writing materials might suggest the young man’s intensity of feeling for the maid, but the words that they contain are false, unapproved, and therefore not “proof” of anything but his willingness to tell lies for seduction. Ultimately then,

⁵⁹ *The Rape of Lucrece*, in Burrow, *The Complete Sonnets & Poems*, 1310-1316. Interestingly, Shakespeare’s use of “the tenor of her woe” in this passage echoes Daniel’s use of the phrase at the end of *The Complaint of Rosamond*.

⁶⁰ Burrow, *The Complete Sonnets & Poems*, 698n43.

even documents written in blood are made the subject of critique, undermining their status as evidence of sincere emotion, even in defiance of the cultural associations with blood and truth.

As mysterious as the blood-as-ink is the illegibility of the words themselves. The poem allows the reader to peer ever closer at what the characters on the schedules and handkerchiefs say. The repetitive appearance of the characters invites close reading, and a possible clue to what has caused the maid's fury.⁶¹ All the reader can see is the maid's violent response to the posies, letters, and embroidered handkerchiefs that led to her seduction:

These often bathed she in her fluxive eyes,
And often kissed, and often gave to tear,
Cried 'O false blood, thou register of lies,
What unapproved witness dost thou bear!
Ink would have seemed more black and damned here!
This said, in top of rage the lines she rents,
Big discontent so breaking their contents. (50-56)

This passage is one of the maid's most emphatic responses to the written "proofs" that have led to her dishonor. Even so, the narration and quotation of her performance presents problems. Her "fluxive eyes" suggest an outpouring of tears that bathe the letters, but "fluxive" also indicates a water-like instability, and perhaps even unreliability of the sincerity of her emotion.⁶² Her world of objects—paper, rings of gold and bone, and handkerchiefs—is announced before the story of her betrayal, and her body's violent interaction with these objects represent a revolt against the fixing and stabilizing that the erotic poetry tries to accomplish. Her response is also a rebellion against the idea of these poems as "proofs" of sincerity. Her "rending" of the letters is a violent refusal, a "discontent" with their contents, a tearing that resonates with the tears that inextricably

⁶¹ For more on this voyeuristic reading experience, see Wendy Wall, "Disclosures in Print: The 'Violent Enlargement' of the Renaissance Voyeuristic Text." *SEL* 29 (1989): 35-59. See also Chapter 4 for more on blood as ink in epistolary complaints.

⁶² *OED*, s.v. "fluxive," adj. The *OED* suggests a secondary meaning of "fluctuating, variable."

tie her effusive body to the landscape. When the maid indicates that the blood that has written these erotic expression is “unapproved,” she suggests that the message is insufficient, untrue, unfounded. In doing so, she discounts the letters as sufficient evidence, not so unlike a defendant responding to a bill of complaint.⁶³ In “top of rage,” the maid becomes a judge of evidence as proof of feeling, destroying the evidence as she rails against it, conflating the tears from her eyes with the “tearing” of written expression.

The Maid’s Confession

The poem’s multi-layered narration is further complicated with the introduction of the “reverend man.” The presence of this figure allows the maid to tell her story and the narrator to overhear and transcribe the echo of that story, further complicating the elaborate voyeurism that already exists throughout the poem.⁶⁴ Interestingly, the reverend man appears briefly in the beginning stanzas of the poem, the maid tells the “father” the entire story of her seduction, but he does not reappear at the end of the poem to provide consolation. In the final line of the poem, the maid suggests that she has been “reconciled,” but of what does this reconciliation consist? The utterance itself is a performative act that can provide consolation to the maid, even if a priest does not reappear to do it for her. The poem restructures the ritual of confession, making or understanding the “reverend man” as unnecessary, except as an audience member or spectator.

⁶³ The maid’s tearing of letters resonates with other letter-tearing episodes in early modern literature. In 3.13 of *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo tears the legal papers of the men who come to ask for his legal assistance. Hieronimo’s tearing voids the meaning of the letters, and when presented onstage with the “bloody napkin” that Hieronimo carries with him, frightens the characters with the threat of chaos onstage.

⁶⁴ Katherine Craik has rightly suggested that by offering a multi-layered, always ultimately obscured narrative, Shakespeare asks, “who in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries was receiving, or even eliciting, such confessions? To attend carefully to this question, and to the silences at the heart of ‘female complaint,’ is to make culturally audible the difference between what early modern women confessed and what confession their listeners heard.” “*A Lover’s Complaint*,” 439. I would extend this question to male complainants, especially since so many ostensibly “female” complaints include male voices of dissatisfaction.

The reverend man is the only figure present in the poem besides the maid and the narrator, and his presence allows the maid to confess her story in the first place. The narrator's description suggests that the reverend man will provide a sympathetic ear to the maid, which will in turn encourage the maid to tell her story:

A reverend man that grazed his cattle nigh,
Sometime a blusterer that the ruffle knew
Of court and city, and had let go by
The swiftest hours observèd as they flew,
Towards this afflicted fancy fastly drew,
And, privileged by age, desires to know
In brief the grounds and motives of her woe. (57-63)

With his own "privilege" of age and his experiences as a "blusterer" who was once familiar with the "ruffle" of the court, the man is uniquely prepared to sympathize with the maid's suffering. The narrator's description of the reverend man suggests that his curiosity has juridical elements as well. In his desire to know the "grounds and motives of her woe," the reverend man wants to get to the bottom of her grief, to investigate its foundations with a thoroughness of a confessor. However, "grounds and motives" also carries a legal connotation; both words had referred to reason for a law or judgment since at least the fourteenth century.⁶⁵ There is something forensic, then, about the reverend man's listening, as if he wants to ensure that the maid's grief is justified and sufficiently persuasive. Additionally, he desires to know the foundations of her misery "in brief," suggesting the limits of his attention as well as the nature of what he wants. "Brief" carries connotations of letters in general, but legal material in particular.⁶⁶ Even though the maid is clearly performing her complaint with a great deal of excess emotion, the reverend man

⁶⁵ *OED*, s.v. "motive" and "ground," n.

⁶⁶ *OED*, s.v. "brief," n. and adj. The narrator's use of "brief" in this passage echoes the Duke desire for a "brief" statement from Isabella in *Measure for Measure* (see above).

alludes to a mode of expression that would provide him with a brief of her dissatisfaction *in* brief. Like her counterparts in *The Mirror for Magistrates*, the maid must begin her case-making, demonstrating that her performance of grief has valid cause.

A Lovers Complaint foregrounds the importance of postures of listening as the catalyst for a good confession. From a distance, the narrator of the poem observes the reverend man as he settles into a listening position:

So slides he down upon his grained bat,
And comely distant sits he by her side,
When he again desires her, being sat,
Her grievance with his hearing to divide;
If that from him there may be aught applied
Which may her suffering ecstasy assuage,
'tis promised in the charity of age. (64-70)

The narrator refers to the maid's woe as a "grievance," suggesting that it is "a wrong or hardship (real or supposed) which is considered a legitimate ground of complaint."⁶⁷ The reverend man's objective is to "divide" the grievance of the maid; that is, he wants to "share her sorrow...and perhaps...diminish it by sharing."⁶⁸ The "contents" of the maid's discontent, and the reverend man's ability to listen to those contents, are not merely ethereal abstractions in this passage; the old man's hearing is capable of dividing the material of her afflictions, of applying relief, as if with a salve. "Assuage" offers the suggestion that he might be capable of mending a shattered subject. If, as the poem suggests, the maid is ecstatic, outside or beyond herself with the splintering of grief, then the reverend man's comfort—and her ability to speak of her grief—might make her whole again. The fractured maid releases an excess of emotion, and the reverend

⁶⁷ *OED*, s.v. "grievance," n.

⁶⁸ Burrow, *The Complete Poems*, 699n67.

man divides and reconstitutes that excess through both consolation and careful, possibly legal, interpretation. Even if this “reverend” man does not explicitly announce himself as a confessor in the ecclesiastical sense, the auricular confession in this poem demonstrates an explicit, if secularized, engagement with penitential discourse in the period.⁶⁹

John Mirk’s *Instructions for Parish Priests* is one of many examples of *summae* that provide advice on how to obtain a thorough confession. Mirk, a parish priest himself, wrote *Instructions* in the mid-twelfth century in order to help priests become models of morality for their parishes. In his discussion of confession, Mirk advises that the priest “encourage the sinner to recount his transgressions boldly, quickly, and completely.”⁷⁰ He suggests that priests use imperatives to encourage a penitent’s thorough confession, including “telle gef þou conne” [tell me if you can] (l. 1244), “Telle me, sone, spare þow nogt” [Tell me, son, and don’t leave anything out] (1266), and “Telle me, sone, a-non ryght here” [Tell me, son, quickly, right now] (1268).⁷¹ If a female parishioner is particularly reluctant to tell her story, the priest may provide himself as an example of a sinner. As Susan Phillips explains, “the priest, when faced with a reluctant female parishioner, should hint at his own transgressions, saying, ‘Parauentur I haue done þe same, / And fulhelt [quite probably] myche more, / gef þow knew all my sore.’” Thoroughness of confessional expression, then, is crucial to the efficacy of the sacrament.

⁶⁹ Kerrigan has observed that the “reverend man” gives the poem “confessional overtones,” but ultimately he dismisses the ecclesiastical charge of the poem, insisting that above all, it is a poem about love. *Motives of Woe*, 41. For a careful reading of confessional practices in the English Church, see Paul Dustin Stegner’s “A Reconciled Maid: A Lover’s Complaint and Confessional Practices in Early Modern England.” *Critical Essays on Shakespeare’s A Lover’s Complaint: Suffering Ecstasy*, ed. Shirley Sharon-Zisser (London: Ashgate, 2006), 79.

⁷⁰ Qtd. in and trans. by Susie Phillips in *Transforming Talk: The Problem with Gossip in Late Medieval England* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2007), 62.

⁷¹ Ibid. All of Mirk’s quotes are translated into modern English by Phillips and appear in *Transforming Talk*.

The “reverend man” in *A Lover’s Complaint* does not need any of these imperatives or suggestions to elicit a confession from the maid. After he settles into a listening position, the maid immediately identifies the source of her distress and announces what has happened to her and by whom. But almost as soon as she has begun, the maid quickly digresses from her own grief into a reverie as she remembers the young man. She opens with his physical description, providing a rather unusual blazon that includes the “small show” (92) of manhood on his chin of “termless skin” (94), an allusion to his “maiden-tongue” (100) and a description of his skill in riding his horse (106-112). Before the maid can tell the story of her ruin, she has to provide as full a narrative as possible, offering every detail of the young man, his appearance, his motives, and his transgressions, even if these have nothing to do with her own feelings of despair. The poem participates fully in the cultural conventions of auricular confession; however, she extends those conventions by shifting from her grief-stricken despair into a remembrance of what led to her fall in the first place.

This cataloging of details and observations allows the reverend man, narrator, and reader to visualize the conditions of her downfall and therefore be persuaded by the validity of the maid’s complaint. This is a common rhetorical move in the *de casibus* tradition of *The Mirror for Magistrates* and other complaint poems: these exhaustive details create the sense that the speaker is building a case with truth claims and valid evidence that will ultimately be subverted by the complaints of the young man later in the poem. The thoroughness of the maid’s confession suggests that she might find some consolation in its telling, and her laying out of evidence suggests that she is ready to lodge her complaint in a juridical fashion as well.

The maid chooses to abandon her interest in justice in favor of swooning with remembrances of her seduction. The maid’s complaint is supposed to reveal how she has fallen,

and should offer a didactic message to the old man, the narrator and the reader. Instead, her monologue to the reverend man allows her to re-imagine the encounter with the young man in detail, and she seems to take more delight in repeating this narrative than in achieving some form of redress. What, then, is the effect of this confession, especially when it is heard by the old man, echoed in the hill's "concave womb," and overheard again by the narrator so that he can convey it to the reader? If the maid enjoys the sound of her own voice when repeating the details of her seduction, then perhaps the maid's narrative "intimates that the act of making a confession might seduce the person making the confession all over again."⁷²

The Complaint-within-a-Complaint

The poem does not merely describe the details of the maid's past; it also presents the voice of the young man, as if he is a defendant in a court of law, providing his own version of the story. As the poem progresses, the young man's testimony becomes peppered with legal language—both real and invented—to further enunciate the poem's engagement with testimony as an expression of dissatisfaction. The complaint-within-a-complaint is a common feature of complaint poetry, and can be found in the oldest complaint poem in the Western tradition: the Book of Job.⁷³ Job finds unsympathetic listeners ("Ah, if you would only be silent and let silence be your wisdom! Now listen to my arguments... [13:5]), demands legitimacy through written

⁷² Burrow, introduction to *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, 142. Margreta de Grazia observes that sonnets "represent what cannot be perfected... Their content is chronic discontent... The form repeats itself because the desire it articulates, be it erotic, political, artistic, can never be satisfied." "Fin-De-Siecle Renaissance England," 42. This observation can also be extended, I think, to the repetition and doubling that occurs in complaint poetry.

⁷³ The Book of Job was instrumental to preachers and writers as they explored the nature of despair and redemption; additionally, "Job was at the center of Renaissance debates about Biblical style" in a culture where "biblical narratives retained a certain (if limited) flexibility: not necessarily a theological flexibility but a sort of extradogmatic surplus of undetermined meaning—or rather meaning capable of being determined in various ways." Deborah Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice, and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 5.

expression (“O that my words my be inscribed, O that they might be engraved in an inscription cut with an iron tool and filled with lead to be a witness in hard rock!” [19:23-4]), and contends with a complaint-within-a-complaint from the final “comforter,” Elihu (32-37).⁷⁴ The complaint-within-a-complaint is a device that reinforces the unreliability of the complainant’s language, providing an opportunity for the listener, the narrator, and the reader to interpret and ultimately judge the “grounds and motive” themselves.

In *A Lover’s Complaint*, the terms of the poem shift when the young man’s complaint becomes the primary speech, ventriloquized by the maid and spoken to the “reverend man.” While the maid’s complaint generates sympathy, the young man’s complaint provides a defense for his actions, thereby complicating the maid’s testimony. From the opening lines of this mediated speech, the young man feels compelled to defend his own actions as a legal defense:

All my offences that abroad you see
 Are errors of the blood, none of the mind:
 Love made them not; with acture they may be
 Where neither party is nor true nor kind. (183-186)

Appropriate legal language seems to be of no use to the young man. He invents legal terms such as “acture” to obscure the weaknesses in his own argument: “Love made them not; with acture they may be,/Where neither party is nor true nor kind” (185-186). These acts of love are merely actions, and do not reveal true feelings.⁷⁵ The testimony of the young man points to the world of broken promises and contracts, the discontent in the content of his letters that, according to him,

⁷⁴ From the *New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, New Revised Standard Version* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁷⁵ This use of “acture” is the *OED*’s only recorded appearance in written English, and suggests the “process of acting,” though it is not actually a word used in jurisprudence. *OED*, s.v. “acture.”

hold no validity because they are empty, if not entirely false. It is as if the young man finds legal language insufficient, and invents his own language to accommodate for its insufficiencies.

If, as the young man claims, his “offences” of the past were “errors of the blood, none of the mind,” then what is the reader, or the maid, or the narrator, for that matter, supposed to make of his letters sadly penned in blood from the beginning of the poem? If the poems were written in blood—presumably the young man’s blood—and the “conceited characters” of the letters and napkin are of his design, then how can what he says be true? Perhaps the blood that courses through his veins is somehow corrupted when it exits his body and appears on the page; perhaps the young man is horrified by “proof” of his words appearing outside of his body. The body has done its own bloodletting to create its false “register of lies,” increasing the reader’s sense of doubt about any form of written expression.

The young man treats these gifts from his lovers as mere shows, attempting to trivialize what has been penned in blood as the error of impetuous, even frivolous, lust. He goes on in the next two stanzas to further catalogue the gifts that other women have given him: “talents of their hair” (204), “annexions of fair gems” (208), and “deep-brained sonnets that did amplify/Each stone’s dear nature, worth, and quality” (209-10), the same sonnets that may have driven the maid into such a rage at the beginning of her complaint. In these lines, the gifts accumulate value when they become forms of currency—the “talents” of hair have worth as part of a sexual exchange, and the naturally occurring beauty of the gems is amplified by the copious expressions of love in the sonnets. These objects are also presented as a kind of evidence for the young man’s case: in addition to being highly prized gifts further enhanced by written poetry, the gems are

“annexions” that have both a legal and ecclesiastical overtone, objects that represent a kind of binding that the young man resists.⁷⁶

In some ways, the young man’s defense is an excellent meditation on the merits of regifting. Consider these lines, when the young man tries—and succeeds—in seducing the maid with the gifts he has received from others:

‘Lo, all these trophies of affections hot,
Of pensived and subdued desires the tender,
Nature hath charged me that I hoard them not,
But yield them up where I myself must render:
That is to you, my origin and ender;
For these of force must your oblations be,
Since I their altar, you enpatron me. (218-223)

There is nothing sacred about the relationship between the maid and the young man. He is no altar, and he has even violated the chastity of a nun in his past life. Nevertheless, he employs these figurations of sacrifice and devotion to suggest that metaphors, even false ones, are capable of producing actions (in this case, the seduction of a virgin maid). Even if his metaphors are a lie, they might still get him his desired result. The young man devalues the similes of the “deep-brained sonnets” and uses them as gifts in a language system that easily combines and conflates legal and ecclesiastical language: charge, yield, render, force. These gifts finally attain value when they are forced into contact with these competing rhetorics.

Throughout the rest of the young man’s complaint, the “blood” that is evidence of so much exuberant desire—and eventual violence and betrayal—continues its work on both the maid and the young man. The maid explains why she was able to resist the young man’s advances when he first approached her: “Experience for me many bulwarks builded/Of proofs new bleeding which remained the foil/Of this false jewel, and his amorous spoil” (152-4).

⁷⁶ See *OED*, s.v. “annex,” v.

Perhaps these “proofs” are poems or posies, “new bleeding” verses written in blood instead of ink, demonstrations of the violence done to the writer even as he writes. Blood inscribes and describes the repetitions of dead metaphors and clichés that ultimately seduce the maid.

The maid’s complaint reveals a profound skepticism of inherited knowledge, rhetoric, and moral aphorism. She expresses frustration with the “blood” that inscribes false poetic conventions and too easily tricks the receiver of the gifts:

‘Nor gives it satisfaction to our blood,
That we must curb it upon others proof,
To be forbod the sweets that seems so good
For fear of harms that preach in our behoof:
O, appetite from judgement stand aloof! (162-168)

Even as the maid is pleased by the repetition of her narrative, she is displeased by the monotonous repetition of inherited, and perhaps hackneyed, aphorisms and advice. The maid transitions from a commentary on the young man’s love rhetoric into a rhetorical engagement of her own:

‘But, ah, whoever shunned by precedent
the destined ill she must herself assay,
or forced examples ‘gainst her own content
to put the by-passed perils in her way?
Counsel may stop awhile that will not stay;
For when we rage advice is often seen
By blunting us to make our wits more keen. (155-161)

How could anyone resist her own desires, even in the face of ominous precedents? The maid’s question implies that her seduction and subsequent fall were unavoidable, and that her behavior ought to be excused because of its inevitability. As Colin Burrow notes, “many complaints end with an appeal that the example of the heroine’s fall will prevent others from undergoing the same ordeal whilst also including within their narrative moments which dramatize the

inadequacy of precedent and example to influence conduct.”⁷⁷ The maid casts doubt on the “precedents” of women who have fallen before her; even so, the precedents seem weak in comparison with the desires of these maids. Like its usage in *The Complaint of Rosamond*, “precedent” carries legal connotations, as does other language borrowed from the juridical realm. The maid uses “counsel” as a word to refer to the “advice” she has received from others, further emphasizing the legal overtones of her failed love affair. Counsel is of no use to a maid who will fall to temptation regardless of the advice of others.

The maid calls attention to the performance of her complaint by continuing to ask rhetorical questions. She also begins a series of apostrophic exclamations that blur against the questions, a rhetorical move which foregrounds the excess of emotion that the maid feels, rather than the validity of her case. When the fickle maid finishes her recitation of the young man’s complaint, she addresses the “father” with another series of rhetorical questions:

‘O father, what a hell of witchcraft lies
 in the small orb of one particular tear?
 But with the inundation of the eyes
 What rocky heart to water will not wear
 What breast so cold that is not warmed here?
 O cleft effect! Cold modesty, hot wrath,
 Both fire from hence and chill extincture hath. (288-294)

The series of questions seem to merit a response, but it signals an empty rhetoric, as do the exclamations of “cleft effect,” “cold modesty,” and “hot wrath.” The entire passage is a series of hypothetical questions that reveal the maid’s outrage against the poem’s Petrarchan inheritance. The reader and the “father” are not required to answer how much witchcraft can be found in a tear, or whether a hard heart can melt when someone cries. The questions are part of a syntax

⁷⁷ Burrow, 705n155.

that the maid uses to place the blame beyond herself. To whom *wouldn't* these things happen? she seems to say, in an attempt to normalize the narrative of her dishonor. Questions without an answer, the maid's attempt to remove herself from blame: these speech acts thwart the traditional rituals of auricular confession. By the end of the poem, the original postures of the listening "reverend man" and the confessing "fickle maid" seem quite distant: these final stanzas suggest the maid's confession has taken on a life of its own, one that is never-ending in the echoes of the hills and the repetition of her "O"s. The maid can go on remembering and repeating the story of her fall in ways that would be impossible in the actual conditions of a confessional situation.

Up to the very end, *A Lover's Complaint* hesitates to root itself in a single landscape with a determined speaker—the final stanza seems to be spoken by the maid, but the lack of closed quotations at the end of her final line in the 1609 text leaves the meaning of the stanza up for grabs. The hills and vales against which the maid's voice once resounded have vanished, as has the narrator's frame, as well as the hope for a successful confession. The "father" does not return to the poem to absolve the maid or offer any sort of consolation. The poem finally trails off with a series of "O's."

'O that infected moisture of his eye;
O that false fire which in his cheek so glowed;
O that forced thunder from his heart did fly;
O that sad breath his spongy lungs bestowed;
O all that borrowed motion, seeming owed,
would yet again betray the fore-betrayed,
and new pervert a reconciled maid.' (323-329)

This final stanza turns repetition into reverie. The maid has worked herself up into an ecstatic state by describing the seduction with lines that are formally identical. Not only would the young man's characteristics seduce the maid again; so too would the very cataloguing of them. The maid says that if she had the chance to be seduced and dishonored all over again, she very well

might. In this stanza, the fickle maid echoes the subjunctive wishes of Rosamond's lady-in-waiting. Her repeated "O's" of remembered desire suggest a memory that can only be articulated as reverie. At the grammatical level, the maid's use of the subjunctive in the final lines—"would yet again betray the fore-betrayed"—signals an epistemological uncertainty that surrounds her confession.⁷⁸ In fact, much of the final twelve lines is spoken in the subjunctive, suggesting a world that could have been, had things gone differently. The maid questions what she *would* have done, had the young man charmed her again, then determines that she *would* have fallen for him again, given the chance. In her evaluation of the possible, the maid indicates that she *would* have been reconciled as well, but this use of the subjunctive in a poem that foregrounds its concerns about confessional expression and the reliability of proof is particularly frustrating, when considered from within the conventions of both confession and jurisprudence explored above. Its passive construction suggests that anyone could have reconciled the maid—the old man, God, or even the maid herself, just as anyone could have "set" the maid on the river's margin. And the indeterminacy of "a" reconciled maid instead of "the" or the simple use of the first person further complicates the reader's sense of agency. Who reconciled her? Was she an agent in the reconciliation? Does she think that by merely uttering the details of her story that she will be or has been reconciled, and if so, by whom? Herself? The reverend man? God?

Formally, the frame of the poem remains open: the "father" does not return to console the young maid, nor does the unnamed narrator. The maid remains abject, the "carcass of a beauty

⁷⁸ About the subjunctive in English, Brian Cummings writes, "The English form 'shall' derives from a Teutonic root meaning 'debt' or 'guilt,' and 'will' is still used as a verb to mean to 'desire' or 'intend.' Statements about the future usually prove nearly impossible to make, and languages hedge them around with various modalities of supposition, inference, wish, fear, stipulation, threat, hope, or resignation." *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 216-217.

spent and done” (11), wailing and weeping on the hillside, in love with the echoes of her own dishonor. It is as if the poem ends with a question, even if the question mark isn’t there. That is, the intricate ironies of the maid’s rhetorical delivery and her retelling of the complaint-within-a-complaint might be the only consolation that she is capable of receiving when there is no adequate listener to provide consolation, when she is unrepentant for her mistakes, and when the language of juridical testimony seems more appealing than the rituals of auricular confession.

Conclusion

As this analysis of the poem demonstrates, *A Lover’s Complaint* and other complaint poems like it absorbed the need for an exhaustive account of despair necessary for a confession to be complete, and secularized that confessional situation for poetic ends. These complainants find that the articulation of the suffering provides some relief in and of itself, but this absorption is variable at best, changing as it does with the circumstances of the complainant’s grief and the terms of his or her relationship with the receiver of the complaint. In this chapter, I have argued that complaint poetry foregrounds the complainant’s struggle with confessional expression as it engages with and supplants two discourses: that of auricular confession as it was conceived and negotiated in the years before the English Reformation; and the emergent rhetoric of legal complaint that became so prominent during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Complaint poetry was an imaginative response to both the dissolution of the sacrament of confession and the proliferation of complaint in Elizabeth’s Star Chamber as well as the “bawdy” ecclesiastical courts, both of which handled many thousands of bills of complaint and defamation lawsuits.

Complaint poetry constituted a rich field of poetic experimentation that secularized, altered, and critiqued the modes of confession that had appeared in pastoral practice, while at the same time exhibiting the bodies and voices of complainants in poems that enact a form of

juridical testimony. It also provided a rhetorical space for poets to negotiate their struggle with poetic authority and a desire for invisibility, of living “unseene,” especially when they have confessed their desires as thoroughly as possible.

Chapter Three
‘A dolefull case desires a dolefull song’¹:
Edmund Spenser’s Emblems and the Poetics of Dissatisfaction

Introduction

In his earliest work, Edmund Spenser demonstrated his interest in poetry as a vehicle for didacticism. In his translation of Jan Van Der Noot’s *Theatre for Worldlings*, Spenser explores a miscellany of *contemptus mundi* themes, an apocalyptic vision of the end times, and the world’s vices through woodcuts that pair allegorical illustrations with didactic verse explications. Each woodcut image that accompanies the short poems explores human themes of memory, loss, and desire, but perhaps most compelling of these is the eighth emblem that appears in the center of the collection, featuring the likeness of a fallen woman who wails the story of her ruin.

The poem’s various allusions to Nero and Caligula reveal that this ruined nymph is Rome personified, a figure that here, in compressed form, also references the weeping widow in Lamentations, the psalmist weeping by the rivers of Babylon, the weeping Genius of Verulamium, and the Muses that Spenser would revise and explore more deeply in the 1591 edition of his *Complaints*:

¹ *Tears of the Muses*, 541. All Spenser quotations come from *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William A. Oram et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

Sonets.

*H*ard by a riuers side, a wailing Nymph,
 Folding hir armes with thousand sighs to heauē
 Didt wee hir plaint to falling riuers sound,
 Renting hir faire visage and golden haire,
 Where is (quod she) this whilome honored face?
 Where is thy glory and the auncient praise,
 Where all worldes hap was reposed,
 When erst of Gods and man I worshippt was?
 Alas, suffice it not that euile base
 Made me the spoile and bootie of the world,
 But this new Hydra mete to be assailed
 Euen by an hundred such as Hercules,
 With seuen springing heads of monstrous crimes,
 So many Neros and Caligulas
 Must still bring forth to rule this crooked shore.



Figure 2. The wailing nymph from Jan van der Noot's *A theatre wherein be represented as well the miseries & calamities that follow the voluptuous worldlings* (1569), C7. Source: Early English Books Online

This wailing Nymph sits “hard by a riuers side,” and the waves of her falling robe are difficult to distinguish from the ripples in the water or the bend of the river. Aurally, too, the nymph’s complaint confuses distinctions: the sounds of the river mix with the force and rush of her voice. This blurring also affects her “golden haire” that flows with the water’s waves. The wailing nymph is a figure of excess: with her arms crossed in grief, eyes looking up to the town in the distance, and disheveled robe extending to the water’s edge, she is in a precarious position, and utterly alone.

But not entirely alone: the isolation of this typically pastoral lament is complicated by the busy-ness of commerce and travel in the woodcut. The naked nymph is surrounded by buildings

on the hill and ships in the water, not just in the background, but also in close proximity. On the shore to the left, two figures pull up to land in a small boat. Is it possible that they are witness to this abject scene of suffering? And if so, what have they seen and heard? This uncertainty extends to the nymph's series of rhetorical questions:

Where is (quod she) this whilome honored face?
 Where is thy glory and the auncient praise,
 Where all worldes hap was reposed,
 When erst of Gods and man I worshipt was? (5-8)

For a full quatrain, the nymph repeats her interrogation of “where...where” and asks two rhetorical questions that leave the poem, and reader, in an unresolved state. The nymph's visual gestures of despair extend to and communicate with the landscape, while her verbal discontent registers and offers exclamations against those who have forgotten the tragedies of history. The nymph's performance is a visually and aurally dynamic performance of grief—noisy, difficult to answer and account for, and always problematic.

This visual and aural blurring between bodies in distress and their environments recurs throughout the complaint poetry of the period. Consider the fickle maid in *A Lover's Complaint* as she sits “upon a weeping margent,” shedding her tears beside—and into—the river, and Elstred as she weeps on the banks of the Severn River in Lodge's *The Complaint of Elstred*. Spenser's *Complaints* (1591) position the poet as a kind of confessor in some poems and judge in others, not in ecclesiastical terms, but in secular, authorial terms that grant the writing subject the license to reveal, witness, absorb, and synthesize confessional expression into literary output. With the excessive emotion of their bodies and voices, the distress of these complainants can only be consoled by the poet, who not only watches, but also listens to their misery, and creates a

written register of their woes. In *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579), Spenser deploys Colin Clout as the consummate poet-complainer, a lovesick figure whose only consolation is the utterance of his song. In these emblematic poems, Spenser emblemizes grief through the visual and aural performances of complainants who cannot say enough about their emotional distress. The result is a poetics of dissatisfaction that provides a secularized model for consolation.

Spenser's emblematic complaints represent the connection between memory, pictorial reading, and an emergent mode of secular confessional expression that carried extra charge in the years after the English Reformation, when Protestant subjects continually negotiated the status of despair and consolation. In their images and text, these emblems use physical affect as a mnemonic device for understanding the origins of—and cure for—dissatisfaction in the period. Complainants necessarily rely on tears, hands, bodies, and vocal expressions of grief as they remember and work through their emotional distress and depend upon a listener in order to witness and provide some consolation for their grief. Rather than advocating for the management of extreme emotions, these poems suggest that remembering grief through its articulation is a path to consolation. Spenser's emblematic complaints contribute to a literature that stages the excess of grief and provides some consolation for it, thereby creating a secularized, and explicitly anti-Stoic, portrayal of consolation.

Critics have focused on Spenser's most emblematic works as crucial to his development of a pictorial poetics,² and with good reason. No early modern poet is more visually attentive than Spenser. His heightened focus on pictorial poetics borrows from ancient and early modern

² For a broad-ranging evaluation of Spenser's pictorialism, see Ernest B. Gilman, "A Theatre for Voluptuous Worldlings (1569) and the Origins of Spenser's Iconoclastic Imagination" in *Imagination on a Long Rein: English Literature Illustrated*, ed. Joachim Möller (Marburg, Germany: Jonas Verlag, 1988).

poetic traditions that “presumed the primacy of sight among the senses, particularly its efficacy in provoking intense emotional responses.”³ Spenser’s focus on visual description of bodies in distress also features an *aural* iconography—one that demands that the poet witness—as well as listen to—complainants in order for them to achieve some kind of satisfaction. Bruce Smith persuasively identifies the need for a “*cultural poetics* of listening”⁴ if twenty-first century critics are to better understand the nature of sound and reception in early modern England. Spenser’s complainants are highly voluble in their grief, and eager to receive a “hearing”—a staged opportunity for remembering, testifying, and demanding some redress for their suffering. Spenser’s emblems, then, are not only visual, but aural, experiences that reinforce the consolatory powers of poetry.

In this chapter, I investigate Spenser’s *Complaints* and *The Shepheardes Calender* as texts that explore the possibilities of curing despair through two possible means: ecclesiastical consolation and juridical redress. I begin by providing some cultural context for Protestant and humanist treatments of despair of the period. I then read *The Ruines of Time* and *Tears of the Muses* as complaints that negotiate between two models of relief of emotional excess: the sharing of grief in order to receive consolation from a sympathetic listener, and the necessity of case-making and juridical testifying in order to find some redress. Finally, my reading of *The Shepheardes Calender* looks back to Spenser’s earlier eclogues as secularized mode of expression in which grief can be consoled, eternized, and redressed through literary production.

³ Joseph Roach, *The Player’s Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 46-47.

⁴ *The Acoustics of Early Modern England: Attending to the ‘O’ Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 8.

Early Modern Consolation

Much of Spenser's writing—including his scenes of despair in the *Faerie Queene*⁵—relies on varied discussions of despair and consolation as they were figured by Protestants throughout the Tudor period. Early modern English Protestant tracts on despair and consolation examine the difficulty of finding an adequate listener and the pitfalls of linguistic expression for speaker and listener alike. These treatises reveal a deep ambivalence about the use and nature of such expression. The burden of sin on an individual conscience was heavy, and early modern subjects often ran the risk of being consumed by their grief over their status as fallen beings.⁶ Before the Reformation, penitent subjects could rely on the sacrament of penance to relieve themselves of the burden of sin. In the years after the English Reformation, theologians necessarily refigured the place of despair and consolation in their newly evolving theological framework.

Though auricular confession was desacralized when Henry VIII broke from the Catholic Church, Protestants still understood the uses of sharing grief over sin; if anything, Protestants refigured and encourage the use of confessional expression in ways that would not have worked in the late medieval period. John Norden's *A Pensive mans practice* provides just one of many examples of this preoccupation with the grief that comes with sin, and the ways in which one can

⁵ My reading of complaints in Spenser's shorter poetry have correspondences in *The Faerie Queene*. In Book III, Canto iv, for example, the complaints of Britomart, Cymoent, and Florimell "are arranged so as to compose a cumulative protest against the ineluctable accidents and the dreaded certainties that make human beings finally vulnerable and subject to destiny." Georgia Ronan Crampton, "Spenser's Lyric Theodicy: The Complaints of *The Faerie Queene* III.iv." *ELH* 44, no. 2 (1977): 205-221, 205.

⁶ As Susan Snyder has argued, "Protestantism was, in a sense, born of Christian despair—the dissatisfaction with works and rites which can never be perfect, the tormented conscience, the desire for spiritual rebirth in total dependence on God." "The Left Hand of God: Despair in Medieval and Renaissance Tradition." *Studies in the Renaissance* 12 (1965): 18-59.

find relief from it. Norden was a surveyor and cartographer by profession, but he was also a prolific writer of devotional texts, and *A Pensive mans practice* was so popular that it went through more than forty editions before his death in 1625.⁷ The 1609 edition of *A Pensive mans practice* opens with a dialogue between Hope and a Pensive Man. When Hope asks the Pensive Man why he is in such a “sorrowfull and pensive plight,” the Pensive Man is reluctant to describe a case that he fears will be too “tedious” for listening. In response, Hope presents itself as an ideal listener, and the Pensive Man begins his confession:

I can not but acknowledge, that sinne is the ground of all my sorrow...as I became accursed for it before I was borne: and I have so multiplied the same by mine actuall filthinesse, that it hath drawn downe upon mee a most heavy weight of judgement, and an intolerable burden of afflictions, which new lie so heavey upon me, as unless I should utter them to some, and so receive inward or outward comfort, I by no means can long undergo them, but must needs faint, and so fall more grievously.⁸

In describing the “grievous” fall that could result from prolonged despair, Norden calls attention to the physical burden of sin. Unless he “should utter them to some, and so receive inward or outward comfort,” his physical condition could be completely overtaken by inward grief. Norden’s emphasis on the heaviness of grief, of the burden that every subject must bear, was a central concern for the most important theologians of the time. Crucial to the understanding of “grief” and “grievousness” is their inherently physical quality: the etymology of both *grief* and *groove* is related to *grave*. Grief does not merely allude to a disembodied emotional state, but is

⁷ Frank Kitchen, “Norden, John (c.1547–1625),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.turing.library.northwestern.edu/view/article/20250> (accessed June 11, 2008).

⁸ *A Pensive Mans Practice. Or The Pensive Mans Complaint and Comfort. The Second Part* (London: William Aspley, 1609), 2.

also physical, and capable of deeply grooving the “grieving” subject.⁹ The intermingling of these three words recurs frequently in Spenser’s complaint poetry and bears significantly upon the understanding of his emblematic poems as material, and physiological, reminders of grief and consolation.

Confessional expression was the remedy that most early modern theologians recommended for relief from the burdens of grief. The first chapter of William Perkins’s *Whole treatise of the cases of conscience* addresses the importance of confessional expression and its use as a salve for despair: “in the troubles of conscience, it is meete and convenient, there should always be used a *private Confession*.”¹⁰ When justifying the necessity of confession, Perkins uses the same rhetoric as one might find in medieval penitential literature: he cites the same biblical passages that emphasize the importance of confession and employs the same metaphor of the listener as the physician who can identify and offer a cure for despair. In Perkins’ view, a confession must always be as thorough and complete as possible in order for a listener to offer a cure and for a despairing subject to feel relief:

For in all reason, the Physitian must first know the disease, before he can applie the remedie: and the grieffe of the heart will not be discerned, unlesse it be manifested by the confession of the partie diseased; and for this cause also in the grief of conscience, the *scruple*, that is, the thing that troubleth the conscience must be known.¹¹

⁹ *OED*, s.v. “grieve,” v., “grave,” n., and “groove,” n.

¹⁰ William Perkins, *The whole treatise of the cases of conscience* (Cambridge, 1606), 5. Katharine Eisaman Maus focuses on Perkins’ distinctions between inward and outward sorrow; see *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 4.

¹¹ *The whole treatise*, 5-6. Michael Schoenfeldt confirms that “emotion, or what is called in the early modern lexicon ‘passion’ or ‘affection,’ was frequently linked with disease, even by those who were engaged in the project of validating its proper deployment.” *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 16.

Later in the book, Perkins again refers to the listener as a “Surgeon” who must treat the despair of the “patient” as if it were a “tumour, or swelling in the bodie, first to applie drawing and ripening plaisters to the place affected, to bring the fore to an head, that the corruption may issue out at some one place.”¹² Like his medieval Catholic predecessors, Perkins figures the thorough and complete confession as a medicine for the subject who is tormented by his conscience. Grief does not merely reside in the mind or soul; its treatment requires a consideration of the subject’s whole being.

Both Norden and Perkins allude to the “grief” of sin as the heaviest weight on a Christian conscience, and Robert Burton continues their investigation of the nature of—and cure for—despair, further enunciating the relationship between “grief” and the “grooves” that it leaves on the despairing patient’s conscience. In his treatment of religious melancholy in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Burton proposes a treatment for religious despair, an affliction for which he advocates many remedies, the most important of which is the “good counsel” of a friend: “Experience teacheth us, that though many die obstinate and willful in this malady, yet multitudes again are able to resist and overcome, seek for help, and find comfort...out of good counsel, advice, and Physick.”¹³ Once a despairing subject has loosened himself from the bonds of Catholic ignorance and the interventions of a priest, he can rely on a learned friend or adviser for the comforts of good counsel. Burton recommends a variety of treatments for the patient who cannot recover from his despair:

¹² *The whole treatise*, 93.

¹³ Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Floyd Dell and Paul Jordan-Smith (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1927), 949-50.

If [the patient's] weaknesse be such, that he cannot discerne what is amisse, correct or *satisfie*, it behoves them by counsell, comfort or perswasion...to *give him satisfaction*. If he conceale his grievances, and will not be knowne of them. They must observe by his lookes, gestures, motions, phantasy, what it is that offends him, and then to apply remedies unto him: many are instantly cured, *when their mindes are satisfied* [added emphasis].¹⁴

Burton recommends that the despairing patient be “satisfied” by easing him with all the comforts he desires—via “contraries,” comforts, or counsel. The counselor must carefully observe the physiological symptoms of the patient in part because the patient cannot discern the symptoms himself. Remedying despair, then, is contingent upon identifying its affective dimensions, how it is embodied in, or revealed upon, the suffering body. Like Perkins, Burton describes despair’s ability to ravage a patient’s body and mind so that he is unable to repair himself from its damage.

Burton’s usage of “satisfaction” emphasizes the difference in Protestant treatments of despair and its focus on talking—instead of doing—as a form of relief. In early modern dramatic texts, “satisfaction” is frequently figured as impossible to attain.¹⁵ In this passage, however, Burton suggests that if the patient reveals his grievances, he might achieve satisfaction. The despairing patient is full of “great paine and horror of minde, distraction of soule, restlesse, full of continuall feares, cares, torments, anxieties,” so much so that “they can neither eat, drinke, nor sleep, for them, take no rest,”¹⁶ but at least it is a condition that produces identifiable symptoms that can be measured and interpreted. The consoler must observe the patient with a great deal of

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 366.

¹⁵ For more on the changing status of satisfaction in the early modern period, especially in revenge tragedies, see Heather Hirschfield, “The Idea of Satisfaction in English Renaissance Revenge Tragedy” (Paper presented at “Rethinking Historicism: A Symposium in Honor of Annabel Patterson.” New Haven: Yale University, May 2006).

¹⁶ *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 779.

sensitivity; luckily, these are outward demonstrations of grief that Burton suggests are both intelligible and curable.

Burton suggests that despair imprints itself on the body and mind of the suffering subject, as if he becomes an emblem of his own suffering. The conscience is deeply affected by what it remembers: the memory is not merely an inventory of transcribed experience, but “a great ledger book, wherein are written all our offences.” The ledger is a dynamic record that continually accumulates, “a register to lay [offences] up...[it] grinds our souls with the remembrance of some precedent sins, makes us reflect upon, accuse and condemn our own selves.”¹⁷ In this description, the memory of past events actively lays tracks in the conscience of the subject, functioning as both record and active agent in subject formation. Burton was intrigued by the way in which a despairing subject would return to his or her initial memory of transgression in order to create this “ledger.” In returning to the original cause of his sorrow, the patient exacerbates his discomfort and derives some masochistic pleasure from it.¹⁸ This is significant to understanding the way in which complaint poems function as registers or ledgers of transgressions, and how those ledgers come to function as performative utterances in the poems.

Humanism

Perkins’s and Burton’s remedies for despair have their analogues in humanist theories of pedagogy and rhetoric. Increasingly, humanist educators presented literature as a secular kind of consolation for the many woes of human existence. Theorists and educators figured the sharing of excess grief as an early modern talking cure, one that had its foundations in the Tudor

¹⁷ Ibid., 942-3.

¹⁸ See my discussion of the pleasure principle in Chapter One.

classroom.¹⁹ In his *Positions*, Spenser's teacher, Richard Mulcaster, advocates for the frequent exercise of the voice in order to purge the body of excessive passions. In his section titled "Of much talking and silence," Mulcaster alludes to the melancholic who could benefit from talk:

It is thought verie fit for such, as be drouselly given: which have their senses daunted, either thorough dreaming melancholie, or dulling phleame. For such kinde of people by talking be cleared, their mindes awaked, their senses freed from the burden of their bodies...so it declareth, that those partes delite in speeche, and receive comfort from speeche, which makes roome for health, where reume kept residence.²⁰

Mulcaster's prescription of loud, emotional talking has its foundations in early modern humoral theory. Many humoral theorists proposed that the imbalances of the humors could be expectorated and restored. In this case, loud talking might rid a melancholic subject of too much "dulling phleame," thereby restoring order in his body. Humanists encouraged excessive talk, especially when discussing grief. In his *Arte of English Poesie*, George Puttenham positions lamentation as one of the highest forms of poetic expression, and extols its uses as a kind of catharsis for readers and writers:

Lamenting is altogether contrary to rejoising, every man saith so, and yet is it a peece of joy to be able to lament with ease, and freely to poure forth a mans inward sorrowes and the greefs wherewith his minde is surcharged. This was a very necessary devise of the Poet and a fine, besides his poetrie to play also the Phisitian, and not onely by applying a medicine to the ordinary sicknes of mankind, but by making the very greef it selfe (in part) cure of the disease.²¹

¹⁹ Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson, eds. Introduction to *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 14.

²⁰ *Positions wherein those primitive circumstances be examined, which are necessarie for the training up of children* (London: Thomas Vautrollier, 1581), 62. Mulcaster goes on to list the many benefits of talking, especially loud talking—but also warns of its dangers, which can include dumpishness, headaches, a dulling of the senses, and even bleeding.

²¹ *The arte of English poesie Contriued into three bookes: the first of poets and poesie, the second of proportion, the third of ornament* (London: Richard Field, 1589), 37.

In this passage, the emotional excesses of despair are best relieved by their “pour[ing] forth.”

Like Perkins and Burton, Puttenham figures despair as “the ordinary sicknes of mankind,” and the poet as a “Phisitian” as he applies the expression of grief as a salve for grief. He explains that this is not a Galenic remedy, but a Paracelsian one:

Therefore of death and burials, of th’adversities by warres, and of true love lost of ill bestowed, are th’onely sorrowes that the noble Poets sought by their arte to remove or appease, not with any medicament of a contrary temper, as the Galenistes use to cure [contraria contrariis] but as the Paracelsians, who cure [similia similibus] making one dolour to expell another, and in this case, one short sorrowing the remedie of a long and grievous sorrow.²²

Puttenham resists the Galenist notion that “the ordinary sicknes of mankind” could be cured with its opposite. In Puttenham’s theory of poetry, one excess can be treated by another: the excesses of poetic lamentation can provide a salve for the despairing reader or writer. Puttenham endorses the use of excessive emotion in poetry as a remedy for excessive emotion in life, a suggested remedy that appears in numerous treatments for melancholia as well.²³

As diverse as their theories and perspectives might be, Norden, Perkins, Burton, Mulcaster, and Puttenham all suggest that the articulation of grief is the best cure for it. This idea was so common in the early modern period that it was frequently used as a proverbial phrase in commonplace books and in emblems. Geoffrey Whitney’s *Choice of Emblems* provides numerous opportunities for meditations on didactic emblems, some of which address the management or

²² Ibid., 38.

²³ For more on the role of sad songs in the cult of melancholy, see Linda Austern, “No Pill’s Gonna Cure My Ill: Gender, Erotic Melancholy and Traditions of Musical Healing in the Modern West.” *Musical Healing in Cultural Contexts*, ed. Penelope Gouk (Brookfield: Ashgate, 2000).

release of excessive emotion. The emblem *Curis tabescimus omnes* (We are all consumed by cares), shows the death of Pliny in the eruption of Vesuvius.

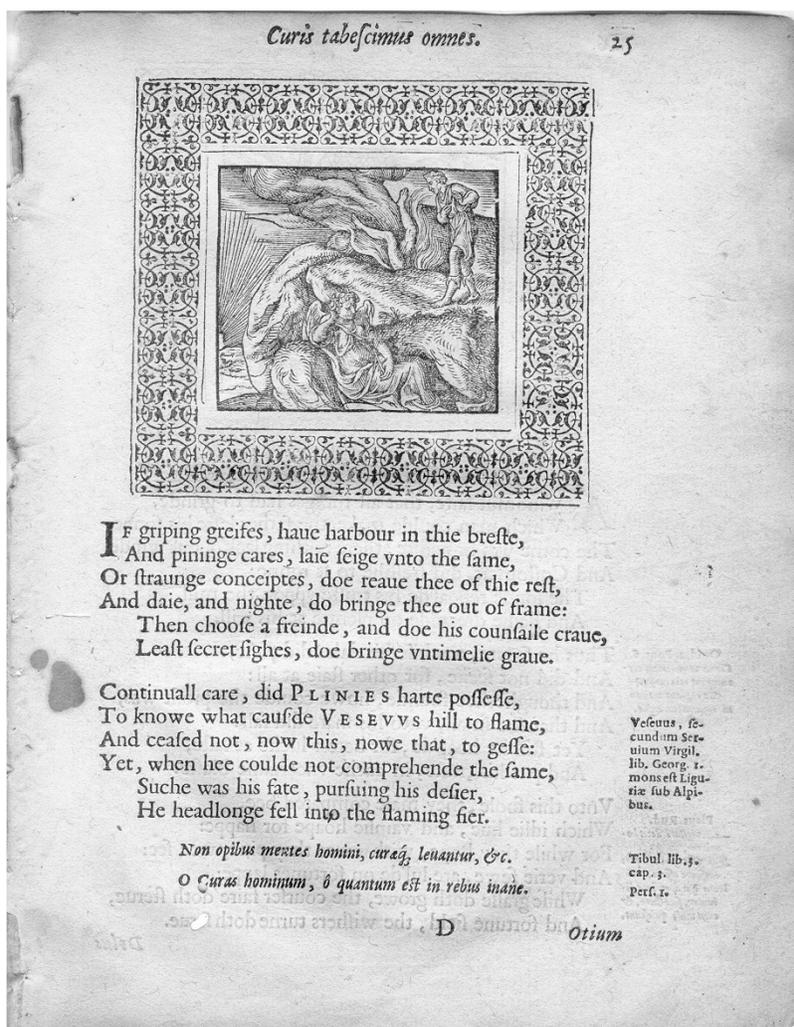


Figure 3. From Geoffrey Whitney, *Curis tabescimus omnes* emblem from *A choice of emblemes, and other devices* (Leyden: Christopher Plantyn, 1586). Source: The English Emblem Book Project, Pennsylvania State University.

The image, and the motto and poem that accompany it, function as a cautionary tale for what unshared griefs can do to the human spirit. The motto at the top of the page forecasts the woodcut depiction of Pliny falling into the fires of the volcano. The poem's first stanza advises

that any grief-stricken subject who has been pulled “out of frame” should share his griefs with a sympathetic listener. English emblems of the beetle and the rose, the spider and the bee, and old age emblemized by a withered elm were static, two-dimensional images that presented the idea of an object and its relation to the human experience. In contrast, Whitney’s emblem, like the woodcut of the wailing nymph in Spenser’s *Theatre for Worldlings*, explicitly stages a performance of the deep distress that accompanies unshared, all-consuming grief and offers the hope of a cure from that distress.

Whitney’s proverbial motto indicates that consolation is a necessarily interactive relation. Certainly, this emotional outpouring could be problematic, and Stoic philosophers did warn against the abuses of the talking cure.²⁴ Ultimately, though, complaint poetry is committed to an anti-Stoic revelation of human grief and despair, a refiguration and broadening of confessional practices that replaced the listening of a priest with that of a learned, sympathetic counselor. Spenser uses emblematic complaints in order to present and rework confessional expression, elevating the status of the writer as witness. His work in both the *Complaints* and *The Shepheardes Calender* is part of a larger literary project which absorbed and redefined confessional expression as a cure for desperation in the period.

Emblems

²⁴ For more on the resistance to Stoicism in the period, see Richard Strier, “Against the Rule of Reason,” and Michael Schoenfeldt, “‘Commotion Strange’: Passion in *Paradise Lost*,” both in *Reading the Early Modern Passions*. As Strier has observed, “It is often taken as a basic truth about the whole ‘Western Tradition’ that the control of ‘passion’ by ‘reason’ is its fundamental ethical-psychological idea...The trouble with this view is not only that it distorts intellectual history in its positive claims...but that it also obscures another strand in ‘the tradition’: the praise of passion” (23).

Emblems were not a marginal form of poetic expression, but part of a vast and “polysemous allegorical tradition”²⁵ that is central to the period’s poetry. The etymology of *emblem* suggests not a natural linking of ideas, but difficulty, even violence, in the translation from image to idea. Scholars trace the word to ancient Greek, where it referred to the inserting or inlaying of a mosaic, the imprint of an image, as in a medallion or appliqué, or the process of grafting a cultivated branch onto a wild tree.²⁶ The word has its origins in a range of pressing, inserting, or grafting practices which served to ingrain memories into the mind of the viewer or reader. Early modern emblems required that readers engage with the motto, icon, and epigram to interpret a meaning that referred to, resonated with, and built upon classical and medieval *topoi*. Sixteenth-century woodcut illustrations that appeared in English emblems and emblem books were not fine works of art; many were crudely produced as imitations or duplications of Continental woodcut emblems.²⁷ Even so, they represented an innovation in print technology that resonated with the memory systems of late medieval reading and writing practices, and went on to influence print culture well into the eighteenth century.²⁸

²⁵ Bath, *Speaking Pictures: English Emblem Books and Renaissance Culture* (London and New York: Penguin, 1994), 29.

²⁶ Daniel Russell, “Du Bellay’s Emblematic Vision of Rome,” *Yale French Studies* 47 (1972), 98-109, 105. For more on the Renaissance emblem as a kind of insertion, see Alastair Fowler, “The Emblem as a Literary Genre,” in *Deviceful Settings: The English Renaissance Emblem and Its Contexts*, ed. Michael Bath and Daniel Russell (New York: AMS Press, 1999), 10.

²⁷ For examples in English that borrow heavily from Alciato’s popular *Emblemata*, see Geoffrey Whitney’s *A choice of emblems, and other deuises, for the moste parte gathered out of sundrie writers, Englished and moralized* (Leyden: Christopher Plantyn, 1586), and Henry Peacham’s *Minerva Britanna Or a Garden of Heroical Deuises, Furnished, and adorned with Emblemes and Impresas of sundry natures* (London: Wa: Dight, 1612).

²⁸ Certainly, emblems lost some of their charge as allegories that could be used in outdated memory systems that had been replaced, by the categorization of knowledge established by the encyclopedists and scientists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For more on this paradigm shift, see Walter Ong, “From Allegory to Diagram in the Renaissance Mind: A Study in the Significance of the Allegorical Tableau,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art*

Emblematic woodcuts, poems, and portraits provided meditations on the instability of court life, royal power, emotions, bodies, and memory itself. Horace famously wrote that “a poem is like a picture,”²⁹ and emblems reinforced that connection between visual reception and linguistic expression. According to ancient and medieval theories of memory, “the visual form of sense perception is what gives stability and permanence to memory storage.” A picture was inscribed as “a sort of imprint, as it were, of the sense-image, as people do who seal things with signet-rings.”³⁰ This idea of “imprinting” was not new to the Renaissance reader; for Plato, too, processes of memory required “‘the seeing of internal pictures’ which are imprinted upon the memory as if with signet rings.”³¹ Early modern rhetoricians borrowed from and extended the power of images in printed emblems, which could be disseminated for pedagogical, devotional, and literary uses. In his enormously popular and influential *Arte of Rhetorique*, Thomas Wilson observed that the “places of Memory are resembled unto Waxe and Paper” and that “Images are counted lyke unto letters or a Seale.”³² Early modern metaphors for memory emphasize the power of strong images as physiological experiences whose meanings are repeatable and

Criticism 17, no. 4 (1959), 423-440, 440. However, emblems did enjoy a significant afterlife in political broadsides and ballads in the seventeenth century. For more on emblems in political satire, see Eirwen Nicholson, “English Political Prints ca. 1640-ca. 1830: The Potential for Emblematic Research and the Failures of Print Scholarship” in *Deviceful Settings*.

²⁹ *Satires, Epistles, and Ars Poetica*, ed. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), 361.

³⁰ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 17.

³¹ Carruthers, “Reading with Attitude, Remembering the Book” in *The Book and the Body*, ed. Dolores Warwick Frese and Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 16.

³² (London: Richard Grafton, 1553), Fol. 115v.

reinforceable. Emblems provided a single process through which the eye of the mind could receive, catalogue, and feel a diverse range of information and emotions.³³

Throughout the sixteenth century, early modern subjects relied on the concept of the mind as a *thesaurus*, and every student, thinker, and poet learned a “well-developed set of intellectual practices and cognitive theories”³⁴ that allowed him to preserve, rehearse, and reproduce rhetorical devices, physical gestures, and literary commonplaces that were part of a larger cultural memory. In the years before archival storage of printed texts became systematized in Western culture, early modern subjects organized their minds as portable archives of knowledge. Even as scholars and theorists expressed their distrust of mnemonic devices of the late medieval period,³⁵ the majority of rhetoricians and educators still advocated for an educational program that focused on translation and the copious generation of rhetorical expression, and Spenser was the beneficiary of such an education. Humanistic models attempted to dismantle the significance of Scholastic *memoria*, but they incorporated many of its underpinnings. In *De Copia*, for example, Erasmus laid out the plans for an educational program that “emphasized *variation, abundance* or richness, *eloquence*, and the *ability* to vary or enrich

³³ Bath, *Speaking Pictures*, 47.

³⁴ Patrick Hutton, “The Art of Memory Reconceived: From Rhetoric to Psychoanalysis.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48, no. 3 (1987): 371-92, 381.

³⁵In “Mnemonic Emblems in the Humanist Discourses of Knowledge,” William E. Engel traces the reservations of Erasmus and Francis Bacon regarding memory theaters as mnemonic devices, even as they consistently advocated exercises that were analogous to those mnemonic devices: “Erasmus condemned all complex mnemonic devices, yet he advocated strengthening natural memory through a self-conscious regime tantamount to the rudimentary principles of artificial memory schemes.” In *Aspects of Renaissance and Baroque Symbol Theory 1500-1700*, edited by Peter M. Daly and John Manning (New York: AMS Press, 1999), 131.

language and thought.”³⁶ In *De Ratione Studii*, Erasmus continues his focus on abundance of examples, recommending that educators provide an immersive, highly visual education for their students:

write some brief but pithy sayings such as aphorisms, proverbs, and maxims at the beginning and at the end of your books; others you will inscribe on rings or drinking cups; others you will paint on doors and walls or even in the glass of a window so that what may aid learning *is constantly before the eye* [my emphasis]. For, although these measures seem trivial in themselves when taken singly, yet taken together they make a profitable addition to the treasury of knowledge.³⁷

Erasmus emphasizes the reiteration of proverbial wisdom on every kind of material in every sphere of life.³⁸ Though Erasmus was committed to a new way of humanistic learning, his phrase “treasury of knowledge” is an echo of the Scholastic *thesaurus* that was so essential of learning and memory.

Emblems served as figures that allowed for inventory *and* invention; that is, the repetition of word-and-image pairings repeatedly indicate a circuit of allegorical relations between mental picture and emotion, mental picture and power relation, mental picture and human relation. Emblems require the reader to bounce between word, image, and motto (or other editorial apparatus) for a rich interpretive experience that reinforces important moral and aesthetic messages. As Michael Bath has observed, “the emblem not only contributed to, but also drew upon, a whole host of analogous signifying systems.” The result was an interpretive practice in

³⁶ Introduction to *On Copia of Words and Ideas*, trans. and ed. D. B. King (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1963), 9.

³⁷ From *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, ed. Craig R. Thompson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 24: 671-72.

³⁸ Erasmus’s focus on reiteration and Wilson’s wax metaphor anticipates Freud’s “A Note Upon the ‘Mystic Writing-Pad’” by over 350 years. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1958), 19.225-232.

which readers were “much closer to being producer[s] than consumer[s] of the text.”³⁹ Early modern complaint poetry arose from—and proliferated through—this interpretive practice, and emblematic works that featured speakers in distress would have allowed readers to meditate upon the benefits of sharing and remembering grief.

Traditionally, emblems have been defined as tripartite structures that fuse motto, pictura, and subscriptio; however, many emblems appeared as verse without image, and vice versa. An emblem can feature a word/image pairing, a single image, or a single poem, but what is most significant is the reading—and remembering—that the emblem emphasizes. The emblematic poems in *The Ruines of Time* and *Teares of the Muses* are “naked emblems”—expressions of dissatisfaction that are deeply engaged with the semiotics of complaint, but are not accompanied by woodcut images or mottoes. Even though these lyric visions appear without woodcuts, they are still explicitly emblematic in their objective: they present a poetics that operates as a remedy to human distress that can only be relieved through its own remembrance.

The Ruines of Time

Spenser’s *Complaints* resonated with—and went on to influence—a number of early modern poems and plays that featured the theme of *contemptus mundi*, or contempt for worldly things. In the late medieval and early modern periods, the *contemptus mundi* theme “was not merely an element in [poetry] but constitutive of [it], a context so enveloping as to be both invisible and unavoidable, both taken for granted and ceaselessly at issue.”⁴⁰ The *contemptus*

³⁹ Bath, *Speaking Pictures*, 28, 68.

⁴⁰ Lee Patterson, “Writing Amorous Wrongs: Chaucer and the Order of Complaint” in *The Idea of Medieval Literature: New Essays on Chaucer and Medieval Culture in Honor of Donald R. Howard* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), 56.

mundi theme appears in music (William Byrd's *Psalmes, Sonets, etc.*), the emblems that fuse word and image (Whitney's *Choice of Emblemes*), the popular psalm translations of the period (Wyatt's translation of the penitential psalms) and dramatic texts (such as *The Lamentable Tragedy of Loocrine*, which adapts some emblems from Spenser's *Visions of the Worlds Vanitie* and *Ruines of Time* for the stage). Spenser's 1591 edition of *Complaints* is distinctive among these works for its preoccupation with complaint as a recurrent "argument" that spans an entire volume. As printer William Ponsonby observes in his letter to the reader, all of these poems "seeme to containe like matter of argument in them: being all complaints and meditations of the worlds vanities; verie grave and profitable."⁴¹ The volume features a range of dissatisfied voices that articulate concerns about court preferment, authorship, and loss of memory using the performative gestures, voices, and rhetorical approaches common to the complaint mode.

Nowhere is the focus on remembering griefs more pronounced than in *The Ruines of Time*, the first long poem of *The Complaints*. In this poem, the unnamed narrator presents himself as a witness who easily shifts into the role of secular confessor for the ruined Genius of the Roman city Verulamium. The Genius is a complainant whose gestures and noisy lamentations remember and rework the forgotten ruins of the Roman Empire, the death of young Philip Sidney, and the redemptive and eternizing powers of poetry. In the opening lines, the narrator stands beside the shore "of silver streaming Thamesis" (2) where he sees the Genius of Verulamium weeping:

There on the other side, I did behold
A Woman sitting sorrowfullie wailing

⁴¹ "The Printer to the *Gentle Reader*." Reprinted in *The Yale Edition*, 223.

Rending her yeolow locks, like wyrie golde,
 About her shoulders careleslie downe trailing,
 And streames of teares from her faire eyes forth railing.
 In her right hand a broken rod she held,
 Which towards heaven shee seemd on high to weld. (8-14)

Like the wailing nymph in the woodcut from *Theatre for Worldlings*, the Genius tears at her golden hair, a tearing that resonates typographically and homophonically with the tears railing forth from her eyes. Both the tears and her torn hair “careleslie downe trailing” create a visual and aural excess of spillage from the Genius. The Genius’s performance of grief also shares similarities with those of David as he laments by the water’s side in Wyatt’s translations of the penitential psalms.⁴² The anguished figure is also on the brink of consuming herself: because the Genius is both symbol and historical location, her speaking corpse will be consumed by her geographical body.⁴³ In emblemizing each detail of this woman’s forlorn appearance, the narrator displays his ability to evoke linguistically what appears visually and aurally.

The narrator is uniquely equipped to pose as listener to her story, “of which there now remained no memorie” (4). He is moved by the sounds of the wailing woman and calls to the figure, but this “calling” suggests a distance that might interfere with the words of the Genius or the intimacy of the relation between narrator and speaker:

Much was I moved by her piteous plaint,
 And felt my heart nigh riven in my brest,
 With tender ruth to see her sore constraint
 That shedding teares a while I still did rest,

⁴² Of the many sixteenth-century penitential psalm translations, none are more attentive to the physiological effects of distress on the poetic speaker’s body than Wyatt’s, which are full of tears that easily mix with the landscape: “down from his Iyes a storme off treys discendes,/Withowt feling, that trykill on the grownd...” (Ps 38). From *The Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, edited by Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thomson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1969), 405-6.

⁴³ The Genius, in describing how far she has fallen, admits that she has “in [her] own bowels made [her] grave” (26).

And after did her name of her request.
I (to her calling) askt what her so vexed. (15-21)

These lines create a picture of the effects of the Genius's performance on the speaker, whose heart is nearly broken by her utterance. Even as the author/narrator is moved by the sorrow of a woman "piteously perplexed," his distant engagement reinforces the idea of the complainant as a performer at some distance from the narrator. This staging of complaint has affinities with the poems in *The Mirror for Magistrates*, in which editors introduce complainants as characters about to walk onto the stage. Spenser's attention to the visual and aural components of the Genius's speech, coupled with his explicitly staged position as listener and witness, create the conditions for the reception of emotional distress, but those conditions complicate the Genius's complaint as well.

The Genius is destroyed almost beyond recognition, even to herself; hence her need for a poet who can create a record of her existence. Once a great Roman city, she is now "but weedes and wastfull gras" (42). The Genius functions as both a model penitent and a memorial to all lost cities. Sitting in ashes, her hair torn from her head, the Genius-as-woman is figured as an early medieval penitent who the abjection of her body to reveal her inner grief,⁴⁴ and the Genius-as-forgotten city is figured as a didactic lesson on forgotten history: all flesh is grass, and all of humankind is inconstant, incapable of remembering former achievements. With the exception of her sad song, the woman is almost unintelligible as a once-great Genius of Verulamium; indeed, all that is left of her greatness is her lament, and the possibility that she might be "bemoaned with compassion kinde" in order to mitigate "the anguish of [her] minde" (160-161). Like Robert

⁴⁴ For more on the public disgracing of penitents, including the use of hair shirts, ashes, and tonsures, see Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 4.

Burton's despairing patient, the Genius is desperate to share her grief, and like so many other complainants in the tradition, it is the registering of her grief that will help to allay it.

At first, the Genius suggests that rehearsing the story of her fall will cause her too much grief: "To tell my forces matchable to none,/Were but lost labour, that few would believe,/And with rehearsing would more agreeve" (89-91). She does proceed to tell her story, though, suggesting that "rehearsing" it to a narrator who pities her might provide her with some consolation. The Genius's complaint is a catalogue of her own reasons for distress, but also an exhaustive list of accusations of and invectives against those who forget the lessons of history. The Genius asks why men pursue courtly honors and advancements (50-55); laments the loss of "learned wits and antique Sages" (59), and wails against the destruction of great monuments of past empires (64-77). Her rhetorical questions, coupled with her apostrophic exclamations ("O vaine worlds glorie" [43], "O *Rome* thy ruine I lament and rue" [78]), provide subtle accusations within her lament. Her series of questions are forms of accusation as well as lamentation, as she tries to resolve some of her misery through argument.⁴⁵ She continues these apostrophic pronouncements and rhetorical accusations throughout her lamentation for Philip Sidney ("O trustless state of miserable men" [197]; "O sad joy made of mourning and anoy" [322]); "What booteth it to have been rich alive?/What to be great? What to be gracious?" (350-351); How manie great ones may remembred be,/Which in their daies most famouslie did flourish?" [358-359]). The repetition of these rhetorical figures creates an accumulation of accusations and grief that escalate the intensity of her emotional excess. Each rime royal stanza adds another rhetorical

⁴⁵ Quintilian elaborated on the power of the rhetorical question: its ability to demand proof or evidence, to arouse pity, or to embarrass a fellow interlocutor, or to emphasize a point. *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, ed. and trans. H.E. Butler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 9.2.6-10.

formulation of loss and longing for Sidney's poetic legacy, until the Genius, inscribing herself as an exemplum for future empires, leaves the narrator utterly speechless with sorrow.

As the narrator records the exchange, the Genius acknowledges that her grief has been "mitigated": "Yet it is comfort in great languishment,/ To be bemoned with compassion kinde,/And mitigates the anguish of the minde" (159-161)." Her sorrow does not vanish, however; it is transferred to the narrator. This process is necessary for literary production in a poem that is obsessed with the death of Philip Sidney and the risk of a culture with no literary pioneers. As the narrator pities her grief and registers it as written expression, he becomes an emblem of remembrance as well as literary productivity. The Genius's repetitive complaints will never end as long as they are repeated and renewed in the emblems that follow her noisy lamentation. The cure for despair, then, is the literary consolation that the narrator can provide as a human register for her words:

Thus having ended all her piteous plaint,
With dolefull shrikes shee vanished away,
That I through inward sorrowe wexen faint,
And all astonished with deepe dismay,
For her departure, had no word to say:
But sate long time in sencelesse sad affright,
Looking still, if I might of her have sight. (470-476)

There is an inverse relation between the "doleful shrikes" that vanish and the "deepe dismay" that overwhelms the narrator in the aftermath of his encounter with her. In his silence, he is "senceless"—like the figure of Pliny in Whitney's emblem, the narrator has been brought "out of frame," beyond the possibility of language's order.⁴⁶ He continues to search for the after-image

⁴⁶ For more on the idea of language as a frame or internal structure for subjectivity, see Rayna Kalas, "The Language of Framing," *Shakespeare Studies* 28 (2001): 240-247.

of the Genius, even as he is horrified by what she has told him. His only solution is to regenerate her complaint with more complaint. Out of sympathy with the woman's plight, the narrator feels compelled to renew "her complaint with passion strong" (479).

After the Genius "vanish[es] away," the narrator is left alone, struggling with the "inward sorrowe" that the Genius has made him feel. In the "naked" emblems that follow the Genius's departure, the narrator enters a web of recycled language that simultaneously constitutes and frustrates a desire that can never be satisfied by linguistic expression.⁴⁷ This compulsion is not merely a psychological transformation, but a physiological one for the narrator:

So inlie greeving in my groning brest,
And deepelie musing at her doubtfull speech,
Whose meaning much I labored foorth to wreste,
Being above my slender reasons reach;
At length by demonstration me to teach,
Before mine eies strange sights presented were,
Like tragicke Pageants to appeare. (484-490)

The narrator suggests that his struggle to "wrest" the Genius's meaning is an inner struggle, but the participles he uses—"greeving" and "groning" in particular—suggest that the struggle is deeply physiological as well as intellectual. In its etymological relationship with "grave" and "groove," "grieving" has a decidedly physical connotation that hints at the possibility of the mark that it leaves on the grieving subject. As the author/narrator remembers what he has seen and heard, he continues to experience the memory of the Genius in physiological terms:

My thought returned greeved home againe,

⁴⁷ After the Genius has left the stage in which she has performed her complaint, the narrator is overwhelmed by the tragedies of the many emblems in a "tragicke Pageant." The pageant takes the form of two sets of six emblems each, with the first six rime royal emblems connecting to the second six with a two-stanza rime royal hinge. The emblems includes descriptions of the beauty of the seven wonders of the world, followed by lamentations for their destruction. They are parts of a memory system in which the performance and articulation of bodily affliction is a prerequisite for literary invention—and interpretation.

Renewing her complaint with passion strong,
 For ruth of that same womans piteous paine;
 Whose words recording in my troubled braine,
 I felt such anguish wound my feeble heart,
 That frozen horror ran through everie part. (477-483)

In his anguished remembrance of his encounter with the Genius, the narrator describes the “return” of his grief and renewal of her complaint as if they are tactile memories treading well-grooved paths in his memory. The “recording” of the Genius’s words affect the narrator’s body and mind. Instead of being a static or cerebral experience, the encounter and its recording are depicted as dynamic experiences full of movement, deep emotion, and great physical discomfort.

By the end of *The Ruines of Time*, the narrator has metamorphosed into a kind of writing tablet, one that “records” and eternizes the complaint of the Genius. As I said earlier in this chapter, medieval and some early modern writers often framed writing and reading as incisive practices that necessarily cut into the mind, and embedded in the meaning of “emblem” is the practice of etching, or deeply cutting. In his “labor[s] forth to wreste” (486), the narrator physically struggles with the meaning of the woman’s complaint, and in doing so begins to generate, through written expression, the visions over which he has no control. The Genius’s emblematic portrayal and performance of grief, and the renewal of her complaint by the narrator, emphasizes the necessity of emblematic reading practices in order to remember and redress both public and private grievances.

The formal and rhetorical repetition of complaint is both the source of and remedy for the complainant’s suffering, but it is this repeated expression that also constitutes the literary generation of the poet. As I have indicated in other chapters, the repetition of complaint is one of its distinctive formal characteristics, but repetition does not mean identical replication. Even

though the repetition of complaint is indicative of the subject's suffering, the utterance nonetheless represents some action, some extension of the self onto the world and the possibility of being remembered, and in this way the complaint operates as a kind of salve for the complainant's misery. Repetition and recursivity often represent "the urge towards reenactment in the psychoanalytic sense, that is, repeating an action to assert mastery."⁴⁸ Certainly, this recursivity is not unique to the English Renaissance, but in a culture that was renegotiating the management and sharing of grief, Spenser's emblematic complaints insist on presenting that excess over and over again.

The Teares of the Muses

In *The Ruines of Time*, the Genius of Verulamium strives to demonstrate the redemptive powers of poetry. In *The Teares of the Muses*, however, each of the nine muses deflates and critiques that message. The result of this ironizing in *The Teares of the Muses* is an endless loop of noisy dissatisfaction with the current state of literature. The complaints of the muses are not against history or the destructive forces of ambition or greed, but the dearth of literary productivity and mastery in England.⁴⁹ Spenser's use of emblematic poetics presents these complainants as aural and visual performers who enact their griefs as if on a stage. In these poems, the Muses do not ask for consolation; rather, the legal rhetoric of their critiques suggests a much more juridical objective in these poems.

⁴⁸ Heather Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and Its Counterdiscourses* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 37-38.

⁴⁹ The *Teares of the Muses* is not the only example of complaint as literary criticism; there are many more explicitly satirical complaints that lament the dearth of quality in literary production. John Davies' *A Scourge for Paper-Persecutors, or Papers Complaint* (London: Holland and Gibbs, 1625) pokes fun at the abuses of rhyme, meter, and form among university students who think they are poetic virtuosos; and John Lane critiques these problems as well in *Tom Tel-Troths message, and his pens complaint* (London: R. Howell, 1600).

The Teares of the Muses is a round of nine complaints, each sung by one of the nine muses. As they weep by the springs of Helicon, each sister variously laments the crises of Elizabethan culture: the lack of interest in learning, the dearth of “mourning matter” (168) appropriate for the stage, the lack of decorum that writers exhibit, and the general ignorance that abounds among the English intelligentsia. From the opening lines of the poem, the narrator, who witnesses and transcribes each of the complaints as he did for the Genius in *The Ruines of Time*, frames his poem as a request for more complaint from the sisters:

Rehearse to me ye sacred Sisters nine:
 The golden brood of great *Apolloes* wit,
 Those piteous plaints and sorrowful sad tine,
 Which late ye powred forth as ye did sit.
 Beside the river Springs of *Helicone*,
 Making your musick of hart-breaking mone. (1-6)

At first, the “piteous plaints” of the muses may seem like a generic lamentation, but theirs is not a timeless plaint. It is a historically specific response to what Spenser sees as a literary crisis. Their suffering is physically as well as emotionally painful: their “sorrowful sad tine” suggests loss (as in *tene*, or despair) but also sharpness, an incisive pain that etches itself into both the complainant and her witnesses.⁵⁰ The physical manifestation and performance of the muses’ grief is an answer to the narrator’s critical question about the effects of these performances on their subjects and their witnesses. The narrator asks a series of unanswerable questions in order to emphasize the “mischievous despight” of the muses:

Ay me, what thing on earth that all thing breeds,
 Might be the cause of so impatient plight?
 What furie, or what feend with felon deeds
 Hath stirred up so mischievous despight?

⁵⁰ *OED*, s.v. “tine,” n.

Can grieffe then enter into heavenly harts,
And pierce immortall breasts with mortall smarts? (43-48)

The narrator's apostrophic exclamation, followed by its series of rhetorical questions, is a common feature of the complaints I discussed in Chapter Two. Like Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint*, complaint is figured as an echo, a rebounded utterance that necessarily repeats, extends, and transfers itself onto the landscape. Unlike the "fickle" maid's complaint, however, the Nine Muses express dissatisfaction with a range of cultural and literary problems of early modern England. The narrator introduces a scene that nearly dissolves in the tears of all nine Muses grieving for what they cannot say, even if they are capable of giving and articulating great eloquence:

For all their groves, which with the heavenly noyses
Of their sweete instruments were wont to sound,
And th'hollow hills, from which their silver voices
Were wont redoubled Echoes to rebound,
Did now rebound with nought but ruefull cries,
And yelling shrieks throwne up into the skies. (19-24)

The echoes of the "ruefull cries" redouble and rebound, and the violence of their movement is compounded by the "throwing" of their shrieks upward as well as laterally across and within the landscape. These echoes make it difficult to discern one voice from the next, or to locate their origin. It is also difficult to differentiate their tears from the movement of the "trembling streames": "Now forst to overflowe with brackish teares,/With troublous noyse did dull their daintie eares" (29-30). "Troublous" indicates emotional agitation, but it is also used to describe disordered, tempestuous waters.⁵¹ The noisy extension of the muses' emotion spans the entire

⁵¹ *OED*, s.v. "troublous," adj.

landscape, suggestive of a world in which “the passions are not ‘internal objects,’ or even ‘bodily states’: they comprise, instead, an ecology or a transaction.”⁵²

In *Tears of the Muses*, each muse articulates her traditional responsibilities, considers the failures of early modern poets who have abandoned their artistic creation, laments that they have nothing more to say, and leaves the performative conditions of the complaint to weep and wail into unintelligibility as the next muse ascends the stage.⁵³ The narrator functions as a hinge between each complainant, just as Baldwin and other authors did for the complaints in *A Mirror for Magistrates*: once the narrator briefly introduces and ultimately concludes each of the complaints of the muses, he largely vanishes into the background so that the muses can speak. Each complaint finishes with a similar refrain that follows a pattern of ending and renewal: “so ended shee: and then the next anew/Began her grievous plaint as doth ensew” (113-114).⁵⁴ The emblemization of the muses’ grief creates a thesaurus of complaint—a vast storage room full of repeated postures of dissatisfaction. However, these complaints are not merely static iconic representations, but dynamic enactments of the damage being done to English culture as a result of what Spenser sees as a crisis in English literature. In order for readers—and for the narrator—to understand the import of their message, the message must be repeated until it is an imprint in the memory.

The result is a highly stylized, repetitive presentation of one muse after another, without any apparent intervention on the part of the narrator. This procession references the mnemonic

⁵² Paster, Rowe, and Floyd-Wilson, Introduction to *Reading the Early Modern Passions*, 18.

⁵³ For more on the procession of the Muses as a formally cohesive pageant, see Richard Danson Brown, *The New Poet: Novelty and Tradition in Spenser’s Complaints* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 135-6.

⁵⁴ Each poem modifies this refrain in some way, emphasizes the repetition-with-a-difference motif.

verses printed in early editions of Virgil's *de Musarum inventis*⁵⁵ and contributes to the sense of this and other emblematic poems as part of a memory system for complaint. It is also a highly aural presentation of discontent that indicts as well as laments. Clio, the muse of history, begins her complaint with a demand for a hearing, presenting her complaint as a "case" that demands redress:

To whom shall I my evill case complaine,
Or tell the anguish of my inward smart,
Sith none is left to remedie my paine,
Or deignes to pitie a perplexed hart;
But rather seekes my sorrow to augment
With fowle reproach, and cruell banishment. (421-426)

The accumulation of these "evill" cases from one muse to the next creates a chorus of dissatisfaction. Thalia, the muse of comedy, also demands "redress" in her complaint, as if in a court of law. She presents herself as one who must "mourne and sorrow with the rest,/Untill [her] cause of sorrow be redrest" (227-228).⁵⁶ Euterpe, muse of pastoral music, "mourn[s] and wail[s] incessantly,/Till please the heavens afford [her] remedy" (293-294), suggesting that her lament is part of a physiological deprivation in a landscape without witnesses to her grief.⁵⁷ Polyhymnia, the muse of rhetoric, utters her excessive sorrow if only out of obligation to the nature of dole itself:

A dolefull case desires a dolefull song,
Without vaine art or curious complements,

⁵⁵ See Brown, *The New Poet*, 136.

⁵⁶ Terpsichore, muse of dance, registers an almost identical complaint: "So seeke we helpe our sorrow to redresse,/Yet none vouchsafes to answeere to our call:/Therefore we mourne and pittilese complaine,/Because none living pittie our paine" (351-354).

⁵⁷ The repetition of this excessive wailing continues when Melpomene, muse of tragedy, cries, "O who shall powre into my swollen eyes/A sea of teares that never may be dryde...To waile the wretchedness of world impure?" (115-116, 120), a lament that signals its debt to the *contemptus mundi* theme.

And squallid Fortune into baseness flong,
 Doth scorne the pride of wonted ornaments.
 Then fittest are these ragged rimes for mee,
 To tell my sorrowes that exceeding bee...(541-546)

Polyhymnia's "ragged rimes" emblemize her wish for a powerful poetics, unadorned by excessive ornament. The muses reveal the physiological toll that these crises take upon their figurative bodies, a toll that is exacerbated by the fact that no poet is present to witness and sympathize with their suffering. The muses hope that the evidence of their grief will awaken Spenser's literary contemporaries and spur them to action.

Like the men and women who have sunk into abjection with their wounded, even dismembered bodies and ruined reputations in *Mirror for Magistrates*, these nine sisters portray themselves as the objects of "fowle reproach and open shame" (61). Clio is a figure of excess who tests and even surpasses the limits of human grief, at least in the narrator's representation: "With that she rayned such store of streaming teares,/That could have made a stonie heart to weep" (109-110). In this procession, the narrator presents himself as a scribe with a blank roll who resists his desire to intervene; however, as the poem progresses, he reveals that he is the one who must, by recording the laments of the muses, "helpe [their] sorrow to redresse" (351). Once again, the narrator's poetic authority relies on the vividness of his descriptions of the Muses, and the attendant transcriptions of each subsequent complaint. But he, as narrator, has the power to give these muses their "hearing," to witness their grief and provide a solution through his own literary generation.

The final stanza of the poem reinforces the tropes of storage and release that undergird the entire poem. This reinforcement indicates at least a partial failure in the "hearing" that the

muses have received. Within the first two lines, the stanza emphasizes the homophonic resonance between the “store of teares” that Polyhymnia must release, and the “sad stowre” that her sisters and narrator witness.⁵⁸

Eftsoones such store of teares she forth did powre,
And all her sisters seeing her sad stowre,
Did weep and waile and make exceeding mone,
And all her learned instruments did breake:
The rest untold no loving tongue can speake. (595-600)

“Stowre” in this context refers to the muse’s great “store” of physical and emotion suffering, but it holds several other connotations as well. “Stowre” or “stour” can also refer to a very loud sound, something of great or even immoderate size, a time of turmoil and stress, and even a driving storm,⁵⁹ suggesting a meteorological disturbance. When her sisters join her in her weeping and wailing, they create an “exceeding mone” and the landscape becomes so full of noise that “no loving tongue can speake.” The noise of discord and suffering ends the poem, obliterating the possibility for the narrator to comment on it. Finally, in a gesture that indicates the desperation of their predicament, the muses break all “their learned instruments” (599). These final lines exemplify what Giorgio Agamben refers to as the “decisive crisis” that occurs at the end of any poem, “a genuine *crise de vers* in which the poem’s very identity is at stake.”⁶⁰ In a way, it is impossible to speak of these lines as final lines. They are merely abandonments of intelligibility as the wailing and weeping overcomes the poetic abilities of the narrator. “The rest

⁵⁸ In addition to the resonance between “store” and “stowre,” the muse’s “pouring” of tears is nearly synonymous with the other actions in the stanza.

⁵⁹ *OED*, s.v. “stoure,” n1 and “stour, stoor,” adj. and n2.

⁶⁰ He continues: “At the point in which sound is about to be ruined in the abyss of sense, the poem looks for shelter in suspending its own end in a declaration, so to speak, of the state of poetic emergency.” *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 113.

untold” is only one of many opportunities for Spenser to explore the crisis of literary degeneration emblemized by the breaking of pipes. The muses break their instruments, echoing the primal breaking of Spenser’s greatest complainant: Colin from *The Shepheardes Calender*.

Shepheardes Calender

When the Muses break their instruments at the end of *Teares of the Muses*, the narrator suggests that what follows afterward might remain unintelligible, and that a “hearing” can never sufficiently offer redress to the complainant’s “case.” *The Shepheardes Calender* continues this concern with a complainant who cannot say or do enough to garner the attention of his object of desire. The woodcuts accompanying the poems in *The Shepheardes Calender* fill the page with visual stimulation, and so too does Colin seem to flood the poem itself with his desire to present his “case.” Spenser’s eclogues present the possibility that literary achievement might finally provide the satisfaction that juridical testimony and Protestant consolation cannot achieve. But in order to come to this realization, Colin first engages with both forms of rhetoric to pour forth his “stowre” of despair.

As with Spenser’s *Complaints*, it is impossible to offer one consistent reading of the various tones and styles of *The Shepheardes Calender*. As Spenser himself notes, some of the poems are plaintive, some “recreative,” and some “mixed with...Satyrical bitternesse, namely the second of reverence dewe to old age” (“The generall argument of the whole booke,” 32-33). The eclogues are far-ranging in their content: Colin’s complaint in the January eclogue stands in stark contrast with the jubilant, epideictic April eclogue, in which Colin’s praise of Elizabeth is sung by his friend Hobbinol, and the silly sweetness of the March eclogue, in which Willye and Thomalin exchange stories of love in the country. However, the *Calender*’s miscellaneous poetic

expression also reveals connections between and among these seemingly disparate poems; as Louis Adrian Montrose observes, “the occasion which gives rise to Hobbinol’s performance [in the April eclogue] is plaintive. The poem lives in the memory of those who have heard and admired it...the poet himself is lost in love melancholy, alienated from his creative sources and from the society which he has endowed.”⁶¹ Those eclogues in the *Shepherd’s Calender* that foreground the rhetorical power of complaint inform the poems of praise that appear elsewhere in the collection. The reader is told that Colin’s poetic gift is so remarkable that he is able to craft a poem about “Elisa, Queene of shepherdes all” by listening to the sound of the water’s movement. However, he cannot sing because Rosalind will not be persuaded by his song, and because of his frustration, he has broken his pipes. Central to Colin’s complaint, then, is his inability to be heard, received, and witnessed in his grief.

The January eclogue introduces Colin in an impoverished state. Colin laments his “stoure” (51) in this eclogue, and with good reason: his object of desire does not respond to his songs, and he wishes for a listener who might sufficiently provide him with consolation. In his notes, E.K. glosses Colin’s “stoure” as “a fitt,”⁶² but “stoure” can connote other dimensions of Colin’s psychology. Colin’s body functions as a thesaurus of emotions, and as a noisy storehouse of grief that must overflow in order to be heard and consoled.

⁶¹ “The Perfecte Paterne of a Poete’: The Poetics of Courtship in *The Shepherd’s Calender*.” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 21, no. 1 (1979): 34-67, 42.

⁶² Oram et al., *The Yale Edition*, 33.

The eclogue form creates an ideal scenario for the presentation of testimony, for witnessing, for case-building, and even for consolation. In the woodcut illustration that precedes the January eclogue, Colin's gestures emblemize his grief.

special benefit. For albeit that in elder times, when as yet the count of the yere was not perfected, it afterwarde it was by Julius Caesar, they began to relect the monethes from March beginning, and according to the same God (as is sayd in Scripture) commaunded the people of the Iewes to count the moneth Abil, that which we call March, for the first moneth in remembrance that in that moneth he brought them out of the land of Egypt: yet according to tradition of later times it hath bene otherwise obserued both in government of the church, and rule of Mightheil Realmes. For from Julius Caesar who first obserued the leape yere which he called Bissextile Annum, and brought in to a more certain counte the olde vvaandering dyes which of the Greekes were called *Metastotes*. of the Romanes intercalares (for in such matter of learning I am forced to use the termes of the learned) the monethes haue bene nombred xij. which in the first or beginning of Romulus were but tenne, counting but CCCiij. dyes in euery yere, and beginning with March. But Numa Pompilius, who was the father of al the Romain ceremonies and religion, seeing that reckoning to agree neither with the course of the sonne, nor of the Moone, therevnto added two monethes, January and February: wherein it seemeth, that vvice king minded vpon good reason to begin the yere at Ianuare, of him therefore so called tanquam Ianua anni the gate and entrance of the yere, or of the name of the god Ianus, to which god for that the old Paynims attribured the byrth & beginning of all creatures newly coming into the vvorlde, it seemeth that he therefore to him assigned the beginning and first entrance of the yere, which account for the most part hath hitherto continued. Notwithstanding that the *Aegyptians* beginne theyr yere at Septemler, for that according to the opinion of the best Rabbius, and very purpose of the Scripture selfe, God made the vvorlde in that Moneth, that is called of them Tisri. And therefore he commaunded them, to keepe the feast of Pavillions in the end of the yere, in the xv. day of the seaventh moneth, which before that time was the first.

But our Authour respecting neither the subtiltie of thone parte, nor the antiquitie of thother, thinketh it fittest according to the simplicitie of common vnderstanding, to begin with Ianuare, vvening it perhaps no decoru, that Sepheard should be icene in matter of so deepe insight, or causale a case of so doubtful iudgment. So therefore beginneth he & so continueth he throughou.



Aegloga prima.

ARGUMENT.

In this first *Aeglogue* Colin cloute a shepheards boy complaineth him of his vnfortunate loue, being but newly (as semeth) enamoured of a countrie lasse called Rosalinde: with which strong affection being very sore troubled, he compareth his carefull case to the sadde season of the yere, to the frostie ground, to the frosen trees, and to his owne winterbeaten flocke. And lastlye, finding himselfe robbed of all former pleasure and delights, hee breaketh his Pipe in peeces, and casteth him selfe to the ground.

COLIN Cloute.



Shepheards boye (no better doe him call)
when Colinters waitful spight was almost spent,
All in a tinnethine rap, as did befall,
Lev forth his flock, that had bene long ypent.
So faynt they wore, and feeble in the folde,
That now binnethes their crete could them uphold.

All as the Sheepe, such was the shepheards looke,
For pale and wanne he was, (alas the while,)
Shay seeme he lowd, or els some care he took:
Well couly he tune his pipe, and fraue his Aile.
A. r.

Tho

Figure 4. The Januarye woodcut from *The shepheardes calender conteyning twelue aeglogues* (London: Hugh Singleton, 1579), Fol. 1. Source: Early English Books Online.

His hands cross his heart to indicate his lovesickness and his eyes are cast upward toward the zodiac in a pose that indicates an appeal to the gods. Behind him, his sheep graze on a sparsely vegetated field; and to his right stand the bridge and spires of a nearby town where he first saw and fell in love with Rosalind. At his feet are his broken pipes, emblematic of his poetic loss of

voice and thwarted desire. Though Rosalind's town stands in the distance, she is not represented as a listener of Colin's song; as Colin reveals, she "holdeth scorn" for Colin's "rurall musick" (64).

This and other woodcut illustrations that accompany the eclogues in *Shepherd's Kalender* bear a striking resemblance to the illustrations that appeared in the anonymous *Kalender for Shepherdes*, first published in 1506 and printed intermittently through the sixteenth century.⁶³ The contents page of this impressive compendium lists advice, illustrations, and information on a range of subjects, from the magnificent "trees and branches of Vertues and vyces" to "The payne of Hell that is ordeyned for every dedely synne with figures" to "the garden and felde of all vertuous that sheweth a man how he should knowe whether he be in the state of grace of god or nat."⁶⁴ In addition to the cataloguing of sin and virtue, the book offers "The number of all the bones and vaynes in a manes body."⁶⁵ *The Kalender* presents itself as an almanac for the year's cycles and events, but it also functions as a network of related information in which specific sins are inventoried and illustrated, standing alongside information about Galenic medicine and physiology. On the page following the table of contents in the *Kalender*, the "maister Shepherde" instructs his fellow herders on the days, months, and astrology of the calendar year:

⁶³ For more on the *Kalender for Shepherdes*, see Bruce R. Smith, "On Reading *The Shepherdes Kalender*," *Spenser Studies* 1 (1980): 69-93.

⁶⁴ Anonymous, *Her[e be]gy[n]neth the kalender of shepherdes* (London: Rychard Pynson, 1506).

⁶⁵ *Kalender of Shepherdes*, unnumbered page.

figures throughout the book—offers an ideal to which Colin has no access: a group of men who will listen to him attentively and provide consolation.

The “Januarye” woodcut from *Shepherd's Calender* is completely devoid of the communal listening presented in the emblem in the one in *Kalender for Shepherdes*. It is as if the crowd of listeners that populated *Kalender for Shepherdes* has vanished, and Colin, in his grief and solitude, has broken his pipe, not only for his love for Rosalind, but for the inability to find fellow shepherdes who will listen attentively and provide consolation. Colin’s body and face are “pale and wane” (8), revealing the suffering of his body in both posture and expression. In a barren, unpopulated landscape, he asks the gods of love to listen to his complaint:

Ye Gods of love, that pitie lovers payne,...
 Looke from above, where you in joys remaine,
 And bow your eares unto my doleful dittie...
 And *Pan* thou shepherds God, that once didst love,
 Pitie the paines, that thou thy selfe didst prove (13, 15, 16-18)

The homophonic resonance between “love” and “prove” conflates love with the markers of its experience in this eclogue. Pan has experienced love, and the “proof,” or evidence of his feeling, at least in Colin’s request, are still with him. Colin hopes that Pan will see the likeness between himself and the poor, pipeless shepherd and provide him with some consolation through listening to his complaint. Colin proceeds to catalogue his woes, creating an inventory that resonates with the “number of all the bones and vaynes in a manes body” that appears in the index to *Kalender for Shepherdes*.

In his autoptic examination of his body and spirit, Colin considers the winter that reigns in his heart, the “life bloud friesing with unkindly cold” (26), and the “thousand sithes” (49) that

he sighs for his fair Rosalind, but none of these signifiers of lovesickness register in the human realm. The only response Colin receives is from “the frosty *Night*” as “her mantle black through heaven gan overhaile” (75) and the nonhuman recognition from his flock, whose “hanging heads did seeme his carefull case to weepe” (78). From the opening eclogue, then, the natural landscape is most frequently the audience for Colin’s complaint, and its similarities with Colin’s emotional landscape provide the conditions for literary generation through metaphoric comparisons. There is no boundary between Colin’s body and his environment. Throughout the eclogues, he is engaged with and able to enact change in the landscape; as the January Argument states, he “compareth his carefull case to the sadde season of the yeare.” In the January eclogue, Colin is only able to observe his own condition in the weakness and despair of the natural world:

You naked trees, whose shady leaves are lost,
Wherein the byrds were wont to build their bowre:
And now are clothd with mosse and hoary frost,
Instead of blossomes, wherewith your buds did flower:
I see your teares, that from your boughs doe raine,
Whose drops in drery ysicles remaine. (31-36)

In these lines of invocation, Colin sees the likeness between the landscape and his own distressed body. Even so, Colin desires human consolation, not only for his linguistic expression, but for a witness—and listen to—his emotional excess.

Colin’s dynamic performance of grief necessarily extend to the landscape and to the narrator. This emblem does not merely present a “preoccupation with all things inward,”⁶⁷ as David Hillman and other critics have suggested, but a preoccupation with all things outward—

⁶⁷ David Hillman, “The Inside Story,” in *Historicism, Psychoanalysis, and Early Modern Culture*, ed. Carla Mazzio and Doug Trevor (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 299. Hillman observes that the early modern world was preoccupied with defining the line between interiority and exteriority in all discourses, including land enclosure, architecture, the sciences, and religion (300).

with the physical display of grief, the isolation of the pastoral landscape, and the necessary blurring that renders both nearly unintelligible. In this and other complaint poems, the pastoral presents the subject with the uncertainty of not being listened to, of speaking complaint to a landscape that may absorb the complaint, and creates a portrait of despair in extreme isolation.

Colin's complaint of the *January* eclogue underwrites the miscellaneous *Shepherd's Calendar*. His original dissatisfaction echoes around and behind each of the eclogues, even if they are not explicitly complaints, including the famous *April* eclogue. Certainly, an historical consideration of Elizabeth's power—and Spenser's emerging role as a poet—allows for a reading of “April” as a “tour de force” in which Spenser acknowledges his literary inheritance from Virgil.⁶⁸ But underneath the political and aesthetic complexity of Elisa's representation is Rosalind's absence, always difficult to define, always the cause for Colin's disavowal of poetry, the breaking of his pipe, and his repeated acts of complaint. In *April*, Colin's suffering resurfaces, but he cannot reappear to sing his song. He is so disabled that Hobbinoll must sing it for him, and in doing so, Hobbinoll pushes Colin's misery backstage once again. If this song of praise for Elizabeth is predicated on Colin's misery, then how does that complicate the reciprocity between queen and poet laureate? What is the position of the subject, if he begins the poem in an act of fragmentation and haunts each of the eclogues up to and including Elisa's encomium? Colin's self-destruction is what initiates this series of eclogues, and his isolation in a pastoral landscape without listeners predicated his relations to forms of power outside of his love relationship with the ever-elusive Rosalind.

⁶⁸ Oram et al., *The Yale Edition*, 67.

In the *April* eclogue, Hobbinoll explains to Thenot that he feels sorrow for the way in which Colin has been “plonged in payne” by his love for Rosalind. Colin’s “madding mynd is starte” (25); literally, his foolish mind has broken away from him. Hobbinoll speaks of Colin in the past tense, referring to the man he was. Colin’s grief overwhelms him physically as well as emotionally: like the Genius of Verulamium and the wailing nymph of the *Theatre for Worldlings*, Colin “dooth teare” at his “tressed locks” (12). He is so altered by the “deadly darte” of Rosalind’s cruelty that Colin has become a complete stranger to Hobbinoll: “So nowe fayre *Rosalind* hath bredde hys smart,/So now his frend is changed for a frenne” (27-28).⁶⁹ Colin’s frenne-ness is a symptom of his despair, an alienation from the self which resonates with the “cultural predisposition [in the Renaissance] to view love as an eroding force.”⁷⁰ Spenser carefully describes Colin’s physical symptoms of distress in order to supplement the emblematic portrayal of his gestures in the woodcut. In doing so, he borrows from a range of late medieval and early modern texts that the status of grief as a physiological state that leaves its mark on the body. In her discussion of Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Cynthia Marshall observes that “the psychic, emotional, and physical experiences of lovesickness and religious despair were similar” for Burton and other early modern thinkers.⁷¹ Spenser aligns Colin’s symptoms of

⁶⁹ E.K. glosses “frenne” as “a straunger. The word I thinke was first poetically put, and afterwarde used in comen custome of speech for forenne.” Oram et al., *The Yale Edition*, 78. The *OED* traces the etymology of “frenne” to “fremd,” which means foreign or strange (s.v., “fremd,” a.).

⁷⁰ Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore and London: Johnson Hopkins University Press, 2002), 11.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 81. For more on the conflation between lovesickness and religious melancholy, see Linda Austern, “Musical Treatments for Lovesickness: The Early Modern Heritage” in *Music as Medicine: The History of Music Therapy Since Antiquity*, ed. Peregrine Horden (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 220-221.

despair with those found in Burton's text in order to reformulate consolation in secular, poetic terms.

The June eclogue is more than an advertisement for Colin's poetic promise: it is a chance for Colin to present his case, and for Hobbinoll to provide some consolation through complaint. Hobbinoll speaks to the Orphic power of Colin's songs to transform plant and animal life. Even so, Colin seems uninterested in Hobbinoll's observations:

I wote my rymes bene rough, and rudely drest:
The fyttter they, my carefull case to frame:
Enough is me to paint out my unrest
And poore my piteous plaints out in the same. (77-80)

Colin's rhymes necessarily fit into the frame of his despair. As Rayna Kalas has observed, the language of framing allowed early modern subjects to consider the appropriateness of their own disposition, against the aptness, or fitness, of their linguistic expression.⁷² In the *Ruines of Time*, the narrator was brought *out* of frame by the complaint of the Genius of Verulamium; in this passage, Colin searches for the appropriate frame that will hold the pouring of his "piteous plaint." Colin sees the "rough and rudely drest" lines of poetry in mimetic relation to his misery. Poetry must exist as an extension of his bodily distress in order for his case to be properly presented. Colin's plaint is a case that he's built through this and the January eclogue, and Hobbinoll is both persuaded of the case's legitimacy and full of pity as he recognizes Colin's suffering: "Carefull Colin, I lament thy case,/Thy teares would make the hardest flint to flowe" (113-114). In the sixth eclogue, Colin finally receives the recognition and absorption of his

⁷² Kalas, "The Language of Framing," 243.

sorrow, as well as words of consolation that can provide some medicine for his physical and emotional pain.

The *June* eclogue allows Colin to put his own poetic virtuosity on trial. While “Hobbinol’s pleasance or *locus amoenus* is for him an end in itself, the proper site for the contented, unambitious man,”⁷³ Colin consistently negotiates with the frustrations of his literary inheritance. Consider Colin’s response to Hobbinol regarding the inspiration of the Muses. Hobbinoll delights in Colin’s “rymes and roundelays,” (49) and reminds him of their power to teach the birds new songs (53-55) and shame the muses with his talents (57-64). Colin, however, resists Hobbinoll’s praise: “Nought weigh I, who my song doth prayse or blame,/Ne strive to winne renowne, or passe the rest” (73-4). Colin seems to be both frustrated by and disinterested in whether his poem offers praise or blame, and to whom, if there is any object. He complains to Hobbinol that Chaucer was the one great poet who, now dead, is unable to influence Colin with “some little drops” of his great fame and poetic inspiration. If Colin could have just a few droplets of Chaucer’s poetic genius, he “soone would learne these woods, to wayle [his] woe, /And teache the trees, their trickling teares to shedde” (95-6). Colin’s suffering shares similarities with Orpheus’s: like Eurydice, Rosalind has vanished from sight, and the duration of Colin’s suffering seems never-ending. But perhaps most compelling is Orpheus’s sympathetic engagement with the landscape. Few threads of consistency can be found in *The Shepheardes Calender’s* many eclogues, but this desire to teach the trees to shed his tears and the woods to wail his woe suggest that nature, even as it provides little satisfaction for the pastoral lover, might still provide a way for his feelings and emotions to transfer on to the natural landscape. In

⁷³ Oram et al., *The Yale Edition*, 107.

the June eclogue, Colin does receive consolation, but he is so insistent on clinging to his lovesickness that he derives no satisfaction from it. His dissatisfaction must continue to fuel the other eclogues until it has generated an entire calendar of complaint.

Whenever Colin's complaint is sung by others, it is always a "permanent poem that can be recited,"⁷⁴ not one that is spontaneously improvised. In the *August* eclogue, Colin's sestina is "dolefully" rehearsed to great acclaim.⁷⁵ The eclogue repeats the request that Colin has lodged elsewhere: in the sestina, he asks that the "wastefull woodes...beare witness" (151) to his grief. This sestina is noisy with the echoes of complaint: the speaker's voice "resounds" in the woods, the "carelesse birds" take part in singing along with his cries with "shrieking sound"; the spring that lulled the complainant to sleep so many times was often augmented by his tears; and the "Echo of [his] carefull cries" (160) rebound in the pastoral landscape. Numerous critics have commented on the form's obsessive recursivity,⁷⁶ and nowhere is this returning again to the source of more significant than in this eclogue.

Even more remarkable than the rehearsing, repeating, and renewing of complaint in this poem is the case-making rhetoric that layers juridical testimony onto traditional pastoral lament. Colin asks that nature not only "bear witness," (151) but also merge and cross with the borders of the complainant's body. One of the sestina's six end-words, "augment," works to increase and

⁷⁴ Oram et al., *The Yale Edition*, 135.

⁷⁵ As with the April eclogue, Colin is not able to sing his own song. Cuddie sings it for him.

⁷⁶ Ezra Pound called the sestina "a form like a thin sheet of flame, folding and infolding upon itself." "Sestina" in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1146-1147.

add to the grief with each new stanza.⁷⁷ In stanza 1, Colin's "tricklinge teares did ofte augment" the stream (156); he yearns for all that "may augment [his] doole" (165) to draw near; and he pities the "blessed" nightingale whose "plaintive pleas...augment/the memory" (185-186) of Tereus's misdeed. Like Orpheus, Colin's goal is not to diminish his grief, but to augment it. In his appeal to "ye banefull byrds," he imagines a situation in which he might "tune" his "deadly cryes" so that they can wail throughout the night "Thus all the night in playnts, the day in woe/I vowed have to wayst" (179-180). The sestina's envoy presents Cuddie's ultimate wish: that this resounding, this extension and coupling in the night might finally take pity. By the end of the poem, the speaker "take[s] part" with the Nightingale as they both "augment" the misery of other's misdeeds with their songs. The poem ends with a indictment of those who would be unmoved by his song:

And you that feele no woe, | when as the soun
Of these my nightly cryes | ye heare apart,
Let breake your sounder sleepe | and pitie augment. (187-189)

What remains is recursion: within the sestina form, the cycle of sleep and sleeplessness, and the inevitability of seasonal return. The complainant is so low, so hopelessly ruined by his grief, that all he can ask is for others to be aware of his plight, enough so that they might lose some sleep too. Colin's desire to augment pity in his listener demonstrates his resistance to more stoic models of emotional restraint.

⁷⁷ While "augment" certainly means "increasing" in this passage, it also holds secondary meanings in the period that were juridical in nature. In the 1530s, Henry VIII established courts of augmentation, which determined suits and controversies in respect of monasteries and abbey-lands. It derived its meaning from the financial benefits that the court gave to the king. *OED*, s.v. "augmentation," n10. Henry Brinkelow refers to the courts of augmentation in "Of the cruelness and suttyltes of the augmentacyon and exchequer." *The Complaynt of Roderick Mors* (Savoy: Wolfgang Köpfel, 1542), C4r-C5v.

In the cyclical repetitiveness of the calendar format, complaint reinforces each of the poems with “many a wofull stowre” (December eclogue, 66). As E.K. observes, the *December* eclogue begins “even as the first beganne,” (Argument); that is, with a “complaynte of Colin to God Pan.” As in the *Januarye* eclogue, Colin stands alone against the landscape in the *December* eclogue, his only company a herd of grazing sheep. Colin’s journey has come to an end; he has no “emblem” at the end of this eclogue, perhaps indicating that Colin dies with the eclogue’s last line.⁷⁸ Colin sits beside a spring “in the shadowe of a bushye brere” (2)—which resonates with the “brere” of the February eclogue—and again assumes a melancholic posture of repose. From a narrative standpoint, this complaint presents the same narrative distance as others in Spenser’s complaints—though Colin seems to present his complaint in the first person, the poem is actually the narrator’s record of Colin’s despair:

The gentle shepheard satte beside a springe,
 All in the shadowe of a bushye brere,
 That Colin hight, which wel could pype and singe,
 For he of Tityrus his songs did lere.
 There as he satte in secreate shade alone,
 Thus gan he make of love his piteous mone. (1-6)

The outside voice brings the reader to the situation of complaint, followed by the direct speech of the complainant to a third party (in this case, Pan). After Colin asks Pan to “Hearken awhile from thy greene cabinet,/The rurall song of carefull Colinet” (17-18), his narrative of demise seems to engage in the *de casibus* tradition. He begins with the innocence of youth, alludes to the pride of his youth, recalls the “checkmate” (53) of his love for Rosalind, and charts his progress into old age, and ultimately, death.

⁷⁸ Oram et al., *The Yale Edition*, 202.

As with Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint*, the frame of the poem does not close—the narrator does not return, and there is no emblem with its usual proverbial wisdom. Colin thanks the “woodes that oft [his] witsse were,” (154) and the true friendship of Hobbinoll, the one character who provided him with some consolation. Colin finishes his complaint with a stanza that begins each line with an “adieu,” but the narrator does not return. His final request is that Hobbinoll “Tell Rosalind, her Colin bids her adieu” (156), even though Hobbinoll does not seem to be present in the frame of the poem.

The woods and Hobbinoll's consolatory friendship have provided Colin with some relief of his “stowre,” but in the end, it is poetry that provides the greatest consolation. As I noted earlier, no emblem follows the December eclogue; all that remains is a white space between the phrase “Colins Embleme” and a border that separates the poem from E.K.'s glosses. E.K.'s final gloss does comment on the power of poetry to console over time: “Embleme. The meaning wherof is that all thinges perish and come to theyr last end, but workes of learned wits and monuments of Poetry abide for euer.” The Genius of Verulamium may lament the loss of great man-made monuments, and the Muses may rail against the dearth of literary genius in Spenser's England, but the final gloss of *The Shepheardes Calendar* still offers hope: even if all earthly pursuits lead to despair and ultimately death, literature can, in a secular fashion, provide consolation—if not for Colin, then for the poet, whose calendar represents his literary accomplishment.

Conclusion

In the absence of a listener who will provide some consolation for their grief, complainants in Spenser's poems transfer their grief onto the landscape, onto other figures in the

landscape, and, in the case of the *Complaints*, the poet/narrator. In *The Ruines of Time*, the Genius of Verulamium repeatedly announces the conditions of her ruin in hopes of finding relief, then stages a “tragicke pageant” that echoes her demise long after she has left the stage. In doing so, she “stoures” her grief in the narrator, describes in poetic form both her lament and the emblems that follow her. In the *Tearcs of the Muses*, each muse presents her “case,” engaging more explicitly with juridical language in order to offer a literary criticism of Spenser’s contemporaries. And in *The Shepheardes Calender*, Colin Clout both searches for consolation and frames his case as a juridical testimony, ultimately determining that literary virtuosity is the ideal consolation for grief. These complainants create a world in which the passions and expressions of the subject are not necessarily separate from the subject’s relations to the world, but participate in a vital engagement with it.

In this chapter, I see emblems as foregrounding the physical performance of complainants, as if they are actors on a stage. Each complainant enacts his or her grief with highly theatrical, overtly emotional poses that would have, according to early modern theories of the passions, extended to both narrator and reader. Spenser uses an emblematic poetics to continue and extend the *de casibus* tradition that found such resonance in *The Mirror for Magistrates* as he critiques the denigrated status of poetry in England, political turmoil, and emotional excess. Complaint always seems to renew itself, whether it be through the repetitive use of emblematic pageants as in the *Ruines of Time*, or through a narrator or witness speaking back to a complainant, as in The Book of Job, Shakespeare’s *A Lover’s Complaint*, and in the February eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender*. When complaint is responded to with more complaint, the intense effect of the grief originally expressed is ironized by the complaint that

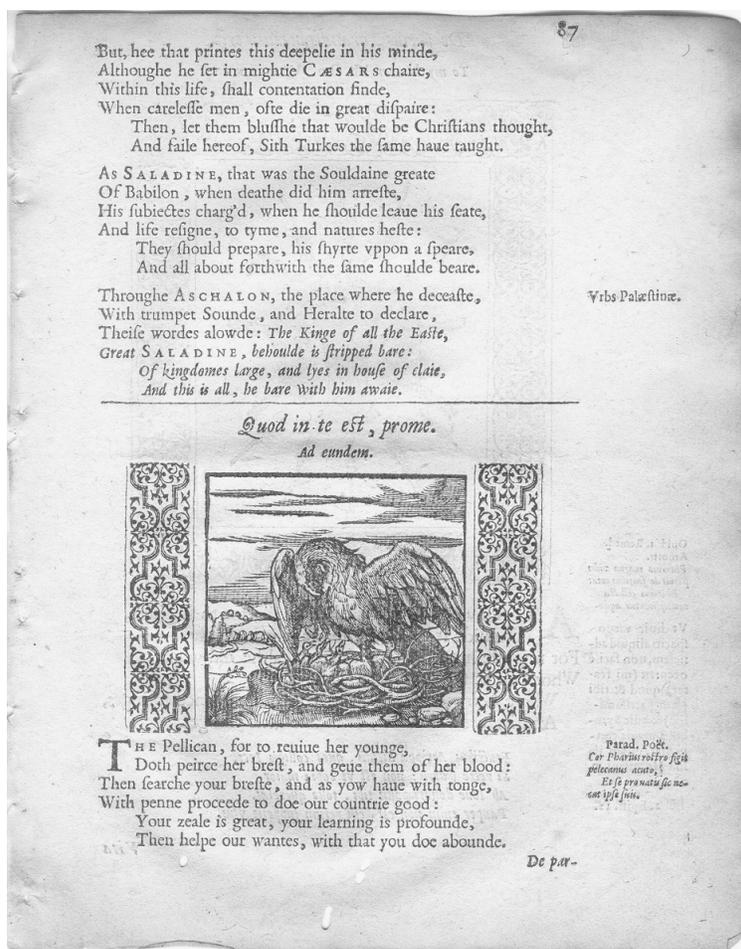
surrounds or responds to it. If the early modern passions are “a single field of motion within a larger, environmental one,”⁷⁹ then the emblematics of Spenser’s shorter poems signify a semiotics of dissatisfaction that does not merely reside within the subject, but spills beyond the subject’s borders onto an environment that absorbs—but cannot offer consolation for—all of the subject’s afflictions.

⁷⁹ Garrett Sullivan, “Romance, Sleep, and the Passions in the Early Modern Period: The Case of Sir Philip Sidney’s *The Old Arcadia*.” Early Modern Colloquium, Northwestern University, October 27, 2004. 3, 4.

Chapter Four
**‘This hatefull Scroule’¹: The Epistolary Complaint as Forensic Evidence
 in the *Heroides*, *Matilda*, and *Englands Heroicall Epistles***

Introduction

Geoffrey Whitney’s *Choice of Emblemes* (1586) frequently explores the relationship between bodies and texts, but one emblem has particular relevance to the complaint poems I discuss in this chapter: *Quod in te est, prome* (Give utterance to what is within you):



¹ Michael Drayton, “The Epistle of Rosamond to King Henry the Second,” in *The Works of Michael Drayton*, ed. J. William Hebel (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1932), 17.

Figure 6. From Geoffrey Whitney, *Quod in te est, prome emblem*, from *A choice of emblemes, and other devices* (Leyden: Christopher Plantyn, 1586). *Source*: English Emblem Book Project, Pennsylvania State University.

The woodcut features a pelican dipping its beak into its own breast to feed its young,² an emblem meant to encourage England's writers to search their hearts for literary inspiration:

The Pellican, for to revive her younge,
Doth peirce her brest, and geve them of her blood:
Then searche your breste, and as yow have with tonge
With pen proceed to do our countrey good. (1-4)

Whitney's emblem presents an allegory for the visual as well as metaphorical violence at work in the writing process: the "piercing" of the pelican is compared with the "searching" of the writer as he considers the kinds of written expression that will best serve his country; and the blood that emerges from the pelican's breast is equated with the ink that will flow from the pen of the writer. The hungry young pelicans, too, provide a metaphor for the hunger of early modern reading subjects, eager to consume the literary production of England's best writers, not just for pleasure but necessary nourishment.

The motto, illustration, and poem for Whitney's emblem provide a directive to Renaissance writers: produce the writing that the reading public demands, and in doing so create a great national literature. The emblematic conflation between body, ink, and blood is a figuration that appears with frequency in the complaint poetry of the period. Complainants frequently blur the line between ink and the blood, tears, sighs, and gall that emanate from complaining bodies as they perform their distress on the page. Just as fluids emanate from body

² This idea that pelicans fed their young with their own blood was common in fables of the late medieval and early modern periods. The pelican also functioned as a motif for Jesus, who "fed" Christians with the grace of his blood. *OED*, s.v. "pelican, 1b."

to page, so too do bodies *become* pages: readable texts that provide legible proof of the suffering of the complainant. The transfer of blood-as-ink and ink-as-blood becomes an increasingly powerful metaphor in a culture experiencing a long and uneven shift to more juridical forms of evidence, precedents, and persuasion, especially when those forms frequently require written materials as “proof” of damage or distress.

In Chapter Two, I observed that the Court of Star Chamber and the ecclesiastical “bawdy” courts were saturated with written and spoken complaint. The Court of Star Chamber and other courts relied on written proofs as the sole evidence of transgressions; and the ecclesiastical courts relied on spoken testimony in order to determine whether a woman dishonored by rumor was chaste. The culture’s engagement with spoken and written testimony and letters extended to the literary realm as well. The epistolary complaints that I examine in this chapter are a significant departure from the “female” complaints that I addressed in Chapter 2. Shakespeare’s *A Lover’s Complaint* and Daniel’s *Complaint of Rosamond* require that the reverend man or poet be present to receive the women’s complaints and provide some form of consolation. The epistolary complaints that I address in this chapter, however, foreground an interest in justice and case-making in the juridical realm, and pay little attention to ecclesiastical modes of confessional expression. These poems emphasize the polyvocality of complaint. Each time complainants build their cases, the transgressors must respond with a defense, but also a complaint of their own, thereby creating an echo chamber of dissatisfaction. This process of case-making as the subject of these poems provides a literary response to forensic forms of truth-finding in the period.

In this chapter, I examine early modern epistolary complaints that use the discourse of jurisprudence as proof of extreme emotion. These letters, some of which are figuratively written in blood, point to extreme emotion as a generative literary force. I provide cultural context for the importance of letter writing in early modern England by examining passages from Erasmus' *De conscribendis epistolis* (1522) and Angel Day's *The English Secretary* (1586), both of which present letters of complaint as important pieces of juridical rhetoric. I then consider the significance of George Turberville's translation of Ovid *Heroides* (1567) and Ovid's influence on letter exchange in Michael Drayton's *Matilda* (1594) and *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (1597). I situate my analysis within a larger consideration of the period's concern with precedents, proofs, case-making, and confessional testimony. In doing so, I show how epistolary complaint poetry privileged excesses of grief and outrage to create a secularized, and highly productive, poetics of dissatisfaction.

The epistolary complaint poems that I examine are not merely vehicles for information or written texts that provide reliable documentation of real events, but petitions that demand to be read, not only by an absent lover, but by a third party in published form. In her recent work, Lorna Hutson has argued for the importance of "a forensic conception of narrative" in understanding how mimesis functions on the early modern stage and page, and her understanding of the logic of juridical narratives has relevance to epistolary complaints and their manifestation of the poetry of the period. Hutson observes that early modern playtexts consistently demanded that spectators perform the "judicatory act" of interpreting and judging the likelihood, or improbability, of events onstage.³ As spectators watched events unfold, they regularly judged

³ Hutson, "Forensic Aspects of Renaissance Mimesis." *Representations* 94 (2006): 80-109, 87.

and interpreted narratives of past events as they were recounted by characters, rather than the events themselves. As Katharine Eisaman Maus has demonstrated, juries for criminal trials were required to “find law” by carefully examining and interpreting evidence, and in doing so they performed a hermeneutic exercise in public, often spectacular circumstances.⁴ I extend the analysis of Hutson and Maus in order to examine the use of evidence in epistolary complaint poems, all of which return to descriptions of the body in distress as proof of abandonment and sexual transgression. These poems suggest that models of juridical rhetoric in epistolary complaints were always complicated by multiple voices, and often resulted in the despair of the initial complainant. Epistolary complaints are an imaginative extension of a culture that was consumed with—and constituted by—its letters of dissatisfaction.

In numerous complaint poems, bloody letters function as indices of emotional distress in the literature of the period. In my understanding of this indexical function of letters, I borrow from Bianca Calabresi, who suggests that “the staging of writing in blood can itself be a kind of rubrication—a directed reading—for the spectators” and readers of early modern texts.⁵ This rubrication is key to understanding the secularization of written expression in the period, and the ways in which inner and outer inscriptions of emotion were fluid and entirely contingent upon the performance and reception of complaint. The numerous references to writing with blood (in *A Lovers Complaint*, *The Ghost of Lucrece*, *Matilda*, and various other texts) includes writing

⁴ Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 107.

⁵ “Red Incke: Reading the Bleeding on the Early Modern Page” in *Printing and Parenting in Early Modern England*, ed. Douglas A. Brooks (London: Ashgate, 2005), 237. Calabresi covers a wide range of texts that figure red ink as rubrication for criminality, whoredom, and religious sacrifice.

with blood as evidence of sincere feeling. Even when these letters are not explicitly coded as “bloody,” these complaints foreground the presence of blood in and beyond the passionate lover’s body. The figuration of blood rising to the surface of the face as a blush (*Englands Heroicall Epistles*) creates a legend of the bodies of complainants—a textual construction of emotion meant to be witnessed, read, and interpreted.⁶

Not only do the complaint texts in this chapter employ juridical language and rhetoric; in their polyvocal complexity, these epistolary complaints featured juridical structures in which complainants interrogate the men who have abandoned them, require a response, and present their damaged bodies as evidence, as if in a court of law. As Hutson has observed, the early modern judicial tradition was “diffused...into habits of fictional and dramatic composition”⁷ in early modern playtexts and poetry. By incorporating this rhetoric of juridical testimony, these poems contribute to and expand upon a method of judicial evidence-gathering and case-making that would have been familiar and satisfying to early modern reading subjects. The “poetics of dissatisfaction” that exists in complaint poetry finds its idealized form in epistolary complaint, where the expression of dissatisfaction is in and of itself satisfying.

The letters also call attention to themselves as written objects: in each complaint, the speaker acknowledges the methods by which the recipient is obtaining and absorbing the information in the letter, the difficulty of writing the letter, and the risk of the letter not reaching its destination. In addition to the material and rhetorical similarities among and between these poems is the twofold nature of the letters as emotional self-disclosures and legal challenges to

⁶ None of the complaints that I examine in this or other chapters (to the best of my knowledge) actually contains red ink to indicate writing with blood.

⁷ “Forensic Aspects of Renaissance Mimesis.” *Representations* 94 (2006): 80-109, 92.

the men who have abused and neglected women complainants. Complainants do not merely ask for redress of some kind; they foreground the role of the body in distress as a source of both juridical evidence and poetic generation.

Early Modern Epistolarity

Gary Schneider has referred to early modern England as a “culture of epistolarity,” one in which, for literate members in the culture, letter writing and letter receiving became an important part of civil discourse. Epistolarity can refer to a range of literary expressions, including poems-as-letters and texts that “explore issues of communication more generally.”⁸ Numerous writers including Erasmus, Juan Luis Vives, and Angel Day provided important advice on letter writing to students, businessmen, lawyers, and secretaries, and their works were reprinted many times throughout the sixteenth century.⁹ These letter-writing manuals not only provided essential advice and examples for an emerging bureaucratic class of writers; they also marked a significant departure, formally and rhetorically, from the writing manuals of the medieval period. These manuals signaled an important shift from the “rigid medieval forms of the *ars dictaminis*—which included highly formalized language, excessive politeness, artificial modes of address, and occasionally the use of *cursus*, a form of stilted prose rhythm often employed in official

⁸*The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 43-44. Duncan Kennedy also broadens the category in “Epistolarity: The *Heroides*” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 220. Claudio Guillén echoes Schneider and Kennedy, suggesting that a text can be categorized as epistolary as long as “it presents or declares itself or functions as writing and as correspondence.” “Notes Toward the Study of the Renaissance Letter” in *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*, ed. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 81.

⁹ For more on these writing handbooks, and on the art of letter exchange in general, see Jonathan Goldberg, *Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Lynne Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Guillén, “Notes Toward the Study of the Renaissance Letter.”

correspondence.”¹⁰ Letter-writing as a mode of persuasion became increasingly important in an era that privileged rhetorical flourish, ornamentation, and experimentation with vernacular English in forms inherited from classical and medieval texts.

Early modern letters represented a mode in which subjects could use their individual styles while also filling the prescribed templates provided in the writing manuals. In his enormously popular *De conscribendis epistolis*, Erasmus classifies letters into rhetorical categories that could be easily personalized for individual uses, including letters of persuasion, consolation, advice, apology, and congratulation. Erasmus’ text provides a comprehensive introduction to the variety of rhetorical strategies suitable for every possible occasion and emotional register. As Lynne Magnusson observes, *De conscribendis* “goes far beyond the immediate goal of teaching letter-writing.” For Erasmus, “epistolary scripts for various occasions are not just forms in words: they are forms of life, the material substance of relationships.”¹¹ Erasmus acknowledges the juridical nature of letter writing that involves accusations, proofs, and refutations. In his section on “letters of the judicial class,” he writes,

If we wish to bring an accusation against someone, the circumstances of the case, the proofs and refutations, the method of bringing proof, the means of making something probable or improbable, of amplifying and extenuating—all this should have been learned from the teaching of the rhetoricians... we shall state the point at issue in a convincing fashion, working in proofs and elaborations of proofs to save time. Then we shall set forth our case with convincing arguments. Finally we shall add the conclusion, or something in its place. (207)

¹⁰ Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity*, 42. See too Charles Fantazzi’s introduction to *De conscribendis epistolis (On the Writing of Letters)*. From *The Collected Works of Erasmus: Literary and Educational Writings*, ed. J.K. Sowards and translated with an introduction by Charles Fantazzi (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 1985), volume 25.

¹¹ Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue*, 3.

In his advice on juridical letters of complaint, he provides formulaic prescriptions for legal letter-writing that owe their debt to medieval formulae that had been in use for centuries. Letters of complaint could outline the transgressions of the defendant, ask for comfort or redress, and allow the respondent to provide a defense of his actions. This complaint-via-letter allowed early modern subjects to avoid the awkwardness or emotional charge of physical contact; in addition, though, each letter functioned as a permanent transcription of the complainant's grievances.¹²

Erasmus provides generalized advice and numerous examples for each of his forms of address and kinds of letter, each of which provide rhetorical and syntactical examples of how to amplify the emotional impact of a letter. Consider his example for a sample letter of reproof:

Tell me, you most ungrateful man under the sun, who could put up with those manners of yours even for a single day? Who could have endured looking at that face at any price?... What did I leave undone to overcome your slowness? Do you have the effrontery to deny this?...Do you not become red with embarrassment whenever you look at the book I slaved over with such care and toil? Do you not shudder and shrink from yourself if ever you return to your senses, that is, if you ever recover from that mad frenzy? Can you not love and respect one who has treated you so kindly? Do you use your foul tongue to attack one who was always ready to oblige you with his eloquence? Why should I reveal you to yourself? (219-220)

In this excerpt, the writer begins his address with an imperative and follows it with a barrage of hyperbolic assaults. He characterizes the addressee as the “most ungrateful man under the sun,” one with a “foul tongue” who regularly demonstrates his insolence to others, even his benefactor. This letter uses a litany of rhetorical questions that, if answered, would either force the addressee to affirm his shortcomings or provide a response that could appropriately address all of the writer's charges. Erasmus provides this seemingly personal reproof as a generalized template for

¹² Schneider has observed that, in some cases, early modern subjects would have preferred letter writing to physical contact, especially if the communication was an unpleasant one. *The Culture of Epistolarity*, 109.

letter writers looking for advice on how best to admonish the addressee of a letter.¹³ Even so, the mode of address and litany of rhetorical questions suggest a more specific and personal reproof, one that foregrounds the importance of dramatic repetition for emphasis. This repetition is central to the formation of a speaker on the page; as Jonathan Goldberg rightly observes, the letter “expresses the mind, but only when the mind has been formed by the letter.”¹⁴

Erasmus’ various examples emphasize the letter’s importance both as a heightened and condensed form of emotional expression and as a tool of juridical investigation and interpretation. Erasmus draws a clear relationship between forensic modes of rhetoric and letter-writing. Even if a rhetoric mode, such as invective, is not always coded as juridical in its common usage, Erasmus is sure to trace its genealogy back to the juridical:

The technique of writing letters of invective is taken partly...from the judicial, for we must involve ourselves in personal vituperation and frequently resort to the formal censuring of a person’s name. In addition we must both refute allegations and vigorously level counter-charges, and this belongs to the judicial class. (223)

Erasmus, Angel Day, and other rhetoricians of the period consistently acknowledged the rhetorical flourishes that letter-writing borrowed from jurisprudence. Letter-writing manuals offered abstract theories of letter-writing coupled with specific examples to follow for subjects who were increasingly immersed in bureaucracies that demanded flexibility and a sense of

¹³ Lynne Magnusson points to Erasmus’ examples as indices of how “the framing logic of the letter’s paradoxical turns is socially directed.” *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue*, 97. According to Magnusson, administrative letter “figures social relation and inscribes relative social status so that these written exchanges open up to close reading the microstructures of Elizabethan society—or at least its upper reaches. At the same time...stylistic complexity depends both on social relation and on discourse task...a space of interpretive ambiguity that the skilled rhetorician can exploit to his or her own advantage to re-rank either relationships or discursive undertakings” (112).

¹⁴ *Writing Matter*, 251.

decorum for every letter-writing task;¹⁵ on the other hand, the examples of letters in these guidebooks are also creative and highly personalized exercises in reproof, invective, and deprecation.

As Erasmus observed, letters of complaint require templates for proofs, refutations, amplifications, and extenuations of the complainant's case. Angel Day's coverage of juridical rhetoric is consistent with Erasmus' treatment, and his English-language *The English Secretary* signals the widespread appeal and use of this letter-writing advice for an early modern readership. *The English Secretary* further enunciates the importance of the letter as a form of unmediated speech, even as Day's templates function as a kind of mediation.¹⁶ Day provides numerous letter templates, but one in particular demonstrates the importance of letters of complaint and its application to private transgressions. In a series of sample letters of invective between a father and son, Day demonstrates that the "conveyance" of such forms "is as full of Art as anie others."¹⁷ In the first epistle from a father against his son, the father catalogues his wayward son's many transgressions and his numerous attempts to set his son on a better path. With each paragraph of the letter, Day provides annotations for each trope, figure, and scheme that the father employs. Day observes the father's use of *paralepsis* to both spare his reader of the details

¹⁵ For more on the role of letter-writing in emerging bureaucracies, see Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue*, and Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity*.

¹⁶ Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 251.

¹⁷ *The English Secretary: or, Methods of Writing Epistles and Letters, with a Declaration of such Tropes, Figures, and Schemes, as either usually or for ornament sake are therein required*, ed. Robert O. Evans (Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1967), 34.

of his troubles and also reveal them;¹⁸ *narratio* when he recounts his son's many wrongdoings in sequence; *erotema* when the father lists a series of unanswerable rhetorical questions that, in their accumulation, create a heightened sense of urgency and wrongdoing;¹⁹ and *prosopopoeia* when the father, in his penultimate lines of invective, calls out to any judge who will listen.²⁰ The father's final apostrophic lament for his son's situation completes his arc of complaint in his first letter, but the dramatic performance of grief does not end there. The father's letter is followed by a response in letter form from his son, which is then followed by the father's response. The letters follow one another in a logical progression of complaint, response, and rejoinder, a process that is reminiscent of the legal procedure of writing bills of complaint and defense.

In these examples from Erasmus and Day, letters of invective and complaint record transgressions and become evidence of the suffering of the complainant. Each rhetorical figure in the examples is meant to reproduce and amplify dissatisfaction with an *enargeia* that will convince the reader of the writer's urgency. The complainant's desire to show his or her body as evidence, and his or her wish that the reader *witness* this suffering, manifests itself in sonnet sequences, in miscellanies, longer narrative works, and the "female" complaints that follow

¹⁸ "I need not repeate here unto you, with what fatherlie care I have brought him uppe to mannes estate, by what provident foresight, I fought both with maintenaunce and convenient place of credite, to continue him as a Gentleman, howe unwilling I was to enter into the search of every small offence, but attributing the force thereof to his tyme of youth, was content to winke at that manie times, the sufferance whereof I doubted would turne to the ruine that it presentlie carrieth" (35).

¹⁹ "Are not these impieties (thinke you) verie strange?...Where is the feare of divine and humane lawes, the one threatening a sharpe scourge for such undutifulnesse, and the other punishing by penal forfeitures and imprisonments, the manner of such detestable and disordered looseness...Why is the common intendment earst in our predecessours tymes, of lawfull and good so accustomed used, thus quite forworne, and in these our seasons, sons (filled with all kind of carelesnes) so far forth disgraced?" (36-37)

²⁰ "Whither are ye gone ye just and severe judges, by whose sentence and opinion definitive sharp and bitter tortures were laid downe unto them, that durst presume by any outward shewe in the world, but once so much as to countermaund the authoritie of their fathers?" (37)

sonnet sequences. Lines from the beginning of Barnfield's "Second Day of Lamentation for the Affectionate Shepherd" (1594) demonstrate the power of the imperative "witnes" that points to the body of the suffering lover:

Witnes these watrie eyes my sad lament
 (Receaving cisterns of my ceaseless teares),
 Witnes my bleeding hart my soules intent,
 Witnes the weight distressed *Daphnis* beares:
 Sweet Love, come ease me of thy burthens paine;
 Or els I die, or else my hart is slaine. (13-18)²¹

The shepherd asks the reader to *witness* his watery eyes, his bleeding heart and the heavy weight of his burden. He wants to lay his pained body out—the body of the text, the body of the speaker—as visual evidence for the skeptic. Certainly, these are tropes that are common enough throughout the period's poetry, but this emphasis on visual evidence of bodily suffering is significant. Although this is the second of two major complaint poems by Barnfield,²² this opening functions as a new invitation to look at the complainant's physical distress. The first sonnet of William Percy's *Sonnets to the Fairest Coelia* (1594) also begins by revealing the male speaker's body as available for juridical inspection:

Judg'd by my goddesse doome to endlesse paine,
 Lo here I ope my sorrowes passion,
 That eu'rie sillie eye may view most plaine,
 A sentence giuen on no occasion. (1-4)²³

²¹ From *Richard Barnfield: The Complete Poems*, ed. George Klawitter (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1990).

²² The first complaint is titled *The Affectionate Shepheard. Containing the Complaint of Daphnis for the love of Ganymede* (1594).

²³ *Sonnets to the Fairest Coelia* (London: Adam Islip from William Ponsonby, 1594).

Though “witnessing” does not always imply a legal context, the speaker figures the witnessing as juridical in this passage. He has been wrongly “sentenced” for his love, and his absent object of desire has punished him with “endless paine.” Like Barnfield’s speaker, the speaker in this poem is compelled to open himself for view, as if his distressed body is a physical exhibit on display. In these first lines of the sequence, the speaker quickly aligns judging with bodily revelation. This open display pervades Percy’s poetic project: in the final poem of the sequence (Sonnet 20), the speaker offers the poems as if his body is an imprint that documents his suffering:²⁴

Receave these writs, my sweet and deerest frend,
The liuelie patterns of my liuelesse bodie,
Where thou shalt find in Hebon pictures pend,
How I was meeke, but thou extreamlie blodie. (1-4)

The speaker describes his poems as “writs” that are “patterns,” or copies, that resemble the physical suffering the speaker has endured (Percy also alludes to the imagistic quality of “patterns” in line 3, when he refers to the poems as “pictures pend”). “Pattern” in this context could also refer to an example or precedent,²⁵ and “livelie patterns,” could suggest that the “writs” set both an erotic and literary “precedent” for the extremity of the speaker’s situation. The depletion that his body has suffered, not only in unrequited love, but in the effort toward literary generation, results in material effects on “these writs,” which are “pend” in Hebon, or poison.²⁶ The speaker describes his unattainable object of desire as “bloodie” in comparison to

²⁴ As Jacqueline Miller has observed, “‘imprinting’ is a frequently-used image significant for its suggestion that the passions are no so much elicited from within but impressed as a copy from without.” “The Passion Signified: Imitation and the Construction of Emotions in Sidney and Wroth.” *Criticism* 43, no. 4 (2001): 407-421, Wendy Wall also discusses this phenomenon in “Reading for the Blot: Textual Desire in Early Modern English Literature” in *Reading and Writing in Shakespeare*, ed. David Bergeron (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996).

²⁵ *OED*, s.v. “pattern,” n.

²⁶ *OED*, s.v. “Hebon.”

his own meekness, but the proximity of blood and Hebon-as-ink in this passage foregrounds the importance of bodily fluids in the articulation of impossible desire. Cynthia Marshall has identified this and other poems as exploring a “masochistic sexuality of meekness, complaint, and affliction prolonged through imagined scenes” of fantasy deaths and pastoral escapes.²⁷

Crucial to this masochistic relationship between the speaker and his object of desire is the compulsion to utter and repeat his complaint as a result of his physiological suffering. The male speaker feels powerless in the absence and refusal of his object of desire; as a result, he repeatedly assumes vulnerable, exposed postures that simultaneously enable and entrap him.

In this and most other complaint poetry, the passions are not “internal objects” or mere physiological conditions;²⁸ they are material, fluid, and frequently meteorological in nature. This crossing of fluids from body to text provides inspiration for many other complaint texts: in Drayton’s *Matilda*, for example, Robert Fitzwater imagines the remnants of his dead daughter’s blood as it is “exhal’d from earth unto the skye,/...Stayning the heavens with her Vermilion dye,/Changing the Sunnes bright raies to gorie red,/Prognosticating death and fearefull dread...” and after Lucrece writes her letter of complaint in Middleton’s *Ghost of Lucrece*, the muse of tragedy (Melpomene) delivers Lucrece’s ghost to the “haule of hell,” where Lucrece’s complaint lives on as a “streame of tragicke bloud and fire.”²⁹ In this preoccupation with the body, liquids,

²⁷ *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 66.

²⁸ Introduction to *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, ed. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 18.

²⁹ Michael Drayton, *Matilda: the faire and chaste daughter of the Lord Robert Fitzwater*, reprinted in *The Works of Michael Drayton*; and Thomas Middleton, *The Ghost of Lucrece* (1600), 477, 47.

such as gall, tears, and blood, complaints are not merely visual descriptions of visual distress. Various forms of bodily ink write the complainant's distress onto the landscape and into the atmosphere so that the complaint can live on long after the complainant has ceased speaking. Certainly, these bodily liquids function as metaphorical presentations of the body. As they circulate, emanate beyond the body, and mingle with meteorological elements, however, they insist on their function as real ink, calling attention to their status as material proof of emotional distress.

Even as epistolary complaints point to the body and its intersections with the written text, they consistently direct the attention of the reader to the limited conditions of letter writing, sending, and receiving. Early modern plays such as *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Hamlet*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and numerous other plays repeatedly, and perhaps compulsively, stage the problems of letter exchange, revealing deep cultural anxieties about “textual misconstruction, misreading and the duplicity of the word.”³⁰ In order to bridge this gap between writer and receiver, many writing manuals point to the letter as a kind of synecdoche for the body. Erasmus described the letter as a “conversation between absent friends,” emphasizing the necessity for physical presence in an intimate dialogue.³¹ Letters included allusions to—and were presented as—kisses; words on the page often were compared to a voice. Mouths, hands, and hearts frequently fill letters to suggest presence, gesture, and the physiognomy of sincere emotion.³²

³⁰ Wall, “Reading for the Blot,” 131.

³¹ *De conscribendis*, 50.

³² Schneider, *Culture of Epistolarity*, 113-120.

This rhetoric of presence in letters was “a textual way to construct authority, validity, and reliability in the letter—for this mode of discourse could *only* represent at a physical distance.”³³

Inherent to the exchange of letters, then, is the recognized physical absence of both parties and the desire to supplement that absence by figuring the letter as a substitute for the body. Leah Marcus has suggested that for early modern subjects, “written material only provided a ‘pale, obscure reflection’ of sincere feeling; for these writers, the body felt absent from epistolary communication.”³⁴ I would push this point further, however, and argue that bodies are written into, and often *onto*, letters, especially epistolary complaints, which consistently foreground the body’s fluids and emanations as evidence of wrongdoing. The immediacy—and materiality—of the body’s liquids are a way to send the body with the letter, an inscription with undeniable dramatic impact in these complaints.

Epistolary complaint poems had enormous appeal in the early modern period, in large part because their rhetorical performances provided an intimacy that was not surpassed in any other poetic form. The poems feature use of the “I/you” deictic that engages the reader in an intimate discourse. In their seemingly private explorations of love, disappointment, revenge, and grief, epistolary complaint poems provide “the illusion of a vital present from the angle of the present, and with that of an open and perhaps unpredictable future.”³⁵ Early modern epistolary complaints convey a sense of intimacy while at the same time presenting themselves as

³³ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁴ “From Oral Delivery to Print in the Speeches of Elizabeth I” in *Print, Manuscript, & Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England*, ed. Arthur F. Marotti and Michael D. Bristol (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), 34.

³⁵ Guillén, “Notes Toward the Study of the Renaissance Letter,” 99-100.

evidentiary documents that are seemingly more public, or at least available for public consumption. Complaint poetry regularly makes “injustice in a private relationship a matter both of public record and public concern, often on behalf of all ‘lovers,’”³⁶ and epistolary complaints are private letters that are staged in print as public utterances that demand a quasi-judicial form of redress. In doing so, epistolary complaint poems provide the opportunity for a voyeuristic reading of rhetorical questions, apostrophic exclamations, and bodily emanations that cross the boundary between internal and external, private and public, fluid versus fixed.

Ovid’s *Heroides*

Though there was a proliferation of epistolary poetry in the early modern period, it was by no means a new literary innovation. As I have observed elsewhere, complaint poetry has its foundations in the jeremiads of the Hebrew Bible and in various poems from classical texts. Of these, Ovid’s *Heroides*, and its English translation by George Turberville in the sixteenth century, provides a foundational model of such letters as a form of forensic writing. Ovid’s *Heroides* was influential in a culture that was continually negotiating the role of the body in written expression, the management of emotional expression on the page, and the nature of complaint in an increasingly secularized rhetorical moment. Ovid’s etiological *Metamorphoses* was one of the most compelling works of antiquity for early modern poets, but pedagogically, the *Heroides* was useful in the early modern period, when students regularly translated, retranslated, and reiterated the collection’s epistolary complaint poems. Renaissance educators used the *Heroides* as part of a large-scale rhetorical education that encouraged an abundance of alternative translations of

³⁶ Lauren Berlant, “The Female Complaint.” *Social Text* 19/20 (1988): 237-259, 243. Berlant continues: “The lover’s complaint is always an implicit rupture of privacy, an admission that private communication no longer works: the message falling on deaf ears, the author takes her/his case to ‘the public’ for adjudication.”

classical texts. Formal and rhetorical repetition in humanist pedagogy allowed early modern subjects to consider translation as a work in progress. The humanist approach to translation “was less of a repertoire of technical rules for amplification than it was a generative principle or *practice*.”³⁷ Rather than demanding rote memorization and mechanical imitation, schoolmasters emphasized translation as a practice of transformation, and as a result, the relationship of the subject to the text was radically transformed from one of coercive memorization to playful experimentation. This approach to translation simultaneously privileged a proliferation of styles and a self-conscious use of language for early modern subjects.³⁸

Young men in grammar schools and young women who were privately tutored would have been exposed to Ovid’s epistolary complaints. In the Tudor classroom, they were part of a pedagogical program which was “designed to inculcate rhetorical facility;” in addition, though,

³⁷ Victoria Kahn, “Humanism and the Resistance to Theory” in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint (London and Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 378.

³⁸ Shakespeare reimagines the grammar schoolroom exercises of translation in *The Taming of the Shrew*, when, in the tutoring scene, Lucentio uses lines from Ovid’s *Heroides* to woo Bianca. Though Lucentio does not directly translate Penelope’s letter to Ulysses in his speech, he does use it as a way to identify himself and flirt with his student:

‘*Hic ibat*’, as I told you before—‘*Simois*’, I am Lucentio—‘*hic est*’, son unto Vincentio of Pisa—‘*Sigeia tellus*’, disguised thus to get your love—‘*hic steterat*’, and that Lucentio that comes a-wooing—‘*Priami*’, is my man Tranio—‘*regia*’, bearing my port—‘*celsa senis*’, that we might beguile the old pantaloon. (3.1.31-36)

From *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: Norton, 1997), 3.1.31-36. For more on the use of the *Heroides* in *Taming of the Shrew*, see Philipppy, “‘Loytering in love’: Ovid’s *Heroides*, Hospitality, and Humanist Education in *The Taming of the Shrew*.” *Criticism* 40.1 (1998). http://firstsearch.oclc.org.turing.library.northwestern.edu/WebZ/FTFETCH?sessionid=fsapp10-32988-fhkodrrdd-o7qai:entitypagenum=6:0:rule=100:fetchtype=fulltext:dbname=WilsonSelectPlus_FT:recno=14:resultset=1:ftformat=HTML:format=BI:isbillable=TRUE:numrecs=1:isdirectarticle=FALSE:entityemailfullrecno=14:entityemailfullresultset=1:entityemailftfrom=WilsonSelectPlus_FT: (accessed March 1, 2008); for more on the centrality of Ovid to rhetorical practices in the early modern classroom, see Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) and Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* and “Rhetoric, Discipline, and the Theatricality of Everyday Life in Elizabethan Grammar Schools,” in *From Performance to Print in Shakespeare’s England*, eds. Stephen Orgel and Peter Holland (New York: Palgrave: 2006).

the translation of these poems frequently became “an exercise in discovering oneself through identification—or, as Erasmus’s theory might formulate this relationship, in adopting the voices of others in order to find out one’s own.”³⁹ The poems in *The Heroides* feature the voices of legendary women after (or, in the case of Medea’s complaint, right before) they have fallen into disgrace and dejection. Much early modern scholarship has focused on the impact of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* on the rhetorical practices of *Tudor* schools and the poets who were the product of that education, but *The Heroides*, which was a familiar text in the Renaissance schoolroom, provided a formally consistent model for the articulation of complaint. By focusing so much on the *Metamorphoses*, we miss the rhetorically rich tradition of epistolary complaint and its effects on the poetry of the early modern period.

Ovid transplants great fallen women figures from the linear movement of heroic narratives to the more recursive realm of letter writing and verse, allowing a space in which he can manipulate the reader’s knowledge of well-known stories while also pushing repetition to its limits.⁴⁰ *The Heroides* feature fifteen epistles written by women complainants to absent men who have abandoned or forsaken them. Not all of the poems are “female” complaints, however: the final six epistles include letters between men and women, demonstrating the uses of the epistolary complaint as a vehicle for rhetorical virtuosity in both male and female voices. Reading the *Heroides* is a richly intertextual experience: readers are encouraged to compare versions of the same story, comparing the master narratives of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* against

³⁹ For more on this phenomenon, see Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare*, 24-25.

⁴⁰ Nancy Dean, “Chaucer’s Complaint: A Genre Descended from *The Heroides*.” *Comparative Literature* 19.1 (1967): 1-27, 16.

the more personalized testimonies of each complainant. For example, Ovid can “plunge directly into the action at or near a point of maximum interest”⁴¹ in an epistle from Medea to Jason because readers already would have been familiar with her story. In Ovid’s ventriloquizing of Medea’s voice in *The Heroides*, readers could derive pleasure from the immediacy of Medea’s first-person perspective in the moment just before Medea leaves the symbolic order to commit the most unintelligible of acts: the murder of her children. Ovid’s use of epistolary style provides the illusion of immediacy and results in dramatic irony.⁴² This narrative positioning allows Ovid to re-use well-known legends and myths, but with a difference: instead of hearing Dido’s complaint in the context of the Aeneid, the reader sees her without Aeneas, dejected and alone, rethinking what went wrong, and why her man strayed; instead of a characterization of Phaedra as purely evil, Ovid allows her to present her own defense of her actions and a sophisticated argument, thereby providing some context for her errant behavior and a reshaping of the nature of complaint. Nearly two thousand years before Freud theorized the pleasure principle, Ovid explored how the displeasure of remembering a painful act could provide pleasure through reenactment and repetition.

⁴¹ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: Theater as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 16. Carlson has written about the pleasure that audiences derive from seeing masterplots, adaptations, and recycled plot structures enacted onstage. This effect is not restricted to the stage; indeed, complaint as a performative utterance borrows from and extends the conventions of theater in its recycling and rehearsal of familiar stories. For more on the ways in which Ovid’s *Heroides* speak back to Homer’s epics, see Alessandro Barchiesi, “Future Reflexive: Two Modes of Allusion in Ovid’s *Heroides*.” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 95 (1993): 333-365.

⁴² The final lines of Medea’s complaint, for example, occur just before Medea has decided that she will murder her own children. In Turberville’s 1567 translation, she says ominously, “I ne wote what greater thing my heart intendes” (Kiir). *The heroycall epistles of Publius Ouidius Naso, in English verse: tr. G. Turberville* (London: Henry Denham, 1567). Unless otherwise noted, all quotations come from this edition.

The Heroides was educationally useful for instructors who wanted their students to experiment with the translation and performance of multiple voices and registers. In addition, Ovid's text was figured as a more morally appropriate text than some of his other works. Scholars and translators treated these poems as moral exempla, especially in collections that were used most frequently by schoolboys for translation exercises.⁴³ Unlike some of the tales in the *Metamorphoses* and some of Ovid's more explicit advice on love and sexuality in *Ars Amatoria*, the abandoned women in the *Heroides* provide an easy example of what kinds of behavior lead to dishonor.⁴⁴ Early modern authors wrote didactic frames for each epistolary complaint in their translations, even where Ovid did not. This didacticism can be traced back to 1481, when Ubertinus Clericus provided the following commentary on the poems:

The matter truly is ethical, that is moral, because it describes the conduct of various men and women; the poet's intention is...to demonstrate how love differs in modest and immodest women, showing in some the piety of chaste love and in others the incontinence of lustful fury. Thus some women are recalled for praise and imitation, and others for the condemnation of lust and immodesty.⁴⁵

In the commentary of various authors, the *Heroides* was presented as instructive reading, not only for schoolboys, but also for young women, and in this way it could easily be grouped with a whole genre of advice for women on how to avoid improper behavior. This didactic reading of

⁴³ Phillippy, "Loytering in Love." Numerous scholars praised the *Heroides* for their exemplary tales; Erasmus, for example, praised the poems as "chaste."

⁴⁴ This didactic reading of *The Heroides* was prominent in the medieval period. Ralph Hexter writes, "For late medieval scholars and writers looking for moral exemplum in classical texts, the *Heroides*, with its "relatively modest collection of twenty letters...could be accommodated to a simple but satisfying didactic aim." *Ovid and Medieval Schooling: Studies in Medieval School Commentaries on Ovid's Ars Amatoria, Epistulae ex Ponto, and Epistulae Heroidum* (Munich: Bei der Argeo-Gesellschaft, 1986), 153. Certainly, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was more popular than the *Heroides*, but late medieval students and scholars showed increased interest in the *Heroides* that continued through the early modern period. See R.J. Tarrant, "The *Heroides*" in *Texts and Transmission: A Survey of the Latin Classics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 269.

⁴⁵ Qtd. in Phillippy, "Loytering in love."

The Heroides, however, obscures the status of its poems as performative complaints that dramatize the suffering of complainants and their bodily emanations.

Turberville's translation of the *Heroides*

While continental authors foregrounded the moral instruction of Ovid's *Heroides* in their published translations, George Turberville resisted this urge in his English translation.⁴⁶ Numerous English authors translated various epistles from Ovid's *Heroides*, and even adapted his epistles for the stage,⁴⁷ but Turberville's *Heroycall Epistles of the Learned Poet Publius Ovidius Naso, In Englishe Verse* (1567) provided the first complete English translation of the *Heroides* to a large readership. Published in the same year as Arthur Golding's complete compilation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Turberville's translation went through at least four editions between 1567 and 1600.⁴⁸ Some critics have suggested that Turberville's *Heroycall Epistles* started a *fin de siècle* phenomenon in which writers, readers, and playgoers used the complaints as "a source of poetic and even licentious delight rather than moral edification."⁴⁹ Turberville's translation was part of a larger wave of complaint poetry that staged the articulation of complaint as a generative form of emotional and juridical expression in the period.

Turberville's translation of *The Heroides* foregrounds the importance of the complaints as performances that elicit sympathy, and even tenderness, in the translator. Unlike his

⁴⁶ According to Philippy, "Turberville's work is unique in its lack of a moralizing gloss." "Loytering in love."

⁴⁷ George Peele translated Oenone's complaint for his drama *The Araygnement of Paris: A Pastorall* (London: Henry Marsh, 1584).

⁴⁸ For more on the various translations of Ovid's works through the sixteenth century, and of select poems from the *Heroides* in particular, see Phillippy, "Loytering in Love."

⁴⁹ Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 32.

continental contemporaries who were interested in providing morals for each poem, Turberville provides historical context for the complaints, and, in some cases, even characterizes complainants as sympathetic characters. In the argument that appears before Penelope's letter to Ulysses, for example, Turberville excuses Penelope's complaint, sympathetically referring to her as a "forsaken wight" who worries that Ulysses has "acoyde" some "other lasse;"⁵⁰ in the argument before Medea's complaint to Jason, the reader learns that it is Jason's "guile" that forces Medea to write her letter in the first place (69r); and in the argument before Oenone's letter to Paris, Turberville refers to Oenone's complaint as "just" in light of Paris's "wrongfull Greekish rape" which led to the "ranckling strife" of the Trojan War (26r).

For the most part, Turberville's arguments sympathize with the abandoned women of *The Heroïdes*, thereby guiding the reader through an interpretive process that results in persuasion of each complainant's case.⁵¹ In the argument that precedes Deianeira's epistle to Hercules, for

⁵⁰ *The heroycall epistles*, A1v.

⁵¹ There is one notable exception to this trend. Turberville's translation of Epistle IV, "Phaedra to Hippolytus," explicitly condemns Phaedra's desire for her son-in-law:

She naytheless attacht with glowing gleede,
To winne the chastfull youth to filthie lust:
In subtile sort his humors sought to feede,
Perswading him hir sute to be but just.
With sundrie sleightes she went about to winne
The retchlesse youth, that minded nothing lesse
Than shamefull lust and filthy fleshlie sinne.
The Mothers mind this Pistle doth expresse,
These suing lynes her sluttish sute bewray
Wherein to Hippolyte thus gan she say. (19v)

In this passage, Hippolytus, though a "retchlesse youth," is clearly the victim of Phaedra's "sluttish" and "filthy fleshlie sinne." Unlike Briseis, Phaedra has not suffered as a result of military exploits or colonial domination; rather, she has dominated an uninterested stepson and violated the incest taboo. Phaedra's logic in her complaint shares similarities to a male respondent from the "double" *Heroïdes* that appear later in the collection.

example, Turberville emphasizes the fact that Deianeia mistakenly killed her husband, and that she is willing to pay the price for her mistake:

The loving wife had slaine her manlie Feere,
Which she poore sielie woman never ment.
But to requite hir husbandes death with paine,
At poynt to hang hir selfe thus gan she plaine. (53v)

This passage emphasizes Deianeira's inability to understand the conditions of her husband's death, and her willingness to make amends for it through her own suicide, even if it means committing suicide. Turberville's arguments, then, give psychological dimension and narrative context to each of Ovid's characters and prepare the reader to sympathize with the complainant even before she has spoken.

Turberville's sympathetic arguments also foreground the political and imperial contexts against which these women are dishonored, and the unwillingness of their lovers to acknowledge those conditions.⁵² In doing so, he ruptures the possibility of the poems as private lover's laments, a rhetorical move that was resonant in a culture increasingly fixated on the border between private self and public sphere.⁵³ Most literary historians consider the poems in *The Heroides* as erotic narratives of abandoned women, but few have explored the political underpinnings of the

⁵² This problem appears in Thomas Lodge's *Complaint of Elstred* and the anonymous *Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine*, both of which explore the status of Elstred as booty after her husband Humber dies and Locrine seduces her; this theme appears, too, in Tamora's complaints onstage in *Titus Andronicus*. I address this phenomenon in further detail in Chapter 5.

⁵³ I am indebted to John Kerrigan's treatment of the novel as the historical endpoint for early modern complaint poetry. *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and the 'Female Complaint'; A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 67. I am in agreement, too, with Mary Jo Kietzman, who explains the reason for complaint's absorption into novels as part of a two-tiered process. First, the complaining subject becomes marginalized as a result "of historical change—the steady polarization of private/domestic and public/economic spheres" (16), and this results in a sentimentalization of complaint. "'Means to Mourn Some Newer Way': The Role of the Complaint in Early-Modern Narrative" (Ph.D. Diss., Boston College, 1993).

poems. The models that Ovid provides in *The Heroides* influenced a range of early modern complaint poems that featured the letters of historical figures and their concubines.

Briseis, a concubine who has no sovereignty in Achilles' camp, is a figure deprived of her native language and country. Briseis' complaint to Achilles highlights the difficulty with which she strives to express herself in Greek, a language which is foreign to her. In doing so, she emphasizes the linguistic difficulty of her complaint, supplementing her words with tears to demonstrate the sincerity of her expression:

The dolefull lynes you reade
 from captive *Briseis* came:
 Whose Trojan fist can scarcely yet
 with Greekish figures frame.
 My flushing teares did cause
 the blottes and blurres you see:
 Yet in these dreerie droppes I knowe
 the weight of wordes to bee.
 If lawfull be to plaine
 of thee my Lorde and Feere:
 Of thee my Feere and Lorde the plaint
 thy selfe shalt quickly heare. (12r)

Briseis can barely “frame” her thoughts in Achilles' native language; even so, her body emanates the blots and blurs that she hopes will be intelligible to her lover and compensate for her linguistic shortcomings. In these salutatory lines, Briseis prepares her reader for a multisensory performance that will require reading, writing, seeing and hearing. In addition, it will be tactile experience—Achilles will feel the “weight” of Briseis' “dreerie droppes” and see the “blottes and blurres” of her misery on the page. Writing is not just mimesis, but action, feeling, and evidence. Each material detail transfers Briseis' physical presence onto paper and provides proof of her suffering.

Other complainants bridge the linguistic and physical gap between themselves and their absent objects of desire. Oenone, for example, performs the gestures that emblemize despair: she wails inconsolably, tears at her robes, and beats her chest. But Oenone has more than her tears as evidence of her suffering; her proofs of dishonor extend to the natural landscape. Her “yelling clamours Ida heard/and witnessde all [her] woe” (29), and the trees that carry the inscription of her name both generate and literally increase the size of her complaint and its annihilation.

The boysteous Beech *Oenons* name
 in outwarde barke doth beare:
 And with the carving knife is cut
Oenon, every wheare.
 And as the trees in tyme doe waxe
 so doth encrease my name:
 Go to, grow on, erect your selves,
 helpe to advaunce my fame. (27r)

Paris’s writing is a broken promise, a failed contract that results not only in the ruin of Oenone but also the ruin of a nation. As time passes, Paris’s written oath expands in size as the tree grows, establishing a direct relationship between the passage of time and Paris’ wrongdoing. Oenone’s appeal to Paris provides proof of his deceit, a proof that relies on the juridical rhetoric to expose his guilt. Consider her series of rhetorical questions to Paris, all of which are impossible to answer without Paris’ acknowledgment of his culpability:

How oft have we in shaddow laine
 whylst hungrie flocks have fedde?
 How oft have we of grasse and greaves
 preparde a homely bedde?
 How oft on simple stacks of strawe
 and bennet did we rest?
 How oft the dew and foggie mist

our lodging hath opprest? (27r)⁵⁴

Like the father who uses invective and interrogation in Day's *English Secretary*, Oenone repeatedly interrogates Paris with rhetorical questions that both accuse and, if left unanswered, provide evidence of his guilt.

The complainants of *The Heroïdes* affirm the power of written, or in many cases, etched or engraved, expression as a register of their griefs. Like the early modern complainants in Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint* and *The Complaint of Rosamond*, the registering of grief is part of its cure; unlike those poems, however, there is no need for the a second character to witness and pose as a listener for the complainant. Consider the letter from Phyllis to Demophoon, a complaint which acknowledges that Phyllis will most likely not receive a response to her letter. In the final lines of the poem, after an exhausting catalogue of Demophoon's transgressions, Phyllis delivers her final series of judgments:

And thou that didst procure my bane
 for thy desert shalt have
 This Verse, or some such other lyke,
 insculped on my grave.
 Demophoon *that guilefull guest,*
made Phyllis stoppe hir breath:
His was the cause and hirs the hande
that brought hir to the death. (11r)

⁵⁴ Oenone does not stop her questions here; on 28r, she continues her litany:

How often were thou wroth with windes
 When windes did serve thee well? [...]
 How oft didst thou me sweetely kisse
 And then unkisse againe?
 How did thy (last adue) procure
 Thy soltring tongue to paine?

Phyllis uses legal language to describe the “bane” that Demophoon has “procured.” In the early modern period, “procure” had explicitly juridical connotations, and in this passage, Phyllis uses the term to suggest that Demophoon ruined her without consent or foreknowledge.⁵⁵ Phyllis directly links the verse on her future epitaph with Demophoon’s transgression: the epitaph “insculp” on Phyllis’s grave functions as the register that ultimately condemns Demophoon. Even so, it leads to interpretive problems. Phyllis foresees the insculping of these words, but acknowledges that whoever engraves them might provide some variation. The poems provide material proof, not only for the emotional excess of these women complainants, but also for the transgressions of their absent lovers. The epistolary form allows the complainants to “insculp” their own final sentence as a marker that memorializes the men’s transgressions.

Blood as Ink

In *The Heroides*, bodily fluids are not merely visible marks, but also physical weights. As Briseis says in her complaint to Achilles, her tears have the “weight of words.” Briseis’s tears mingle with her blood as she both reaches for her sword and writes her complaint into being, and the tears create the “blottes and blurres” that Achilles will eventually see when he receives and reads the letter. The word “blot” carries with it the actual ink mark on the page as well as the stain that corrupts written expression: the word for “blot” in Ovid’s original Latin is *litura*, which can mean signal a “blot,” an “erasure,” or an “editorial correction.”⁵⁶ As Farrell observes that while Briseis writes, “her tears bathe the sword, but once she stops writing, the tears will give

⁵⁵ OED, s.v. “procure.”

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 133. For more on blotting, especially in *Othello*, see Wall, “Reading for the Blot,” 137-138.

way to her blood.”⁵⁷ Tears and blood, like ink, stain the page and leave traces of the writer’s grief that are as eloquent as words but incompatible with them.

In epistolary complaint poetry, writing is often represented as having a physical cost, frequently manifested in bodily emanations. The insistence on writing with blood in complaint poetry—and the possibility of blood’s legibility outside of the body’s borders—is a constant reminder of the body’s leakages and transgressions. This phenomenon of blood as proof of sincere emotion appears throughout much of the poetry of the early modern period. For example, in Henry Constable’s sonnet sequence *Diana*, bloodletting blurs the boundary between inside and outside. In Sonnet 9, for example, Constable suggests that the blood from the male speaker’s heart stains violets purple. He then leaps from that metaphor to one in which he compares the evidence of his suffering to the stigmata of St. Francis:

Sweet hand the sweet, but cruell bowe thou art,
 from whence at mee five yvorie arrowes flie:
 so with five woundes at once I wounded lie,
 bearing my brest the print of every dart.
 Saint *Fraunces* had the like, yet felt no smart;
 where I in living torments never die:
 his woundes were in his hands and feete, where I
 all these five helpelesse wounds feele in my hart...(1-8)⁵⁸

In this and other passages, the humoral body is a volatile site of wounding and bleeding.

Constable adds a considerable religious charge to this sonnet, which already shares formal similarities with the rosary;⁵⁹ in addition, he uses metaphors of printing to indicate the

⁵⁷ Farrell, “Reading and Writing the *Heroides*,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 98 (1998): 307-338, 335.

⁵⁸ Henry Constable, *Diana: Or, The excellent conceitful sonnets of H.C.* (London: by I.C. for Richard Smith, 1595), First decade, Sonnet 9.

⁵⁹ In the sixteenth century, a “decade” could refer to anything that comes in sets of ten; however, Constable has organized his book of sonnets in “decades,” each of which conflates the erotic and the devotional.

permanence of the emotional damage. The speaker's breast bears the "print" of Cupid's every dart. Though they are painful, and even physically destructive, the arrows are generative as well, creating the inspiration for the speaker's poetic virtuosity. The speaker's body becomes its own fountain of ink: blood spills onto letters and flowers as a record of the suffering of the complainant. In this passage from Constable's sonnet, the comparison between the speaker's suffering and the wounds of St. Francis beatifies—and legitimizes—the lovesickness of the speaker. Like the pelican in Whitney's emblem from the beginning of this chapter, Constable's lover dips into his own bodily fluids to create his literary innovations.

Constable's poem demonstrates the power of blood as a metaphor for ink, and the status of that ink as "proof" of extreme emotion. Elsewhere, complainants shift their rhetoric to more secular evidentiary contexts. In *The Rape of Lucrece*, Lucrece figures her blood as a "testament" in which Tarquin's crime will be immortalized: "My stainèd blood to Tarquin I'll bequeath,/ Which by him tainted shall for him be spent,/And as his due writ in my testament."⁶⁰ The bloody ink transforms Lucrece from violated body to a writing fluid capable of creating her own "will" (1205). As Lynn Enterline has observed, Lucrece is like a "second Philomela," one whose story resonates with Ovid's foundational rape victim and points toward "an imagined intersection between authorship, language, and the body," one that is capable of writing the unspeakable.⁶¹ Philomela, "embrued" in her own blood after her violent rape, embroiders her message in the

⁶⁰ From *The Complete Sonnets & Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1181-3.

⁶¹ Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body*, 154.

“purple signs”⁶² that make her story intelligible to Procne. Lucrece, too, alludes to the fluids of her body, and the transformative power of her corpse as a message of transgression. Once Collatine does “oversee this will” (1205) and avenge her dishonor, the “testament” of her trauma will be responsible for a change in government. Complaints written in blood purge the excessive emotion of the complainant, and also enact change beyond the complainant’s body as well.

Examples of letters written in blood abound in early modern literature, and not just in complaint poetry. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo is astonished when a letter written in blood descends from the sky, announcing the details of his son’s brutal murder; in Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (1594), Faustus signs a contract with Mephistopheles with his own blood, ensuring his eternal servitude to Lucifer; and in the 1583 edition of John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*, prisoners reputedly write letters with their own blood as they await their trials for heresy.⁶³ This preoccupation with blood and bloodletting is amplified and sustained in epistolary complaint poems in the period, which participate in a rubrication of excess emotion for poetic figures desiring consolation and justice. In complaint poetry, bloody letters signify both the limits and the possibilities of writing as “proof” of emotion in the early modern period. When complainants write and receive letters written in blood, it either signifies the expression of extreme emotion or functions as proof of insincerity and defamation. The insistence on writing with blood—and the possibility of blood’s legibility outside of the body’s borders—is a constant

⁶² *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 6.577.

⁶³ When John Foxe describes martyr Ralph Allerton’s letter to Agnes Smith, he suggests that the letter was written in blood: “He wrote this letter in the prison with blood for lack of other ink[...]the copy of which letter here ensueth” (1583 edition, p. 2014). Martyr Richard Roth is also reported to have used blood in order to describe the conditions of his prison cell in Colchester (1583 edition, p. 1631), and William Tyms reported that he would use his own blood in order to write his own spiritual testimonial (1570 edition, p. 2078). See John N. King, *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs and Early Modern Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 54.

reminder of the humoral body's leakages and transgressions. The humoral body is not only volatile in and of itself: its borders are permeated by the fluids that provide proof of—and immortalize—the transgressions committed against complainants.

Matilda

Drayton's epistolary complaint poems are part of a larger literary movement that provided a secularized, juridical exploration of confessional expression in the literature of the period. In the Heroic tradition, *Matilda* is a complaint that makes private grief part of the public record. At the outset, Drayton's *Matilda* uses the same narrative devices as other female complaints: a wronged woman speaks from the dead, laments the fact that no poet has recorded her narrative, and then proceeds to utter her complaint in hopes of receiving consolation. *Matilda* hopes that "some sacred Muse" feels enough pity to reveal her story through poetry. *Matilda* is willing to accept other alternatives, however, which begin as anaphoric "ors" in this stanza:

Or on the earth if mercy may be found,
Or if remorse may touch the harts of men,
Or eyes may lend me teares to wash my wound,
Or passion be exprest by mortall pen,
Yet may I hope of some compassion then:
Three hundreth yeeres by all men over past,
Now finding one to pittie mee at last. (8-14)⁶⁴

Like Rosamond in Daniel's *Complaint of Rosamond*, *Matilda* laments that her story has been forgotten. Though her first goal is to attain the compassion of a poet and his readers, she also wants to be remembered, and perhaps even immortalized.

⁶⁴ All quotations from Drayton's *Matilda* and *Englands Heroicall Epistles* come from *The Works of Michael Drayton*.

Matilda draws attention to her damaged corpse as evidence of her suffering. In her pitiless state, though, Matilda differs from other women complainants in one crucial way: though King John attempted to seduce her, she refused his advances and remained chaste, even finding refuge as a nun in a convent to hide from him.⁶⁵ Ultimately, King John gives Matilda two options: she can accept his sexual advances, or she can take the poison that he provides via a messenger. In this regard, she is unlike Rosamond, whose crimes cannot be excused by the “bewitching” rhymes of Samuel Daniel (34); Jane Shore, whose “wanton humor” is “sooth’d” by the praise of poets like Thomas Churchyard (43); and Elstred, a “looser wanton” praised by Thomas Lodge (48). Of these, Matilda seems most displeased that a woman like Rosamond would be “so highly graced,/Recorded in the lasting Booke of Fame,/And in our Sainted Legendarie placed,/By him who strives to stellifie her name” (29-32). Matilda has been chaste in her actual behavior, but the “Booke of Fame” records Rosamond’s narrative *as if* she had been a saint.⁶⁶ Matilda, then, provides a critique of the conditions of literary immortality, and the representation of fallen women compared with what they have actually done.

Matilda attends to the status of letter writing, receiving, and interpreting with physiological metaphors of labor, suffering, and blood-letting.⁶⁷ After Matilda completes her

⁶⁵ Matilda explains, “I had vow’d to live a holie Nunne./And in my Cloyster, kept amongst the rest, /which in this place virginities profest” (740-741). Matilda does acknowledge that Lucrece was chaste in marriage, and that Lucrece’s story does share similarities with her own (36-42); in general, though, Matilda’s complaint is based in large part on the fact that unchaste women are sanctified through poetry.

⁶⁶ By the mid- to late sixteenth century, “legend” came to refer to any popular story, secular or religious, handed down from generation to generation, but the earliest usage of “legend” in English is in referring to “the story of the life of a Saint.” OED, s.v. “legend,” n.

⁶⁷ In my treatment of *Matilda* as an epistolary complaint, I borrow from Duncan Kennedy, who defines “epistolarity” as a mode “not reducible to formal elements of style or generic category.” “Epistolarity: The *Heroides*,” 220.

introductory invocation to the Muses, she begins her *narratio* of events, putting into practice the juridical narrative arc that Angel Day recommends in *The English Secretary*. Matilda blazons herself to foreground her noble birth and her honor, describes the way in which Fame reported her beauty to King John, and his subsequent attempts to seduce her. Woven into this narrative are figurations of Matilda's body as a book: Matilda's brow is a table that contains "heavens divinest law" (93), her face is a book "where heaven her wonders did enrole" (114), and her white skin is a "snowie margent quoted on each side" (94). Others describe Matilda in textual terms as well; King John compares her to a charter sent from heaven "to gratifie a King" (334) and he claims that her honor is readable in the lines of her brow (341). In his attention to his own speech and writing, King John explains how difficult it is to "lim" Matilda's beauty in words (358). This detailed textualization of Matilda's body and face is deliberate: Matilda is an unblemished page that is at risk of being incurably blotted by the king. This description of the virginal "snowie margent"⁶⁸ of Matilda's face makes her murder by a lust-corrupted king all the more heinous.

King John does describe himself in textual terms as well, further blurring the line between bodies and texts in the poem. In asking for Matilda's sympathy, he describes his own brows as a "perfect Map of care" where "in wrinckled lines...sorowes written are" (379, 381). The border between John's body-as-text and the physiological properties of his letter writing are consistently blurred in order to demonstrate the power of writing upon his body. When King John attempts to seduce Matilda through letter-writing, Drayton describes the physical difficulty of that act. As King John sits down to write his letter of invitation to Matilda, he is

⁶⁸ This punning on "margent" appears in Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint*, when the "fickle" maid sits upon the "weeping margent" of the river; and in *The Rape of Lucrece*, when, after Lucrece is raped, she is better able to see the sinister meaning in the "glassy margents" of Tarquin's "wanton sight" (102, 104).

...like one sick of a strange disease,
 Whose cruell paine no phisick can asswage,
 Nor plaster can his torments once appease,
 Boyling his intrales, with such hellish rage... (687-690)

Grief generates demonstrations of feeling, but it is enervating as well. King John's veins are bloodless from "greefes Phlebotomy," and his heart is "ever bleeding" (383, 384) in his lovesick despair. Grief depletes John's veins, and only sending the letter written with the blood of his passion can remedy his malady.

When the king's messenger delivers King John's bloody letters to Matilda, he equates the value of the letter with the blood that was required to write them. The messenger who delivers the letters penned in blood codes them as proof of the King's sincere feeling:

Receive fayre Maide, these Letters heere (quoth hee,)
 The faithfull earnest of that good is meant thee:
 But craving that which never shall repent thee.
 His lines be love, the Letters writ in blood,
 Then make no doubt the warrant passing good. (751-756)

Alliteration and assonance in these lines variously point to the linkages the king's apparent sincerity and Matilda's culpability in the seduction. The messenger suggests that because the letters are sincere, only good is "meant" to Matilda, who will not have to "repent" for her sins with King John. The alliteration in "lines," "love," and "Letters" in line 755 align his bloody words with actual feeling. The messenger also uses juridical rhetoric to persuade Matilda: he refers to the love letter as a "warrant," echoing the legal nature of the "schedules" that the fickle maid destroys in *A Lover's Complaint*. The messenger's use of "warrant" is meant to ensure that the king will do no harm to Matilda; even so, he's come prepared with a vial of poison if Matilda

chooses to disobey her king. Earlier in the poem, when Matilda considers the King's offer, she also imagines it in juridical terms:

The time is come I must receive my tryall,
 His protestations subtilly accuse mee,
 My Chastitie sticks still to her denial,
 His promises false witnes do abuse me... (449-452)

As she considers her limited options, Matilda acknowledges her fate, but complains against the abuse that the king's "false witness" has committed against her. If Matilda resists the king's advances, she will be "accused" of treason, and her "tryall" will result in her condemnation as a traitor and certain death. In this and other stanzas, the reader gains access to Matilda's thought-as-action: this passage details the moment at which her decision-making takes place, right after King John's messenger has provided the letter as evidence of the king's intentions. Matilda's meditations remind the reader of the political stakes of her private decision.

Like Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint* and Daniel's *Complaint of Rosamond*, *Matilda* includes secondary male complaints within the frame of the female-voiced complaint, thereby complicating the easy dichotomy between men's and women's voices in the poem. When Lord Fitzwater, Matilda's father, learns of his daughter's suicide, he is as bereft as Hieronimo when he learns of his son Horatio's death in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Drayton writes an extended lament for Lord Fitzwater that employs apostrophe and prosopopoeia, the same rhetorical figures that Day uses in his letters of invective, in order to amplify the performance of his tragedy:

O Heavens (quoth hee) why was I borne accurst?
 This onely comfort to mine age was left: ...
 Why suffer you, your owne to be disgra'st,
 Subject to death and black impuritie?
 If in your shield be no securitie?
 If so for Vertue these rewards be due?

Who shall adore, or who shall honour you?

What ment you, first to give her vitall breath,
 Or make the world proude by her blessed birth,
 Predestinating this untimely death,
 And of her presence to deprive the earth?
 O fruitlesse age, now starv'd with Vertues dearth.
 Or if you long'd to have her company,
 O why by poyson would you let her die? (960-961, 969-980)

Robert Fitzwater's complaint straddles two worlds: his is the private misery of a father who has lost his child, but it is also the public complaint of a dutiful subject who has been betrayed by a power-hungry monarch. He remembers the bygone days when "just men were instaured in [the] throne" that is now "imbrew'd" with the "blood of Innocents" under a "cloud" that rains "this bloody shower" of Matilda's death.

Embedded in every lamentation is an invective in which the mourning subject rails against forces beyond his or her control. In addition to this register of shame, Fitzwater delivers an invective against John that both curses and sentences him to political and moral ignominy.

When all thy race shal bee in tryumph set,
 Their royall conquests and atchivements done,
Henrie thy Father, brave *Plantagenet*,
 Thy conquering Brother, *Lion-hart*, his Sonne:
 The Crownes, & spoyles, these famous Champions won;
 This still shall bee in thy dishonor said,
 Loe, this was *John*, the murderer of a Maide. (1058-1064)

Certainly, Drayton intends for this passage against John to stand in contrast with the reputation of Queen Elizabeth, the "pure Maiden" who sits upon the throne of "happy *Albion*" at the end of the poem (1034). In addition, though, the final two lines of the stanza function as a condemnatory epitaph, not so unlike Phyllis' epitaph for her own grave in her complaint to Demophon in the *Heroides*. Even if these complainants cannot change their falls into dishonor,

they have some control over the “report” that can potentially slander them. Instead, these epitaphs defame the kings who have committed hidden transgressions.

Blood is not restricted to its use in King John’s letter; it also appears in the “Book of black Defame” as a constant reminder of the violence of kings who too easily follow their own desires. King John’s crime—his attempted seduction and subsequent murder of a young virgin—is an act that will be, according to Fitzwater,

enrold in the Booke of black Defame,
Where men of death and tragick murders reed,
Recorded in the Register of shame,
In lines whose letters freshlie ever bleed... (1065-1068)

The black of ink and the white of paper are figured throughout the period as contrasting colors with a significant ethical charge,⁶⁹ but in this passage, the red blood-as-ink provides rubrication for the intensity—and permanence—of written expression. In this passage, the book is like a body full of fresh wounds, its stories of transgression so vivid that it would be impossible to forget them. The bloody book of defamation provides a didactic memorial to sexual violence in this poem, but the memorial is not static—it is a live body, transformed and energized by the message it must carry.⁷⁰ Lorna Hutson has explored the ways in which writing was used with increasing frequency as a form of legal evidence in English courts during this period.⁷¹ *Matilda*

⁶⁹ Wall, “Reading for the Blot,” 133.

⁷⁰ Wall persuasively observes that moments of “black defame” involve a “blackening of the virgin page that can infect its represented subject,” and that black as a color of damnation takes on racial registers in the period as well. “Reading for the Blot,” 139. See too Kim Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

⁷¹ Hutson describes the roll of Titivullus, a medieval writing demon who compulsively catalogued the sins of unrepentant subjects. Hutson outlines a shift in thinking in the early modern period, in which the role of Titivullus was obscured by the more secular role of legal case-making in the common law courts in the years after the English Reformation. In *The Invention of Suspicion*, 22-27.

signals its debt to the Heroidean tradition by allowing Matilda to speak from the dead, providing the poem as a form of quasi-judicial complaint with the rhetorical flourishes of invective and the status of the letter as a sentence-like epitaph for King John's crimes. Matilda's complaint represents the transformation of bodies into books, and vice versa. The poem suggests that the Ovidian compulsion to memorialize sexual transgression in written form actually invests those materials with human qualities, and that human bodies become books in their response to unspeakable violence and treachery.

Englands Heroicall Epistles

In *Matilda*, Drayton explicitly foregrounds the power of the epistolary complaint to rubricate the bodies of complainants in distress and suffuse written materials with physiological properties. In *Englands Heroicall Epistles*, Drayton continues this project, establishing more pronounced connections between public history and the rubrication of private emotion. *Englands Heroicall Epistles* is a highly allusive text: it shares formal and rhetorical similarities with *The Mirror for Magistrates*, Ovid's *Heroides*, various English historiographical materials, and his own poetic texts,⁷² and it is as varied as those miscellaneous projects as well. In what follows, I will consider two sets of epistolary complaints from *Englands Heroicall Epistles* that provide alternative figurations of eros and political power. The first letters between Rosamond Clifford and Henry II show a commitment to political engagement and historiographical memory that exists in much of Drayton's collection. The other pair of letters between Matilda and King John

⁷² In his message "To the Reader," Drayton explains the title of his work, and clearly signals his debt to Ovid: "And though (Heroicall) be properly understood of Demi-gods, as of *Hercules* and *Aeneas*, whose Parents were said to be the one Celestiall, the other Mortal; yet it is also transferred to them. who for the greatness of Mind come neere to Gods. For to be borne of a celestiall *Incubus*, is nothing else, but to have a great and mightie Spirit, farre above the Earthly weakenesse of men; in which sense *Ovid* (whose imitator I partly professe to be) dooth also use Heroicall" (130).

signal the future of epistolarity as the complainants dehistoricize the conditions of their relationship and foreground their importance as apolitical displays of passion.

In Chapter 2, I examined Rosamond Clifford's complaint to Samuel Daniel at the end of *Delia: Contayning certayne Sonnets* (1592). In that poem, Rosamond laments the nature of her murder at the hands of Eleanor of Aquitaine. Rosamond died ignobly as the adulterous mistress of King Henry, and without having the opportunity to reveal her circumstances to the world. In Daniel's poem, Rosamond "wails" her "strange unlookt for misery" (653) and rages against the forces that have led to her demise. As the poison "spreads through all [her] vaines," Rosamond wishes that she had written her complaint in blood:

This, and much more, I would have uttered then,
A testament to be recorded still,
Sign'd with my bloud, subscrib'd with Conscience Pen,
To warne the faire and beautifull from ill.
Though I could wish (by th'exemple of my will)
I had not left this note unto the faire,
But dide intestate to have had no heire. (764-770)⁷³

Throughout her complaint, Rosamond figures herself as a kind of legal precedent, and in this passage, she imagines that words written in her own "testament" could provide a "will" to other women in her predicament.⁷⁴ In a literal sense, Rosamond's use of "intestate" suggests that she has died without a will; but her use of the word also indicates that her written expression would have functioned as an inheritance of wisdom to future generations of readers.⁷⁵ Samuel Daniel's

⁷³ From *The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Samuel Daniel*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963).

⁷⁴ As I also observed in Chapter 2, the didacticism of Rosamond's complaint is almost entirely subverted by her invectives against the lady-in-waiting that persuaded her to sleep with Henry, and with her own ironic limits as a woman in love with her own beauty.

⁷⁵ OED, s.v. "intestate," n.

poem creates a record of Rosamond's woe, which simultaneously legitimizes Rosamond's suffering and his own poetic virtuosity. But what would Rosamond have achieved if she had "subscrib'd" her complaint with her own bloody signature?

Five years after the 1592 publication of Daniel's *Delia*, Rosamond has a second chance to announce her griefs in her own hand in Drayton's *Englands Heroicall Epistles*. As with every poem in this collection, Drayton provides Turberville-like arguments before the poem and annotations after, guiding his reader through the layers of history and politics behind each pairing of letters. Drayton's preface to the 1597 edition explains the reasoning behind his annotations following each poem: "because the Worke might in truth be judgd Braynish, if nothing but amorous Humor were handled therein, I have inter-woven Matters Historicall, which unexplained, might defraud the Mind of much Content...[these] have seemed to me not unworthie the explaining" (130). "Brainish" in this context means headstrong or passionate,⁷⁶ indicating Drayton's reluctance to provide delight with no instruction or moral lesson. Drayton's annotations, then, link private scandal with public figures and make the poems more accessible to a broader audience.

In the *Complaint of Rosamond*, Samuel Daniel transcribes Rosamond's complaint as she speaks from the dead. In Drayton's "The Epistle of *Rosamond* to King *Henrie* the second," however, the epistolary poem conveys a greater sense of urgency: the two lovers are, at least in the frame of the poem, still alive, and Rosamond is frustrated with her imprisonment. As Drayton notes in his Argument,

⁷⁶ "OED, s.v. "brainish," adj.

Whilst the King is absent in his warres in Normandy, this poore distressed Lady, inclosed in this solitarie place, tucht with remorse of conscience, writes unto the King of her distresse and miserable estate, urging him by all meanes and perswasions, to cleere himselfe of this infamie, and her of the grief of minde, by taking away her wretched lyfe. (1)⁷⁷

Drayton borrows Daniel's reference to Rosamond's "conscience" in this passage, suggesting that this poem is a fulfillment of what Rosamond wished she had written in Daniel's original poem. Drayton's argument highlights the urgency of Rosamond's condition: trapped in a maze and far from Henry's view, Rosamond's hurried letter demands a response, but it also forestalls her inevitable death with every line.⁷⁸ The Argument also indicates that Henry's affair with Rosamond has led to his "infamie" which necessarily compromises his reputation as a leader.⁷⁹ Rosamond begins her letter by calling attention to its material qualities, just as Ovid's complainants do in the *Heroides*:

If yet thine Eyes (Great *Henry*) may endure
 These tainted Lines, drawne with a Hand impure,
 Which faine would blush, but Feare keeps Blushes backe,
 And therefore suted in despairing blacke,
 Let me for Loves sake their acceptance crave,
 But that Sweete name (vile I) prophaned have... (1-6)

In this stanza, Drayton uses speech tags—"(*great Henry*)"—to juxtapose the greatness of Henry with the "vileness" of Rosamond.⁸⁰ Rosamond's "tainted lines," too, reflect her compromised status as a concubine to the king. She indicates that even the "tainted lines" that Henry reads

⁷⁷ *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (London: I.R. for N. Ling, 1597).

⁷⁸ In her treatment of the *Heroides*, Linda Kauffman observes that "the act of writing is a continual deferral of death," even when the reader knows that death is inevitable. *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 58-59.

⁷⁹ In Chapter Five, I examine how this problem functions in *The Lamentable Tragedy of Lochrine*.

⁸⁰ For more on the varied uses of speech tags in early modern texts, William Flesch, "The Poetics of Speech Tags" in *Renaissance Literature and Its Formal Engagements*, ed. Mark David Rasmussen (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

have an “impure” quality, not only morally, but materially. This conflation between metaphorical and material occurs elsewhere in the poem. When Rosamond alludes to the “rose” of her name, she translates her name, “Rosamond,” as “Rose of the World,” then acknowledges that it refers to the “Shame of the World” (130), equating the color red with contamination. Rosamond’s “blot” (15) functions as a contagion that can afflict the king and compromise his authority. Inherent in Rosamond’s written expression is a blush of red that would appear in the letter to Henry were it not for the “despairing blacke” of her emotional condition.

Whereas Samuel Daniel’s lovesickness was inextricably linked to—and reliant on—Rosamond’s complaint, Drayton does not intervene in her actual letter-writing. Instead of asking for Drayton’s poetic assistance, Rosamond writes her letter directly to King Henry, conveying the immediacy of her distress for him and for the reader:

This scribbled Paper which I send to thee,
 If noted rightly, doth resemble mee:
 As this pure Ground, whereon these Letters stand,
 So pure was I, ere stained by thy Hand;
 Ere I was blotted with this foule Offence,
 So cleere and spotlesse was mine Innocence:
 Now, like these Marks which taint this hatefull Scroule,
 Such the black sins which spot my leprous soule. (11-18)

Rosamond establishes a resemblance between her actual physical presence and the material qualities of her letter in order to prove the urgency of her request. The black ink with which she writes turns her scroll into an object that is “hateful,” as if her message has the power to transform the material itself. Typographically and aurally, Drayton aligns “foule,” “scroule,” and “soule,” reinforcing the resemblance between the soiling of Rosamond’s reputation as well as her

textual representation on the page. In doing so, Drayton also reinforces the urgency of the letter's presentation: Rosamond's text-as-body as an indication of her distress.

Men blaming women

In his epistles written by both women and men, Drayton follows Ovid's Heroidean model by complicating the easy gendering of his epistles as "female" complaints. The *Heroides* includes four "double" complaints—Acontius to Cydippe, Ulysses to Penelope, Demophoon to Phyllis, and Paris' reple to Oenone—that problematize the reception and interpretation of letter writing between men and women.⁸¹ In these responses from the men who have abandoned their lovers, letter-writing is always a potential trap: both men and women can easily say too much or speak with obvious duplicity, thereby creating documents of incrimination and self-disclosure.⁸² Of these "double Heroides," perhaps Ulysses' letter to Penelope is most compelling in its use of juridical effects and most resonant with Drayton's examples in *Englands Historical Epistles*.⁸³ As I noted earlier in this chapter, Erasmus, Day, and other early modern rhetoricians called attention to—and tried to remedy—the problems inherent in letter writing and letter exchange. Ovid acknowledges the instability inherent in a mode of expression, and characterizes the letter as a weapon of deceit.⁸⁴ Even if a letter is presented as truthful, authentic, or sincere, there is

⁸¹ The collection also includes epistles from Leander to Hero (18) and Paris to Helen (15), but these are more amorous epistles than complaints per se. Critics have traditionally questioned Ovid's authorship of these poems; however, because Turberville translated all of them into English for Renaissance audiences, I am considering the "double" Heroides as part of what early modern audiences would have read.

⁸² See Joseph Farrell, "Reading and Writing the *Heroides*," 315.

⁸³ By "juridical effects," I mean the use of rhetorical figures and tropes that deploy a narrative arc that follows the juridical modes of persuasion.

⁸⁴ In Book 1 of the *Ars amatoria*, for example, Ovid recounts the story of Acontius and Cydippe, and how Acontius' writing on a quince fruit deceived Cydippe into agreeing to marry him.

always the danger that the complainant had used the form for deceitful or manipulative ends, especially in matters of the heart.

In Ulysses' response to Penelope (whose epistolary complaint appears as the first one in *The Heroides*), the juridical stance is necessarily an interpretive one: by responding to and refuting Penelope's claims, Ulysses' version of events becomes the record that supplants her account. Ulysses' letter to Penelope reads like a legal response, but it is also an interpretive response as well: Ulysses uses his letter as the final revision of the events that so angered Penelope. After Ulysses has "throughlie scand/The earnest verse his wife did write," he readily attempts to excuse himself from Penelope's objections. Ulysses's letter functions as an "acquittal" of Penelope's charges and supplants blame with a revision, foregrounding a narrative of "worthy feates of fame" (148v). Ulysses uses his rebuttal as an opportunity to reiterate his triumphs and adventures from the *Odyssey*, thereby supplanting the narrative that Penelope has inserted into the *Heroides*. In addition, he lodges other complaints: he expresses his frustration over Penelope being so willing to send their son Telemachus out to search for him, and he wishes that he had slept with old Hecuba, just to give Penelope something to gripe about.

Penelope's charges of sloth do not make Ulysses feel any better about his long absence; if anything, they make him wish that he had stayed away longer. While Penelope has been writing her letters of complaint, Ulysses argues that he has not been slothful, but industrious and heroic. Even so, he now worries that coming home will cause him further distress.⁸⁵ Ultimately, Ulysses's complaint ends with an apostrophic exclamation and a question, instead of an answer:

⁸⁵ But I, not forcing of their giftes
did love my wedlock best:
Although perhaps in seeking thee

Oh Gods, when wilt that day come on
 and pleasant houre be,
 Wherein I may renue againe
 the sweet delights ypast:
 And thou begin to repossesse
 thy loving spouse at last? (153v)

The rhetorical structure of Ulysses' complaint bears similarities to the structure of Angel Day's example of invective in the father's letters to his son. In the *Heroides*, the conversation between Penelope and Ulysses stops with Ulysses' unanswered question, suggesting that if Ulysses does come home, he will be greeting with a certain amount of dissatisfaction.

Like Ovid, Drayton juxtaposes women's seemingly private laments with men's more worldly ones. Drayton allows his men to respond to complaining women, but in each of these cases, the men who respond to these epistolary complaints try to deflect and reduce the intensity of the women's suffering by amplifying their own miseries. Not surprisingly, Henry gets to have his say in the epistle that follows Rosamond's. Like Ulysses in his letter to Penelope, Henry's letter calls attention to his own suffering to remind Rosamond that she is not the only prisoner of dishonor:

Fatal my birth, unfortunate my life,
 Unkind my Children, most unkind my Wife.
 Griefe, Cares, old Age, Suspition to torment me,
 Nothing on earth to quiet or content me;
 So many Woes, so many Plagues to find,
 Sicknes of Body, discontent of Mind;
 Hopes left, helps rest, life wrong'd joy interdicted,
 Banisht, distress'd, forsaken and afflicted:
 Of al Releefe hath Fortune quite bereft me? (41-49)

Instead of attempting to comfort Rosamond, Henry launches his own Job-like complaint, lamenting his “sicknes of body” and “discontent of mind.” Even the participles that Henry uses to describe the limits of his joy—“interdicted,” “banisht”—suggest that the boundaries between himself and his happiness are rigidly imposed by an authority beyond his control. In Henry’s view of kingship, the king suffers more than any one of his subjects, just as Richard III did in his complaint from *Mirroure for Magistrates*. In focusing on his own complaint, Henry supplants the emotional intensity of Rosamond’s, and in doing so deflates her urgent need for a reply.

The legend of Rosamond and Henry’s love affair benefits from the rhetorical complexity that Drayton adds to Daniel’s original poem. Drayton also reworked his own version of *Matilda* in *Englands Heroicall Epistles*. In this exchange of letters between Matilda and King John, however, the king is not explicitly coded as a black devil, and Matilda is not simply a chaste and uncompromising maid. If anything, King John is transformed into a personalized romantic hero, one who points to the future of the epistolary as it evolved through the seventeenth century. In the notes to the poem, Drayton himself acknowledges that John’s lamentations are dehistoricized expressions of a lover’s griefs. In the notes that follow the epistle of King John to Matilda, he writes:

This Epistle of King *John* to *Matilda*, is much more Poetical then Historicall, making no mention at all of the Occurrents of the Time, or State, touching onely his love to her, & the extremitie of his Passions forced by his desires, rightly fashioning the Humour of this king, as hath beene truly noted by the most authentickall Writers... (152)

Drayton seems to abandon his goal of mixing the amorous with the historical in these epistles. The letters between these figures signal what is, at least for Drayton, a shift from the conflation of political and erotic realms toward a more complete shift to private letter writing.

In *Matilda*, blood-as-ink functions as an effective trope that demonstrates proof of excess feeling in the poem. In *Englands Heroicall Epistles*, however, King John and Matilda, like Rosamond and Henry before them, shift the trope to one of blood rushing to the surface as a blush. The characters still rubricate the emotion in their letters, but instead of referring to blood as a fluid that demonstrates the body's distress and functions as ink on the page, these complainants use blushing as a form of passion that is alternately repressed or finds itself rushing to the surface. In the opening lines to his letter, John aligns his own emotional correspondences with Matilda's:

You blusht, I blusht, your Cheeke pale, pale was mine,
 My Red, thy Red, my Whitenes answer'd thine;
 You sigh'd, I sigh'd, we both one Passion prove,
 But thy sigh is for Hate, my sigh for Love;
 If a word pass'd, that insufficient were,
 To helpe that word, mine Eye let forth a Teare,
 And if that Teare did dull or senselesse prove,
 My Heart would fetch a throb to make it move. (15-22)

In this stanza, John creates a cyclical performance of affect that will prove his love for Matilda. He promises to match her blushes, sighs, words, and tears, and if none of those are sufficient proof, his heart with "fetch a throb" to amplify the power of his passions. As with other complaints, bodily emanations such as tears and sighs offer proof of emotion, and the possibility of sufficiency of expression that supplements the insufficiencies of the written letter. In addition, though, King John eagerly matches the color of his blushes to Matilda's as a supplementary form of communication. There is a deliberate conflation in these lines between the redness of the character's blushes and the actual letters, as King John's blushes "answer" the blushes of Matilda. Calabresi has observed that as a chemical compound, vermilion had the ability to "mark the

cultural status of the bodies that bore it,” not only in its use for the creation of red ink, but also as a component in facial cosmetics.⁸⁶ King John’s lines allude to the emotional effect that letters have on each character, and their attention to the physiological qualities of the letters—and to the bodies of the characters—blurs the line between the characters and the white page upon which they are inscribed.

In *Matilda*, the heroine clearly demarcates her own virtue from the less virtuous behavior of other complaining women by calling attention to her chastity and status as a nun in a convent. In *Englands Heroicall Epistles*, however, King John conflates legal and ecclesiastical language in his efforts to persuade Matilda of his love for her, and in doing so satirizes the holiness of those religious institutions. The king co-opts Matilda’s religious language from the earlier poem to suggest that he, as king, has the power to sanctify her. He asks Matilda to imagine his arms as a “Cloyster” and that she imagine him as a “Monke,” so that they can live together the way monks and nuns once did centuries earlier. He continues:

Holy *Matilda*, Thou the Saint of mine,
Ile be thy Servant, and my Bed thy Shrine,
When I doe offer, be thy breast the Altar,
And when I pray, thy Mouth shall be my Psalter. (83-86)

Like the young man in Shakespeare’s *A Lover’s Complaint*, the king uses metaphors that attempt to sacralize his love for his object of desire. This preoccupation with sainthood, cloistering, and virginal beauty is a thread that recurs throughout epistolary complaints and continues in one of the earliest epistolary novels, *Les Lettres Portugaises*. Matilda’s holiness—and its status as an object of derision—highlights a point at which these metaphors of sacralization be used

⁸⁶ “Red Incke,” 255-6. The conflation between cosmetics, blushing, and texts is apparent in the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition of “rubric,” which also referred “a red preparation for heightening the complexion” in the early modern period. s.v. “rubric,” I.1.b.

satirically, a phenomenon that occurs with increasing frequency through the seventeenth century in epistolary literature.

The rhetoric of Matilda's letter to King John emphasizes the physical strain and labor associated not only with writing letters of complaint, but also with receiving them. When Matilda receives and reads the lines that King John has sent, she can barely control her body's response to the material page:

And in a shivering extasie I stood,
A chilly coldnesse runs through all my Blood;
Opening the Packet, I shut up my rest,
And let strange Cares into my quiet Brest,
As though thy hard, unpitying Hand had sent me,
Some new devised Torture to torment me... (5-9)

Matilda's "extasie" is reminiscent of the "suffering ecstasy"⁸⁷ of Shakespeare's fickle maid in *A Lover's Complaint*, but what's significant here is that Matilda—cloistered in a convent and in apparent solitude—can only find solace in writing about her grief. Instead of assuaging her ecstasy through a reverend man's sympathy, Matilda attempts to find consolation in letter writing. Her epistle includes a search for appropriate writing materials, a commentary on the writing process, and the contents of the letter itself:

I write, indite, I point, I raze, I quote,
I enterline, I blot, correct, I note;
I hope, dispaire, take courage, faint, disdaine,
I make, alledge, I imitate, I faine:... (35-38)

The rapid speed generated by the numerous actions—"I hope, dispaire, take courage, faint, disdaine"—coupled with the anaphoric repetition of "I" emphasizes the speaker's breathlessness as she engages in what ought to be a silent process. In addition, Matilda's use of the present tense

⁸⁷ *A Lovers Complaint*, from *The Complete Sonnets & Poems*, 69.

makes her reception and recognition of the letter's contents part of a performance unfolding on the page as it is read. Matilda's various symptoms and hyperbolic enactments of passion have a two-fold function: they allow the reader to watch Matilda's catalogue of actions unfold in the present tense as part of a process of juridical revelation ("I indite," "I point," "I alledge"). In addition, though the melodramatic actions of the passage—"I hope, dispaire, take courage, faint, disdain"—create the effect of breathlessness, as if this cataloguing further generates the very passions it describes. This second effect forecasts a cataloguing of the passions that becomes a standard trope in the epistolary novels of the seventeenth century.

The future of epistolarity

Rhetorically, Drayton's epistles foreground the evidence of bodily suffering as part of a juridical structure that early modern rhetoricians borrowed from classical sources. The status of letters as truth-finding and truth-revealing texts continues through the seventeenth century and eventually becomes the basis for epistolary novels of the eighteenth century. As Kevin Pask has observed, "the seventeenth century seems to have increasingly emphasized the effect of intimacy produced by the letter."⁸⁸ In the sixteenth century, Angel Day's *English Secretary* prepared a generation of men to become secretaries in the public sphere, and in the seventeenth century, similar letter-writing manuals proliferated for women. The status of women's letters transformed the letter and led to the development of the epistolary novel as the dominant literary genre of the eighteenth century. By the time *Pamela: Or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) was published, women had been "constructed as the repository of privacy,"⁸⁹ and their letters were a revelation of that

⁸⁸ "The Bourgeois Public Sphere and the Concept of Literature," *Criticism* 46, no. 2 (Spring 2004), 241-256, 244.

⁸⁹ Goldberg, *Writing Matter*, 255.

privacy. Even so, early modern epistolary novels still demonstrate an interest in the effects of juridical rhetoric in the erotic realm.

Les Lettres Portugaises (1669), translated by Sir Roger L'Estrange as *Five love-letters from a nun to a cavalier* (1678), absorbs the epistolary form in order to articulate a theory of passionate movement in the Restoration period. *Five love-letters* draws heavily from the rhetorical format and style of Ovid's *Heroides*, which remained an important model well into the seventeenth century.⁹⁰ Even though *Five love-letters* is different in form from much of the complaint poetry I've discussed in this chapter, it does, as Berlant observes, make the case that "the lover's complaint is always an implicit rupture of privacy, an admission that private communication no longer works: the message falling on deaf ears, the author takes his/her case to 'the public' for adjudication."⁹¹ If poetic complaints are "often a last ditch deployment"⁹² at persuasion, the epistolary complaint novel sustains and extends that deployment, calling attention to the ways in which bodies in distress reach beyond themselves to the outside world, particularly in a culture which seems to be increasingly fixated on the border between private self and public sphere.⁹³

⁹⁰ For an overview of increasingly satirical treatments of Ovid's work in the seventeenth century, see Richard F. Hardin, "Ovid in Seventeenth-Century England." *Comparative Literature* 24, no. 1 (1972): 44-62.

⁹¹ Berlant, "The Female Complaint," 243.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ I am indebted to John Kerrigan's treatment of the novel as the historical endpoint for early modern complaint poetry. *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and the 'Female Complaint'; A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 67. I am in agreement, too with Mary Jo Kietzman, who explains the reason for complaint's absorption into novels as part of a two-tiered process. First, the complaining subject becomes marginalized as a result "of historical change—the steady polarization of private/domestic and public/economic spheres" (16), and this results in a sentimentalization of complaint. Kietzman, "'Means to Mourn Some Newer Way': The Role of the Complaint in Early-Modern Narrative" (Ph.D. Diss., Boston College, 1993).

Compared with the complexity of the epistolary novels that would follow it, *Five love-letters* is a simple work: five letters that, with the exception of L'Estrange's brief introduction, are not framed with any sort of argument, intervention, or response. In his introduction to his English translation, L'Estrange briefly outlines the circumstances of the letters from a Portuguese nun to a French cavalier, with no response from the cavalier. After a torrid and forbidden affair in Portugal, "the Cavalier forsakes his Mistress, and Returns for *France*. The Lady expostulates the Business in five letters of Complaint..."⁹⁴ Like the prefatory prose frames of the *Mirror for Magistrates*, L'Estrange's letter to the reader prepares the reader for "the Lively Image of an Extravagant, and an Unfortunate Passion." In its depictions of the erotic transgressions of a cloistered nun, *Five love-letters* fulfills the fantasy of King John's metaphors in *Matilda*.

Mariana, the Portuguese nun whose letters remain unanswered (at least within the frame of the novel) is a typically Ovidian complainant: she calls attention to the materiality of her letters by blurring the line between her body and the paper. In the first letter, Mariana describes the physical effect that the cavalier's last letter had on her: "Your last Letter gave me such a Passion of the heart, as if it would have forc'd its way through my Breast, and follow'd you. It laid me three hours senseless; I wish it had been dead; for I had dy'd of Love" (6-7).⁹⁵ In this passage, the letter is, as Goldberg suggests, "a mode of presence...a fiction of presence"⁹⁶ that

⁹⁴ "To the reader," page unnumbered.

⁹⁵ All quotations come from *Five love-letters from a nun to a cavalier done out of French into English*, trans. Sir Roger L'Estrange (London: Henry Brome, 1678).

⁹⁶ *Writing Matter*, 249.

must be amplified with the nun's rhetorical force. In response to the letter that so transported her, the nun writes, "And yet I cannot quitt this Paper yet. Oh that I could but convey my self in the Place on't! Mad fool that I am, to talk at this rate of a thing that I my self know to be Impossible!" (14-15). Even though her message causes her emotional distress, the process of writing the letter brings Mariana the illusion of intimacy. Like Ovid's abandoned women, Mariana calls attention to the means by which her letter must reach its destination. In the fourth letter, she writes, "The Officer that waits for this Letter grows a little Impatient; I had once resolv'd to keep it clear from any possibility of giving you Offence. But it is broken out into Extravagances, and 'tis time to put an end to it" (76-77).

Throughout the novel, Mariana castigates herself for loving the cavalier so ardently, criticizes and interrogates him for abandoning her, and attempts to create a sense of urgency that will force the cavalier to give her his attentions. Mariana uses hyperbole to amplify her physiological desolation, often multiplying her distress by the "thousands": "A Thousand times a day I send my sighes to hunt you out: and what return for my Passionate Disquiets, but the good Counsel of my Cross Fortune?" (4-5)⁹⁷ Mariana's hyperbolic response to her abandonment appears in other epistolary novels as well; Aphra Behn highlights this melodramatic behavior in her *Love-Letters between a Noble-Man and his Sister* (1693). Authors describe the superfluity of their characters' emotions as outpourings of despair that are easily intelligible in the world of the novel. Characters can refigure their distress in countless ways, but they always call attention to the semiotic performance of their "thousand afflictions."

⁹⁷ Elsewhere she writes: "I am so wonted to Persecutions, that I have discover'd a kind of pleasure in them, which I would not live without, and which I enjoy, while I love you, in the middle of a thousand afflictions."

Mariana's letters are vehicles for the emotive performance of her distressed body, but even the vividness of her speech and descriptions of physical grief are not sufficient proof to win the cavalier's heart again. As a cloistered nun who has too eagerly followed her desires, Mariana is especially captivating: her letters seem like private revelations of a forbidden sexual relationship. In some ways she is a foolish woman, too, repeatedly demonstrating her affections in a written form that reveals her desperation and frenzied emotional state. Mariana's letters are presented as expressions of true passion, but the letters are ironized by Mariana; by the time Robert L'Estrange completed his translation of Comte de Guilleragues' *Love-Letters*, repentance had become an object of derision, even perhaps of satire in the novel. Mariana is frequently figured as desperate, and even ridiculous: when she writes exhaustively of her love for the cavalier, even though she has not heard from him in six months; and she describes a three-hour discussion that she has with one of the cavalier's fellow officers (28) and in her letters she stages trials of the cavalier in which she acquits him of his crimes, even though she receives no response from him. Because Mariana's letters receive no response, they become a form of soliloquy in which the nun reveals her own psychological landscape more than any reliable account of her relationship with the French cavalier.

Finally, after a full year, Mariana abandons hope in the cavalier. She does not repent for having an affair with him (earlier in the novel, she writes, "I do not at all repent of my Passion for you; Nay, I am well enough satisfi'd that you have seduc'd me..." [26-27]), but she regrets that repeated her tropes of abandonment and misery so many times in her letters:

But I will never have any thing more to do with you. I am a fool for saying the Same things over, and over again so often. I must leave you, and not so much as think of you.

Now do I begin to Phansie that I shall not write to you again for all This; for what
Necessity is there that I must be telling you at every turn how my Pulse beats? (116-117)

Like the “fickle” maid in *A Lover’s Complaint*, Mariana ends her novel of dissatisfaction with a rhetorical question, suggesting that her complaint may continue to reverberate in her cloister, even if her novel has come to an end.

Conclusion

Throughout the early modern period, poets were exposed to, translated, and borrowed from *The Heroides* as a model of complaint. The complainants in *The Heroides* reveal the marks of grief on their bodies, and the difficulty of communicating to their absent lovers through letters. *The Heroides* examines secular, political, and legal transgressions against the bodies of women who have been wronged and demand some kind of redress through written expression. Ovid’s poetics of dissatisfaction resonated among early modern English poets who were working through juridical models of evidence and persuasion in their complaint poetry. Throughout his career, Michael Drayton attended to the culture’s fascination with letter writing in his epistolary complaints. Drayton’s complainants repeatedly try to inscribe their bodies into, and onto, letters, figuring the paper as a body and their ink as their own blood. These bloody letters functioned as proof of extreme emotion in a period when the sharing of distress was figured as the best form of consolation.

In the sixteenth- and early seventeenth centuries, early modern theologians reimagined what confessional expression—whether written, spoken, or performed—could do to relieve the conscience of a penitent subject, but by the time *Five Love-letters* was translated and published in England in 1678, the culture showed a more explicit engagement with the critique of penance,

cloistered women, and the rituals of Catholicism. *Five Love-letters* deploys private letters as rubrications of the passions, not only as proof of emotional distress, but as part of a larger literary interest in charting the movement of the body on the page and the stage.

Chapter Five
‘You hold too heinous a respect of grief’¹:
The Uses of Complaint on the Early Modern Stage

Introduction

In Act 3 Scene 2 of *Hamlet*, the Prince of Denmark offers advice to the players on how to perform his play, *The Mousetrap*. Hamlet’s detailed lesson reveals his belief in acting techniques that might conjure powerful feelings of guilt in Claudius as he watches the performance. Hamlet wants Claudius’s emotional response to his play to be powerful, but he urges the players to moderate their passions with some sense of decorum so that they can elicit this response:

Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus, but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and as I may say whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious, periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings, who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise. (3.2.4-11)

Hamlet warns against hands that saw the air too much or noises that split the ears of the audience, suggesting that a restrained, dignified acting technique will be more emotionally effective.

Everything that Hamlet experiences—the appearance of Hamlet’s father’s ghost, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern’s “playing” of the prince, and Ophelia’s rejection of his amorous advances—result in his own performance of excess emotion throughout the play. Even if Hamlet cannot follow these rules of restraint himself, they represent a theoretical ideal that he hopes will effectively “catch the conscience of the king” (2.2.582).

Hamlet’s theory of performance is often accepted as representative of theories of acting in the early modern period, and much early modern anti-theatrical writing does suggest that the

¹ *King John*, 3.3.90. In *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: Norton, 1997). All Shakespeare quotations come from *The Norton Shakespeare*.

witnessing of such excess emotion onstage could do serious damage to audience members. In his critique of plays that foreground “immoderate sorrow, heavines, womanish weeping and mourning,” Stephen Gosson worried that audiences might become “lovers of dumpes, and lamentation, both enemies to fortitude.”² More recent assessments of early modern dramatic theory and practice also acknowledge the dangers of immoderate performance. Paul Menzer foregrounds the importance of “passionate moderation” in early modern performance, suggesting that “scripted restraint provided players an efficient means to represent a passion genuine, powerful, and, above all, legible.”³ Menzer’s argument about early modern acting relies on the premise that spectators comprehend and indeed privilege the expected stabilization of the actor’s emotions as a form of sophisticated restraint. This passage from *Hamlet*, however, suggests that the emotional performance of grief and excess emotion might have been common enough for Hamlet to desire an alternative.

Even as theologians, physicians, and dramatic theorists recommended the moderation of the passions, early modern playtexts consistently presented characters in extreme emotional distress. Complaint in dramatic performance provided an opportunity for actors to perform the excesses of grief and rage that could lead to consolation and juridical redress for their characters. Many tragedies of the period, such as *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus*, *King John*, *King Lear*, *Gorbuduc*, *Lochrine*, and *Richard III* indicate that it was common for players to perform excessive grief onstage. In the tragedies of the period, actors repeatedly threw themselves to the

² *Playes confuted in fiue actions prouing that they are not to be suffred in a Christian common weale* (London: Thomas Gosson, 1582), page unnumbered.

³ “The Actor’s Inhibition: Early Modern Acting and the Rhetoric of Restraint.” *Renaissance Drama* 35 (2006), 83-111, 85.

ground when their characters heard unbearably bad news, folded their arms as signs of inconsolable sorrow, sat on the stage when the burden of their tragedies was too great to bear, and pulled at their hair to enunciate the physiological effects of their suffering. These prescribed gestures, coupled with the standard rhetorical tropes of complaint,⁴ resulted in a heightened attention to complaint as a rhetorical and physiological process made intelligible onstage. Complaint requires language and gestures that, even when contested, become a kind of action. Its utterance encourages characters—and audiences—to grasp connections between improbable or emotionally difficult events onstage.⁵

Certainly, these physical performances of grief are not unique to tragedies performed in the theater; as I have shown in this dissertation, poetic texts ranging from the *Mirror for Magistrates* to Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint* describe the bodies and gestures of complainants to heighten the dramatic performance on the page. However, the performance of complaint onstage did allow actors to embody what was only alluded to in poetic texts. Drama, like the allegorical "Truth" in *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third*, adds "bodies to the shadows" of poetry.⁶ Kenneth Gross has observed that "the Renaissance theater provided occasions for playwrights and players to explore multiple, always shifting registers of outrageous

⁴ Topoi such as apostrophic exclamations, lamentations that turn into juridical complaint, and competitions of complaint among several distressed voices. Wolfgang Clemen, *English Tragedy before Shakespeare* (London: Methuen & Company, 1955).

⁵ Lorna Hutson argues that early modern plays are exercises in the "grasping together" of complex or improbable plots, and that this "judicatory act of grasping together...cultivates not only the disposition to identify and recognize but also *the habit of skeptical inquiry into likelihood*, which tends to discriminate between identifications and recognitions [her emphasis]." "Forensic Aspects of Renaissance Mimesis." *Representations* 94 (2006): 80-109, 86, 87.

⁶ *The True Tragedie of Richard the third* (London, Thomas Creede, 1594), 1.1.10.

speech, from whispered innuendo to gaudy rant, from the dexterous verbal twistings of clowns to the cursing bombast of revengers and the bitter invective of malcontents.”⁷ Dramatic performance relies on bodily expression *as* evidence of distress. Characters point to their own bodies to create cases for their complaint. The embodied witnessing of this emotional distress is what allows complaint to be a transformative phenomenon that moves the audience.

Complaint on the early modern stage continues—and is central to—the period’s re-evaluations of the status of satisfaction, consolation for excessive grief, and the possibility of juridical redress. In my analysis of lamentation in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, I borrow my understanding of complaint as a form of satisfaction from Heather Hirschfield, who has argued that revenge tragedy’s focus on satisfaction allowed audiences to question “the very meaning and possibility of satisfaction and its allied concepts of necessity, sufficiency and excess.” In Hirschfield’s view, the period’s rethinking of satisfaction is a response “to the Protestant reorientation of the agency of penitential activity and forgiveness—the reorientation of the theological notion of satisfying for sin.”⁸ *Richard III* does not stage a scene of penitence; instead, the lamenting women use their excessive complaints as a two-pronged process of reconciliation among themselves and indictment against Richard. Richard may refuse to confess his sins as he does in other versions of his story, but Shakespeare’s text ensures that Richard’s accusers are satisfied by the staging of complaints against Richard atrocious crimes.

⁷ *Shakespeare’s Noise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 5.

⁸ “The Idea of Satisfaction in English Renaissance Revenge Tragedy” (Paper presented at “Rethinking Historicism: A Symposium in Honor of Annabel Patterson.” New Haven: Yale University, May 2006).

In this chapter, I examine both poetic and dramatic texts, deliberately blurring modern generic distinctions between poetry and drama in order to foreground the rhetorical similarities that they share. As I observed in Chapter 4, complaint poetry voiced by both male and female characters was a regular component of the written translation practices of Tudor schoolboys. Lynn Enterline's research has shown that students used their translations as written exercises as well as performance exercises. In their spoken contests of *declamatio*, students imitated various poetic and dramatic personae in their efforts to fashion themselves into young gentlemen.⁹ I shuttle between poetic and dramatic complaint texts to highlight their shared rhetorical properties, and to suggest that the dramatic adaptations of poetic texts reveal a preoccupation with the same tropes of exclamation, interrogation, and the search for juridical redress.

Dramatic adaptations of complaint poetry recast complaining figures in public spaces where they can be listened to, watched, and judged. In these dramatic works, the complainant can actually kneel and weep before the audience, embodying the gestures that were only alluded to in earlier poetic texts. Once embodied, the staged complaint is both "real" and a theatrical illusion, an emblematic phenomenon that necessarily renders truth claims about the body differently; as Joseph Roach has observed, "When an actor takes his place on a stage, even in the most apparently trivial vehicle, and his audience begins to respond to his performance, together they concentrate the complex values of a culture with an intensity that less immediate transactions cannot rival."¹⁰

⁹ See Lynn Enterline, "Rhetoric, Discipline, and the Theatricality of Everyday Life in Elizabethan Grammar Schools," in *From Performance to Print in Shakespeare's England*, eds. Stephen Orgel and Peter Holland (New York: Palgrave: 2006).

¹⁰ *The Player's Passion*, 11.

This chapter consists of two main parts. In the first section, I examine the semiotics of despair and complaint in early modern acting theory. I consider the work of Thomas Wright and John Bulwer, both of whom theorized the power of words and gestures to transfer intense emotional experience from actor to spectator. Moving from theory to practice, I focus on Hecuba as an iconic complainer, one who functions as a point of reference for early modern complainants. In the moment when her lamentation is transformed into rage and revenge, Hecuba supplies early modern characters with a repertoire of words and gestures against which they can compare their own miseries.¹¹ In the second section, my investigation begins with examples from a range of different tragedies to demonstrate the pervasive power of complaint on the stage. In the end, I analyze scenes of complaint from *Lochrine* and *Richard III* that foreground the role of complaint as an important emotional, rhetorical, and juridical process onstage. In *The Lamentable Tragedy of Lochrine*, Brutus, Gwendolyn, Humber, Elstred, and the title character perform complaints that are alternately mirrored, supplanted, ridiculed, or ignored by other characters onstage. In the complaint poetry uttered by Richard III in *The Mirror for Magistrates* and in Giles Fletcher's miscellany, Richard is the chief complainant who utters his dissatisfaction over the perils of kingship. Shakespeare's *Richard III*, however, foregrounds the complaints of its women characters, staging the only serious trial of Richard in the play. These dramatic texts

¹¹ Many other ancient women perform similar lamentations, but Hecuba is an especially effective model because she loses both political power (the loss of Troy) and familial ties (the losses of her husband, sons, and daughter), she utters her grief both as a singular voice and as part of the chorus of Trojan women, and her rage allows her to exact her revenge. As Enterline observes, Ovid's Hecuba from Book 13 of *The Metamorphoses* "provided an exemplary model for how to use copia to create great emotion. In humanist educational training, the voice of Ovid's suffering Hecuba became a "mirror" or "example" for pupils to imitate—a lesson for young men learning to develop their own style." *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 25-26.

are a testament to the power of the men's *and* women's articulations of despair, and what dramatic performance, uninterrupted by prose frames (as in *The Mirror for Magistrates*) or voyeuristic narrators (as in *A Lover's Complaint*) can provide for spectators.

Early Modern Acting-as-Process

The question of how the actor's emotions were transferred from his body to the bodies of listeners was of crucial importance to educators, dramatists, and critics of theater.¹² This concern over the actor's passions is not new to the early modern period: the affective processes of the passions were a central preoccupation for medieval rhetoricians, and early modern rhetoricians borrowed their ideas about the movement of the body from ancient texts. Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* and Cicero's *De Inventione*, among others, encouraged early modern students to create narratives and oratorical performances that were "intensely motivated and vividly intelligible" to listeners.¹³ These forensic techniques provided excellent training for students who would go on to practice law; it was also preparation for dramatists who would write plays whose characters demonstrated these intense emotions.

In the actor's tears, hand-wringing, and hear-tearing, both actor and audience were part of a process in which the actor's inner passions were revealed externally. In *The Passions of the Minde in General*, Thomas Wright considers the power of passions in the orator and their effects on listeners and audience members. Wright's treatise emphasizes the transferability of emotion,

¹² Roach observes that "treatises on the passions, cataloguing their inner causes and outer characters, became numerous enough to constitute a minor literary-scientific genre in which it seemed that ever more careful descriptions of outward expressions would somehow explain the inward nature of the phenomena." *The Player's Passion*, 31.

¹³ Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7.

and the power of the orator to move his audience with powerful rhetorical performance. This emphasis on moving the audience emotionally was a common one; Brian Vickers has observed that in the early modern period, “the increasing stress on persuasion via the passions led to a readjustment of emphasis within rhetoric,” making *movere* the dominant goal.¹⁴ The very etymology of “emotion” in this period suggests how important it is to understand emotions not merely as feelings that originate within a subject and then emanate as physical affect, but also as feelings that begin as transference from one body to another. The word *emotion* comes from the Latin *emovere*, and the first definition of the word, common by the seventeenth century, is “a moving out, migration, transference from one place to another.”¹⁵ The chief goal of rhetoric in this period was to move the passions in a listener or reader, “and this goal of moving [was]...grounded in emotions.”¹⁶ Wright compares the affective process of the impassioned speaker transmitting his emotion onto a listener to imprinting his message onto a table or piece of wax; Wright suggests that the speaker “first apply his art to himself” and “of necessitie stir up first that affect in himselfe [that] he intendeth to imprint in the hearts of his hearers.”¹⁷ This metaphor of imprinting is not unique to Wright’s *Passions*; it appears with frequency in other

¹⁴ “On the Practicalities of Renaissance Rhetoric” in *Rhetoric Revalued*, ed. Brian Vickers (Binghamton, N.Y.: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1982), 136.

¹⁵ *OED*, s.v. “emotion.” Jacqueline Miller writes, “The passions are not so much our own, and do not so much always emerge from within, but rather get transferred from one person to another. “The Passion Signified: Imitation and the Construction of Emotions in Sidney and Wroth.” *Criticism* 43.4 (2001): 413. For a comprehensive introduction to theories of early modern emotions, see *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotions*, ed. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Miller, “The Passion Signified,” 411-412.

¹⁷ *The Passions of the Mind in General*, ed. William Webster Newbold (New York: Garland, 1986), 177.

early modern discourses.¹⁸ Wright's figurative conception of emotion as a printing process emphasizes the important physiological transformation for which every orator is responsible.

Through *The Passions of the Minde*, Wright is particularly attentive to the physical qualities of emotion. He continues his metaphor of imprinting elsewhere in *The Passions*, comparing the process of emotive transference to a musician blowing through a trumpet to create sound:

For the passion in the perswader seemeth to me, to resemble the wind a trumpeter bloweth in at one end of the trumpet, & in what maner it proceedeth from him, so it issueth forth at the other end, & commeth to our eares; even so the passion proceedeth from the heart, & is blowne about the bodie, face, eies, hands, voice, & so by gestures passeth into our eies, & by sounds into our eares: & as it is qualified, so it worketh in us. (174)

Wright presents the effects of oratory not as a singular event, but as a process that “worketh” upon both speaker and audience. The blowing that transfers emotion from the orator onto the listener is a complete body experience: the message is blown every part of the body to achieve its effects. This transformative power of oratory is precisely what concerned anti-theatrical Puritans and other critics of the theater in the period; nevertheless, it was a power that was tremendously compelling to poets, readers, and theatergoers. The unmediated performance of actors onstage allowed writers—and audiences—to draw upon the potentially transformative power of emotive transference.

Through this process of movement between actor and spectator, the actor could convey in performance what could only be alluded to on the page: the creation of *enargeia*. In the *Institutio*

¹⁸ For more on imprinting, see Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) and Jacqueline Miller, “The Passion Signified,” 412. See too Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Oratoria, Quintilian describes *enargeia* as “vivid illustration” that “thrusts itself upon our notice.” Quintilian emphasizes the importance of *enargeia* for juridical effectiveness:

For oratory fails of its full effect, and does not assert itself as it should, if its appeal is merely to the *hearing*, and if the judge merely feels that the facts on which he has to give his decision are being narrated to him, and not displayed in their living truth to the eyes of the mind.¹⁹

The acting process, when successful, enacts both the transference and legibility of emotion, impressed upon the audience and other actors onstage. In doing so, the actor presents his emotional case to the audience who would determine the efficacy of the performance based in large part on the production of *enargeia*. Like Wright, Quintilian uses metaphors of pressing and impression to convey the importance of exhibited emotion in rhetorical performance. He describes the orator’s performance as a transaction during which the orator exhibits himself and his emotions for audience members: “From such impressions arises...*illumination* and *actuality*, which makes us seem not so much to narrate as to exhibit the actual scene, while our emotions will be no less actively stirred than if we were present at the actual occurrence” (6.2.32). This focus on the transference of passions dominated theories of oratory and performance through the eighteenth century. As Joseph Roach observes, “[The actor’s] passions, irradiating the bodies of spectators through their eyes and ears, could literally transfer the contents of his heart to theirs, altering their moral natures.”²⁰ Quintilian acknowledges the power of an orator’s persuasive rhetoric in actual performance conditions; however, he also recommends specific gestures that make the performance of emotion intelligible to audiences.

¹⁹ *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, ed. and trans. H.E. Butler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 8.3.61-62.

²⁰ *The Player’s Passion*, 26-27.

Bulwer's Gestural Codification

Early modern rhetoricians privileged the importance of *enargeia* in performance, but they also acknowledged the limits of language as a corrupted form of postlapsarian communication. As a result, some early modern treatises positioned the movements of the face and body as even more important than language. Nowhere is the impulse to categorize and assess the uses of gestures of grief and despair more apparent than in the work of John Bulwer, who published his *Chironomia* and *Chirolugia* in the same volume in 1644. In his systematization of the body's gestures, Bulwer hoped to recover a more precise semiotics of emotion than what written and spoken language allowed. In doing so Bulwer drew upon and continued the work of Francis Bacon, Levinas Lemnius, and other writers who wanted to propose an alternative to imperfect systems of language-based communication. According to Bulwer, "words are conventional, slow, and often misleading," but the signs made by the hands are "part of the unalterable laws and institutes of nature."²¹ The publication of Bulwer's works postdates the plays I examine in this chapter, but his theorization and classification of gestures represents an important codification of the semiotics of dissatisfaction that were embodied and performed throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Bulwer, like Wright, borrows from classical categories of rhetoric and performance in order to demonstrate the range of actions that the hands can perform without language. The title page of *Chironomia* emblemizes Bulwer's debt to classical sources and emphasizes the practical performative applications of his theories:

²¹ *Chirolugia, or, The naturall language of the hand* (London: Thomas Harper, 1644), 2.

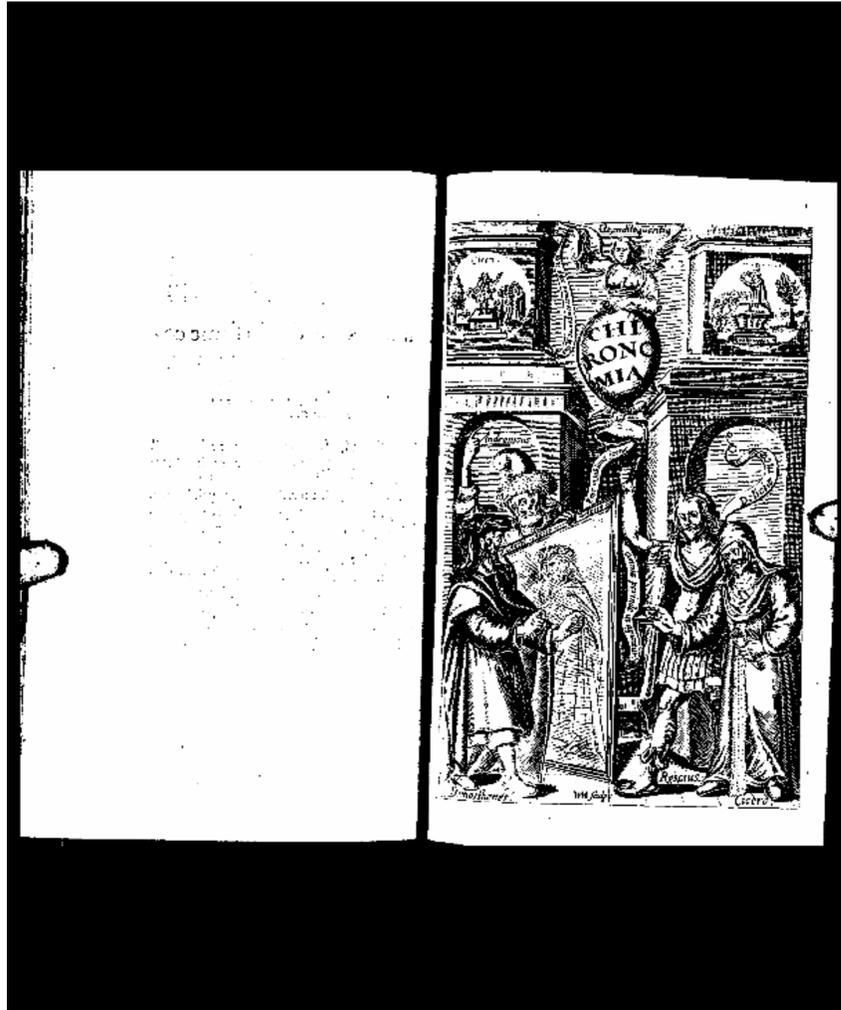


Figure 7. Frontispiece to John Bulwer's *Chironomia*, from *Chirologia, or, The naturall language of the hand* (London: Thomas Harper, 1644). *Source*: Early English Books Online.

In the foreground of the illustration, four men stand in various dramatic postures: Demosthenes watches himself as he acts before a mirror, the frame of which is inscribed several times with the word *Actio*; the Roman dramatist Lucius Livius Andronicus holds the mirror with one hand and points to heaven with the other; the Roman actor Roscius points his thumb upward; and Cicero holds a scroll in one hand and gestures with his index finger and thumb with the other. With this

title page, Bulwer signals that his “Manuall Rhetoricke” borrows its precedents from classical rhetoric and the acting techniques that were grounded in that tradition.

Bulwer returns to the theatrical components of his gestural system throughout each volume. In his introduction to *Chirologia*, Bulwer asserts that the gestures he classifies can be of use in the schools, in the courts, and in the churches, but he is especially interested in theatrical performance. For Bulwer, the body itself is a container that holds “two Amphitheatres”: “Two Amphitheatres there are in the Body...to wit, the Hand and the Head.”²² Bulwer’s privileging of the hand and head borrows from and enhances Aristotle’s description of these body parts as powerful instruments of meaning.²³ The body is a theater, with the head and hands having their own distinct performative characteristics and abilities; in addition, though, the body performs and is capable of absorbing theatrical performance.

Bulwer’s exhaustive list of gestures is meant to offer actors and orators a supply that is so copious that it both surpasses and improves upon linguistic expression. Early in his *Chirologia*, Bulwer claims that his list of hand gestures is so comprehensive that “if their total summe could be cast up, they would seeme to exceed the numericall store of words, and the flowery amplifications of Rhetoricall phrases.”²⁴ Many of the gestures have legal or ecclesiastical sources including gestures that sue, reprove, repent, witness, accuse, confess, lament, complain, despair, revenge, and appeal.²⁵

²² “To the Candid and Ingenious Reader,” page unnumbered, in *Chirologia*.

²³ Jonathan Goldberg, *Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 86.

²⁴ *Chirologia*, 8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 7-9.

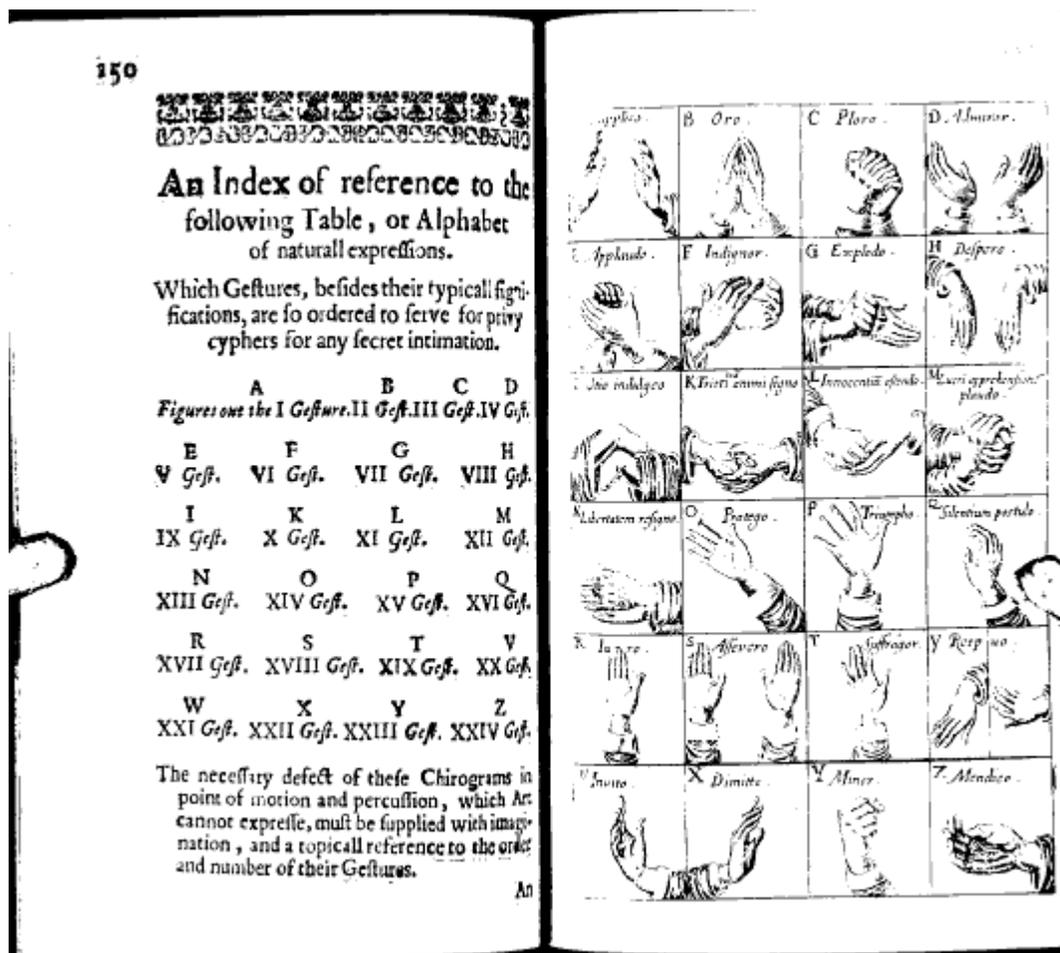


Figure 8. From Bulwer's *Chirologia: Or the Naturall Language of the Hand*

Bulwer's system confirms the importance of using gestures not only to announce and signify various emotions, but also the power of bodily gestures to release and transfer emotion into the world. Gestures and facial expressions provide a conduit between the actor/orator and the audience; both onstage and off, the body does "disclose the disposition and inclination of the minde in generall."²⁶

²⁶ Ibid., "To the Candid and Ingenious Reader," page unnumbered.

Throughout the sixteenth century, Erasmus, Angel Day, and other rhetoricians relied on examples from the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations to bolster their claims for a proper rhetoric of dissatisfaction in letter-writing. John Bulwer continues this tradition of citation in his descriptions of gestures of the hand. Throughout both volumes, he cites numerous examples of complaint from the Hebrew Bible as evidence that gestures of despair are effective, wide-ranging, and powerful in large part because of their foundations in divine communication.²⁷ Bulwer describes hands raised and spread toward heaven as a universal signifier of prayer, but also a sign of “bitter anguish of Minde... Thus we acknowledge our offenses, aske mercy, beg reliefe, pay our vowes, imprecate, complain, submit, invoke, and are suppliant.”²⁸ Later, Bulwer describes the gestures of “anguish and affliction” that belong to Jeremiah and Zion, who “spreadeth forth her hands, and there is none to comfort her.”²⁹ In referring to Jeremiah’s lament, Bulwer alludes not only to the prophet’s sorrow, but also his rage at the state of affairs in Israel, signaling the complex duality of dissatisfaction.

Bulwer continues this cumulative approach to gestures of despair and complaint, always emphasizing the double edge of dissatisfaction: the need of the complainant to both express sorrow and to proclaim the injustice of his or her case. He observes that “Fainting and Dejected

²⁷ Bulwer refers to “scripture” as “that most sacred Spring of pregnant Metaphors.” *Chirologia*, 13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

Hands” signify “utter despair” and refers to a passage in Jeremiah as evidence of the use of this gesture.³⁰ Bulwer describes the hands as they are applied

passionately unto the head as a signe of anguish, sorrow, grieffe, impatiencie, and lamentation, used also by those who accuse or justifie themselves. The recourse and offer of nature in this relieving expression of the Hand, makes good the Adage, *Ubi dolor, ibi digitus*.³¹

Even without words, this gesture of anguish is a “relieving expression.” With the Latin phrase *Ubi dolor, ibi digitus*—where the pain is, there the finger will be—Bulwer identifies the moment at which the speaker can literally point to his or her own distress. He also foregrounds the doubleness of the gesture as one that conveys both sorrow and a sense of injustice.

Bulwer’s “Manuall Rhetoricke” relied on the “natural” language of the hand and head as an idealized mode of communication. Even so, the gestures he described were “artificial” because they were part of a system that had precedents in other texts and traditions.³² This “artificiality” was intelligible to early modern audiences because it was inherited, practiced, and imbued with the power of divine precedents. Bulwer’s codification of gestures includes an entire spectrum of human emotions, but his numerous descriptions of gestures of despair, coupled with their classical and Christian precedents, create a varied and interconnected semiotics of dissatisfaction for a range of performance conditions.

Outbidding Hecuba

³⁰ Jer 6.24: “We have heard news of them, our hands fall helpless; anguish has taken hold of us, pain as of a woman in labor.” *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, New Revised Standard Version* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³¹ *Chirologia*, 84.

³² Bulwer’s title page of *Chirologia* uses both “natural” and “artificial,” but Bulwer fluctuates between these terms many times throughout his treatise.

Just as Wright and Bulwer looked to classical rhetoric in order to categorize the various emotional effects of bodily gesture, so too did characters in early modern dramatic texts look to figures of distress from classical and Christian texts to help them gauge and understand the extremity of their dissatisfaction. In their hasty division of kingdoms, murder of children, invocations to the gods, and the desire for justice through revenge, the playtexts that I discuss here repeatedly borrow from the rhetoric and plot structures of Senecan tragedies, especially *Thyestes*, *The Trojan Women*, and *Medea*. Hecuba is a figure replete with afflictions, a figure capable of teaching other complainants about their own suffering.³³ In the varied tellings of her narrative, Hecuba presents her griefs as so profound that they cannot be exceeded; as she says in Seneca's *Trojan Women*, "Whatever griefs you weep, you will weep for mine. Individuals bear just their own disasters, but I bear everyone's. Every death touches me; anyone who is wretched touches Hecuba" (5.160-162).³⁴ Hecuba's lamentations are exhaustive purgations of emotion that both afflict and inspire other complainants to reflect upon their own distress. This potential for emotional transference is palpable in several Shakespearean texts. When Hamlet watches the emotional outpouring of the Player as he meditates on Hecuba's woes, he is astonished by the Player's ability to convey an emotion that doesn't originate in his own life circumstances (2.2.526-582). Lucrece, too, is deeply affected by Hecuba's outpouring of grief. In a moment of

³³ Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare*, 166.

³⁴ In *Hercules, Trojan Women, Phoenician, Medea, Phaedra*, ed. and trans. John G. Fitch (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). For an early modern translation, see Jasper Heywood's *The sixt tragedie of the most graue and prudent author Lucius, Anneus, Seneca, entituled Troas* (London: Richard Tottyl, 1559). Hecuba is a touchstone against which early modern complainants—including Videna from *Gorboduc*, Hieronimo from *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hamlet, and Constance from *King John* can gauge their own distress. In one passage from *Gorboduc*, the title character observes that Hecuba is "the woeful'st wretch / That ever lived to make a mirror of" (3.1.14-15). *Drama of the English Renaissance*, ed. Russell A. Fraser and Norman Rabkin (New York: Macmillan, 1976).

ekphrastic reverie in *The Rape of Lucrece*, Lucrece meditates upon—and derives strength from—the poignant depiction of Hecuba as she weeps over the dead body of Priam (1443-1498).

Hecuba's lament provides a model in which lamentation turns into outrage, protestation, and revenge, not only for early modern playwrights but for all students who went through the Tudor school system. Lynn Enterline has observed that “in humanist educational training, the voice of Ovid's suffering Hecuba became a ‘mirror’ or ‘example’ for pupils to imitate—a lesson for young men learning to develop their own style.”³⁵ Hecuba enacts the most extreme rituals of lamentation: she pulls at her “hoary hair,” beats her breast, weeps inconsolably, and invites the other Trojan women to do the same. Because her gestures of despair are so extreme, Hecuba's symptoms of distress are easy to identify, and she becomes a useful pedagogical figure for translation, interpretation, and performance in the Tudor schoolroom. Hecuba's rage against the injustices that have destroyed her family also fuels her revenge, which begins as speech and is completed as violent action.

In Book 13 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Hecuba is so afflicted with grief after the fall of Troy that she loses her qualities of personhood: “The poor wife of Priam after all else lost her human form and with strange barking affrighted the alien air where the long Hellespont narrows to a strait.”³⁶ The Trojan women board the ship that will take them from the burning, fallen city. Hecuba is the last to board because she has to leave locks of her hair on the tomb of her dead son Hector. Hecuba's lamentation points to the very limits of subjectivity in what her body is capable

³⁵ Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare*, 25-26.

³⁶ *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 13.404-407.

of bearing. Ovid carefully describes the movements and words that make Hecuba intelligible to the Trojan women and to the reader. After she sees the death of her daughter Polyxena, Hecuba

pours her tears into her daughter's wound, covers her face with kisses, and beats the breasts that have endured so many bows. Then sweeping her white hair in the clotted blood and tearing her breast, this and much more she cried: 'O child, your mother's last cause for grief—for what is left me—my child, low you lie, and I see your wound, my wound. (13.491-495)

When Hecuba draws a relationship between her daughter's physical wound and her own mourning, it is a poignant moment that allows Hecuba to demonstrate the power of emotional transfer that Wright so eloquently describes. Central to this transference of emotion is Hecuba's physical enactment of the actual wound in her language, and the parallel syntax—your wound, my wound—that creates a relational structure between the wounds.

Hecuba provides the gestures that make grief intelligible, embodying the pivotal moment at which lamentation turns into a rage that demands a response from the transgressor or some form of action from the complainant. In the *Metamorphoses*, in the moment when Hecuba believes that she cannot bear another loss, she sees the body of her dead son Polydorus wash up on shore: “now she gazed upon the features of her son as he lay there in death, now on his wounds, but mostly on his wounds, arming herself and heaping up her rage” (13.543-544). Hecuba's wrath “mingles” with her grief, and this emotional mingling allows her to exact revenge on Polymestor, the man who brutally has murdered her son. After revenge, though, survival as a human is impossible for Hecuba. In Ovid's rendering of the story, she becomes the dog that was foreshadowed in her “strange barking” earlier in the narrative. Hecuba's devolution emblemizes the impossibility of survival after revenge has been exacted, and this is crucial to the playtexts of the period. It suggests, too, that as long as a character is complaining, as long as

lament is possible and intelligible, it can be a site at which the character is still a subject of language.

Hecuba's gestures and words of abject misery draw from ancient Roman rituals of mourning, prescribed performances of lamentation that were absorbed by early Christianity and perpetuated in England until the Reformation. These gestures of lamentation carried a special charge on the early modern stage, as they had been recently critiqued and suppressed by the English church as inappropriate vestiges of Catholic ritual and excessive emotion.³⁷ When women pulled at their hair, threw themselves to the ground, and invoked the names of gods and spirits to assist them in their lamentations, women were intelligible—and explicitly gendered—figures whose suffering provided some relief to mourning subjects. On the early modern stage, the rituals of lamentation continued in full force, whether or not the English church critiqued them or recommended their abandonment entirely.

Hecuba's gestures of despair appear in numerous early modern plays, even when the text does not explicitly allude to Hecuba. In Act 3 Scene 1 of *King John*, Constance, who already fears the worst for her son Arthur, looks to Salisbury and describes his gestures before he has said a word about her son's condition:

What dost thou mean by shaking of thy head?
 Why dost thou look so sadly on my son?
 What means that hand upon that breast of thine?
 Why holds thine eye that lamentable rheum,
 Like a proud river peering o'er his bounds?
 Be these sad signs confirmers of thy words? (2.2.19-24)

³⁷ Goodland, "Obsequious Laments," 35. Goodland writes: "On the one hand, sorrow was considered natural, an expected, even obligatory response to the loss of a loved one. On the other hand, sorrow could be excessive, self-indulgent, and construed as contrary to faith because it was believed to stem from doubt about the resurrection" (37).

In this passage, Constance asks if Salisbury's "signs" are "confirmers of his words," but in this context, the gestures anticipate, rather than follow his words, literally strengthening the import of the message.³⁸ The catalog of rhetorical questions becomes more ominous when Salisbury does not announce his message right away. With her questions, Constance delays the delivery of a message that she knows will destroy her; in doing so, she, along with the audience, fills in the dramatic gap between Salisbury's gestures and words. This is an example of a moment in which a character uses repetitive rhetorical devices so that the audience can observe, infer, and judge the actions that have taken place offstage.³⁹

Characters onstage carefully examine the gestures of others in order to heighten the dramatic tension in a scene. In their rubrication of complainants' distressed bodies, characters can provide observations about the damage that excess emotion does to the complainant's body. Later, when Constance is utterly desolate with grief over Arthur's disappearance, she approaches King Philip with a deathlike appearance. King Philip comments on Constance's physical symptoms of grief before she utters her Job-like complaint:⁴⁰

Look who comes here! A grave unto a soul,
Holding th' eternal spirit of her will,
In the vile prison of afflicted breath. (3.4.17-19)

In this passage, Constance's complaint in words comes second to her distressed appearance. She seems more dead than alive with her despair, and King Philip's words, coupled with Constance's

³⁸ This usage of "confirmer" in *King John* is the first in English, and its usage in the early modern period connotes a sense of strengthening, settling, and establishing firmly. *OED*, s.v. "confirmer," n.

³⁹ For more on the specific elements of this convention, see Hutson, "Forensic Aspects of Mimesis."

⁴⁰ Constance, in her speech against redress, echoes Job when she says: "Arise forth from the couch of lasting night" (3.4.27). Job says, "Though I hope, yet the grave shall be mine house, and I shall make my bed in the dark" (Jb 17.13). *King John*, ed. L.A. Beaurline (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 119n27.

embodiment of a walking corpse, “confirm” her physical distress. Constance finds intelligibility through the very gestures of extreme distress that Bulwer codified in *Chironomia* and *Chirolugia*. King Philip tries to quiet Constance (“O fair affliction, peace!” [3.4.37]), but she refuses to quiet herself: “No, no, I will not, having breath to cry./O, that my tongue were in the thunder’s mouth!/Then with a passion would I shake the world...” (3.4.37-39). Constance wishes that her misery could extend beyond her body onto her environment, a sign of lament as old—and as intelligible—as Hecuba’s.

Whenever complainants rail against injustices onstage, other characters try, usually unsuccessfully, to set limits on their complaints. Pandolph, recognizing the apparent limitlessness of Constance’s grief, tries to characterize her as unintelligible in order to minimize the damage of her speech. To subdue her, he says, “Lady, you utter madness, and not sorrow” (3.4.43). When she continues to wail against the fate of her son, Pandolph suggests that her perspective has been damaged by madness, and that she holds “too heinous a respect of grief” (3.4.90). Constance insists that she is sane:

I am not mad: this hair I tear is mine;
 My name is Constance; I was Geoffrey’s wife;
 Young Arthur is my son; and he is lost.
 I am not mad; I would to God I were,
 For then ‘tis like I should forget myself. (3.4.45-49)

King Philip misinterprets Constance’s deathlike visage and excessive rantings as signs of insanity, and Pandolph tries to restrain Constance’s speech because he knows that she suspects foul play.⁴¹ Even as Constance’s emotional excess is dangerous to the characters onstage, it is a

⁴¹ Juliet Dusinberre offers an alternate interpretation of this tension, observing that up through the end of Act 3, “the dramatic action is dominated by the women characters, and this is a cause of extreme embarrassment to the men on stage.” “King John and Embarrassing Women.” *Shakespeare Survey* 42 (1990): 37-52, 40.

clear marker for the atrocious acts that are planned against her son. Audience members would have understood this irony, even if King Philip does not. Constance's gestures and repetitive language make her complaint intelligible to spectators as well as characters *because* they are inherited from antiquity and practiced through the late medieval period.⁴² Although Paul Menzer has argued that weeping and ranting on the early modern stage were often understood by audiences as behavior that is "fraudulent, possibly deranged, and certainly at risk,"⁴³ complainants resist this categorization with their ceaseless utterance of distress and their ability to articulate their own symptoms of dissatisfaction.

On the early modern stage, characters continually test the limits of intelligible behavior, staging scenes of complaint that necessarily fuse—or shatter—the connection between the gestures of the body and the dissatisfaction of the voice. *Titus Andronicus* represents the apotheosis of Shakespeare's engagement with complaining bodies, privileging gesture as the most powerful of human expressions. Titus and Lavinia, both disabled and traumatized by the loss of their hands (and, in Lavinia's case, the loss of her virginity and tongue), find a way to gesture their grief, even if words fail them. The complaints of Titus and Lavinia are characterized as in excess of what their mutilated bodies can contain; as Titus observes, even the beating of Lavinia's heart exceeds reasonable limits, presenting itself as further evidence of

⁴²For more on the shift from medieval to post-Reformation forms of lamentation, see Goodland, "Obsequious Laments."

⁴³ Menzer, "The Actor's Inhibition," 86. Menzer continues: "passionate exhibition...risks more than just authenticity. The external manifestation of interior events falls within a range of habits condemned as insalubrious, illegible, and possibly insane."

Lavinia's physical distress.⁴⁴ Titus' nephew worries that Lavinia's "extremity of griefs" will make Lavinia as mad as Hecuba of Troy (4.1.19). Titus understands the generative qualities of Lavinia's griefs, and his words to his daughter are a stubborn insistence of the legitimacy of her complaining body:

Speechless complainer, I will learn thy thought.
 In thy dumb action will I be as perfect
 As begging hermits in their holy prayers.
 Thou shalt not sigh, nor hold thy stumps to heaven,
 Nor wink, nor nod, nor kneel, nor make a sign,
 But I of these will wrest an alphabet
 And by still practice learn to know thy meaning. (3.2.39-45)

In his "wresting," Titus carefully observes and classifies Lavinia's every gesture. Appropriately, the verb "wrest" alludes to the violence with which Titus will twist meaning from Lavinia's wordlessness. It also provides a subtle pun on the origin of the word "wrest," which comes from "wrist."⁴⁵ This reliance on Lavinia's "wrists" for "wrested" meaning suggests that even with her amputations, Lavinia's body has the ability to connote powerful messages to her avenging father. Without her hands, Lavinia "writes" her story of transgression in the dirt, thus justifying the revenge that ensues in the play.⁴⁶ Lavinia eventually does, as Titus suggests, "teach" her father the alphabet of her misery, and in doing so remains a subject of language, an emblem of its shortcomings, and a catalyst for violent revenge.

The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine

⁴⁴ Lavinia's heart "blots with outrageous beating" (3.2.13). *OED*, s.v. "outrageous." In doing so, its rhythm pushes beyond itself to perform its own kind of communication.

⁴⁵ *OED*, s.v. "wrest," v.

⁴⁶ For more on the meaning of hands, both when they are attached to, and amputated from, bodies in *Titus Andronicus*, see Katherine Rowe's *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency, Renaissance to Modern* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

The extreme pathos of Lavinia's "speechless complaining" catalyzes Titus into remembering his responsibility as a father and is crucial to the development of Titus's revenge plot. In other tragedies of the period, however, complaint variously functions aside from—or in spite of—the plot's developments. In the case of the anonymously authored *Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine*, complaints by several characters amplify its use as an emotional purgative and suggest that complaint has value beyond the life of the complainer. *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine* is by no means the most canonical of Elizabethan playtexts, but in its exploration of the private decisions of public figures, it borrows significant rhetorical and formal elements from *The Mirror for Magistrates* and other texts in the *de casibus* tradition. *Locrine* stages four series of complaints: from Brutus, the dying king; Humber, the Scythian king-in-exile, Elstred, whose complaint is matched and then supplanted by that of Locrine; and Gwendolyn, spurned wife of Locrine. These complaints take up an inordinate amount of space in the play, allowing actors to practice, and audiences to experience complaint that sets itself no limits. In doing so, *Locrine* stages excess emotion as a generative, and active, phenomenon.

The premise of *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine* is similar to that of *King Lear*:⁴⁷ the play opens with a dying Brutus who divides his kingdom between Locrine, who will be crowned king after his father's death; Camber, who will inherit the south of England; and Albanact, who will inherit the north. After lengthy meditations on his past greatness and the division of the kingdom, Brutus begs his advisors to carefully guide his sons in their governance: "favour these

⁴⁷ Jane Lytton Gooch links Gorbuduc, Locrine, and Lear as kings who divide their kingdoms too early. Gooch also observes that Locrine's dumb shows and long speeches, probably written between 1585 and 1594, have a lot in common with other dramas performed at the Inns of Court, including *Gorbuduc* (1561), *Jocasta* (1566), *Gismund of Salerne* (1568), and *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (1587). *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine: A Critical Edition*, ed. Jane Lytton Gooch (NY: Garland Publishing, 1981), 24, 5.

orphans, lords,/And shield them from the dangers of their foes” (1.2.143-144).⁴⁸ Throughout the first scene of the play, Brutus’ laments are contested by his counselors, thus staging a situation in which his suffering, and his distrust of what will happen after his death, provide a dramatic foreshadowing of future tragedies. In one of his brief soliloquies, Brutus meditates on—and initially resists—the power of death:

Behold, your Brutus draweth nigh his end,
And I must leave you, though against my will.
My sinews shrunk, my numbed senses fail,
A chilling cold possesseth all my bones;
Black ugly Death, with visage pale and wan,
Presents himself before my dazzled eyes,
And with his dart prepared is to strike. (1.2.6-11)

In his lament, Brutus reveals his contempt for “crooked age” (1.2.15) and describes his body as “rent and cloven to the very roots” (1.2.28). He asks his counselors to “behold” each of his physical deficits. Brutus needs to make peace with the fact of his death; his metaphysical struggle, however, is unpalatable, and to some extent unintelligible, to his counselors. In the *Mirror for Magistrates*, Brutus peacefully resigns himself to his fate,⁴⁹ but in this passage from *Lochrine*, Brutus struggles against the fact of his imminent death and expresses his rage against its inevitability.

⁴⁸ All quotations from *The Lamentable Tragedy of Lochrine* come from Gooch’s *The Lamentable Tragedy of Lochrine: A Critical Edition*.

⁴⁹ Brutus’ final lines from the *Mirror for Magistrates* emphasize his accomplishments as a leader and his love for his counselors and sons. He finishes with the following: “Farewell my frendes, my children and my lande,/And farewell all my subjects, farewell breathe,/Farewell ten thousand tymes, and welcome deathe.” From *The first parte of the Mirour for magistrates containing the falles of the first infortunate princes of this lande* (London: Thomas Marshe, 1574), Fol. 13v.

Brutus frames his complaint as a necessary part of his preparation for death;⁵⁰ even so, his counselors misinterpret his complaints as useless. After Brutus finishes speaking, his counselor Assaracus says, “worthy lord, since there’s no way but one,/Cease your laments, and leave your grievous moan” (1.2.41-42). Corineus, another valued counselor, echoes Assaracus’ sentiment, telling Brutus to “leave these sad laments” (1.2.61). These rebukes from Brutus’s counselors tap into a general anxiety about complaining onstage. Consider when, in Seneca’s *Trojan Women*, Ulysses tells Andromache to stop crying, even as he takes her son Astyanax to be sacrificed: “Break off your weeping, now, mother; great grief sets itself no limits” (5.786-787). At the end of the scene, after Andromache insistently continues her complaint against the fate of her son, Ulysses reiterates his reproof in a command to his fellow soldiers: “There is no limit to weeping...quickly, carry off this delay to the Argive fleet” (5.812-813). In *Lochrine*, Brutus’s advisers castigate him for his lamentation, but their critique is a demonstration of the limits of their understanding. Brutus is emphatic in his response to Corineus:

Nay, Corineus, you mistake my mind
 In construing wrong the cause of my complaints...
 A greater care torments my very bones,
 And makes me tremble at the thought of it,
 And in you, lordings, doth the substance lie. (1.2.64-65, 68-70)

Brutus’ advisors mean to placate him in his final moments; instead, they reveal their lack of foresight and discover that they are the cause of his distress. They misread Brutus’s complaints

⁵⁰ Brutus’s struggle, moment of awareness, and final acceptance are prescribed stages of the *ars moriendi*, or the art of dying well that would have been familiar to late medieval and early modern audiences. See David W. Atkinson, “The English *Ars Moriendi*: Its Protestant Transformation.” *Renaissance and Reformation* 6.18 (1982), 1-10 and M.A. Overell, “The Reformation of Death in Italy and England, circa 1550.” *Renaissance and Reformation* 23.4 (1999): 5-21.

in this scene, and the swiftness with which, after Brutus' death, the weakened kingdom will collapse.

Throughout *Lochrine*, characters who want to suppress the complaint's emotive charge figure it as useless. Later in the play, when Gwendolyn is outraged by Lochrine's adulterous relationship with Elstred, she engages in a lengthy complaint, and her brother, Thrasimachus, critiques the uselessness of her utterance. He dismisses her lamentations as "bootless" (5.3.25) and insists that only warlike action can "extinguish [their] complaints" (5.3.28).⁵¹ Thrasimachus' masterful use of the "marching figure"⁵² in his speech establishes logical consequences between action and success, and convinces Gwendolyn that her words of complaint are useless without actual revenge. In doing so, he affirms an economy common to many tragedies of the period: revenge is the only remedy that will satisfy the dissatisfaction of wronged victims. Gwendolyn's reply diminishes the power of the words that only moments earlier had provided her with a voice for her distress: "Then henceforth farewell womanish complaints,/All childish pity henceforth then farewell!" (5.3.42-43). Thrasimachus attempts to devalue the power of complaint by describing it as "womanish"; even so, *Lochrine* is a play that repeatedly features complaints as generative purgations, and forms of action, in other parts of the play.⁵³

⁵¹ This reproof and call to action is a common rhetorical approach to complaint. In *Gorboduc*, Philander says to Gorboduc: "Beware, O King, the greatest harm of all,/Lest by your wailful plaints your hastened death/Yield larger room unto their growing rage/..." (3.1.126-128).

⁵² For more on the "marching figure," see George Puttenham, *The arte of English poesie Contriued into three bookes: the first of poets and poesie, the second of proportion, the third of ornament* (London: Richard Field, 1589), 3.19.

⁵³ Complainants are frequently chastised for their ceaseless complaints, and complainants often turn this critique against their own speech. Consider when, in *The Rape of Lucrece*, Lucrece decides that ending her life is the only productive resolution to her defilement:

'In vain I rail at opportunity,

Humber's Excess

Lochrine stages resistance to the complaints of Brutus and Gwendolyn, but it differently stages Humber's complaints as repetitive, excessively emotional demonstrations of grief that do not move the play's plot forward, but instead punctuate it. Humber functions as an extraordinary emblem of grief in this play: even though he is not the title character, he takes up a disproportionate time complaining onstage.⁵⁴ Humber's complaint engages with all of the tropes and formulae of complaint: Humber appeals to the power of the gods and wishes for a meteorological extension of his own grief; he asks unanswerable rhetorical questions to amplify his despair; and his laments easily turn into juridical accusations that demands redress, even if he does not receive it.⁵⁵ Humber may not advance the plot of *Lochrine*, but the excesses of his body and language ensure that his complaint will have a transformative emotional effect on the audience.

Humber, a Scythian king, leads his soldiers against the fractured English army after the death of Brutus. The Scythians are easily defeated, however, and afterwards Humber is

At Time, at Tarquin, and uncheerful night;
 In vain I cavil with mine infamy,
 In vain I spurn at my confirmed despite:
 This helpless smoke of words doth me no right.
 The remedy indeed to do me good
 Is to let forth my foul defiled blood. (1023-1029)

⁵⁴ Baldwin Maxwell dismissively observes Humber's complaints as errors. "All told, the curses and laments uttered by Humber in the three scenes in which he appears after his defeat amount to 128 lines, lines abounding in repetitious thoughts and phrases. As there are (omitting the dumb shows and their explanations) fewer than 2,000 lines in the entire play, it is obvious that the dramatist lost all sense of time, proportion, and importance in making this addition to his sources, or that Humber's original laments have been first divided and then elaborated..." *Studies in the Shakespeare Apocrypha* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1956), 50.

⁵⁵ Humber stages at least three major complaints in *Lochrine*. For a more thorough treatment of gestures of lamentation and their significations in *Lochrine* and other works, see Clemen, *English Tragedy before Shakespeare*.

mysteriously left in the wilderness. This outcome is a marked departure from Humber's fate in *The Mirror for Magistrates*. In his complaint poem in the 1574 edition, Humber dies by immediately drowning after the battle with Lochrine. As he is quickly surrounded by enemy forces, he readily accepts his fate:

So with my boates beset poore Humber I
 With no refuge: my werye armes did ake:
 My breath was short: I had no powre to crye,
 Or place to stand while I my plaint might make:
 The water cold made all my joyntes to shake:
 My hart did beate with sorrow, grieve and paine:
 And downe my cheekes, salt teares they gusht amaine. (16v)

Humber makes a critical decision to end his life in this stanza because he does not want to be a prisoner of war to the English forces, but also because his ability to complain has been compromised. Thrasimachus tries to feminize complaint in order to diminish its importance for Gwendolyn in *The Lamentable Tragedy of Lochrine*, but in this stanza from *The Mirror for Magistrates*, Humber suggests that life without the ability to express complaint would be “bootless.” In the final stanzas of Humber's complaint in the *Mirror*, he describes his last moments as he drowns in the river that will be named after him:

With that I clapt my quavering hands abrode,
 And held them up to heaven, and thus I saide:
 O Gods that know the paines that I have bode,
 And just revengment of my rashnes paide,
 And of the death of Albanacte betraide
 By mee and mine: I yelde my life therefore,
 Content to dye, and never grieve yee more. (16v)

Humber's “clapt” hands resemble the gestures of despair that Bulwer describes in his *Chironomia*. Humber's quick suicide in *The Mirror* instantly conflates the line between his drowning body and the actual river, which takes his name after his death.

In the *Mirror for Magistrates*, Humber quickly drowns himself instead of surrendering to the English, but in *The Lamentable Tragedy of Lochrine*, Humber exists as barely human, like a Tantalus above ground, for seven years.⁵⁶ Why, if he is no longer necessary to the plot, does he repeatedly appear in emotional and physical distress, wailing against the events that have led to his demise? Humber, like Constance and Hecuba, lingers as a ghost-like figure—not quite dead, but barely alive on the margins of civilization. In his complaint, Humber curses his abject state and his utter deprivation of his former powers. He approaches the wilderness with his “curses” and his “condemning voice:”

Where may I find some desert wilderness,
Where I may breathe out curses as I would,
And scare the earth with my condemning voice;
Where every echo’s repercussion
May help me to bewail mine overthrow,
And aid me in my sorrowful laments? (3.7.1-6)

In his feverish search for “some desert wilderness,” Humber’s complaint echoes Hecuba’s when, in the final lines of Seneca’s *Trojan Women*, she asks, “Where shall I take my tears? Where shall I spew out this obstacle to an old woman’s death? For my whole world, or for myself?” (5.1168-1171). Humber, like Hecuba, wants to amplify his complaints, not diminish them. He hopes for a complaint so voluble that it “scare[s] the earth” in a place where “echo’s repercussion/May help [him] bewail [his] overthrow.” In the sixteenth century, “repercussion” had very physical connotations, usually alluding to the act of shaking, striking, or dashing, as well as the

⁵⁶ In 4.4., Lochrine says, “Seven years hath aged Corineus lived/To Lochrine’s grief and fair Estrilda’s woe[.]” (1-2). Humber’s final complaint comes in 4.5, after Lochrine’s announcement about the passage of time.

reverberation of sound.⁵⁷ Humber wishes to amplify his complaints, not quell them, and to find their correspondences beyond his own body in the natural world.

Humber's distress is not restricted to just one scene of complaint; later, in the stage directions preceding the action in 4.3, Humber appears onstage, more abject than ever. The stage directions call for Humber to enter alone, "his hair hanging over his shoulders, his arms all bloody, and a dart in one hand" (4.3) Humber's visual manifestation of despair becomes an emblem in a play obsessed with the didacticism of emblems onstage.⁵⁸ After years of distress, alone and abandoned in the wilderness, Humber has not received a hearing for his complaints, until he receives a visitation from the ghost of Albanact, son of the now-dead Brutus and brother to the new king Lochrine. For early modern audiences, the visitation of Albanact's ghost would have resonated with visitations from ghosts in Senecan revenge tragedies of the period. The prosopopeia of Albanact from the 1574 *Mirror for Magistrates* is transformed and embodied in the figure of an actual ghost in *The Lamentable Tragedy of Lochrine*. Albanact's ghost points to the reasons for Humber's distress and provides a moral reading of Humber's suffering body:

Lo, here the gift of fell ambition,
Of usurpation and of treachery.
Lo, here the harms that wait upon all those
That do intrude themselves in others' lands
Which are not under their dominion. (4.3.89-93)⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *OED*, s.v. "repercussion," n.

⁵⁸ Like *Gorboduc* and many other tragedies, *Lochrine* stages dumb shows that emblemize what viewers will see in the act that follows. For more on this convention, see Dieter Mehl, *The Elizabethan Dumb Show: The History of a Dramatic Convention* (London: Methuen, 1965).

⁵⁹ Compare this with the similarly didactic ending of Albanact's complaint in *The Mirror*:

If thou be forayne bide within thy soyle:
That God hath given to thee and thine to holde:
Or of the feates thy elders did of olde,

To some extent, Humber becomes onstage what Bulwer had hoped for in his systematization of the body: a human emblem, a sign of despair that, even without his use of words, can signify his grief.⁶⁰ Albanact's exclamatory "Lo...Lo" urges the audience to see Humber as evidence of his transgression and as an emblematic moral message. Humber's complaint finally ends when he jumps in the river which is eventually named after him.

Like the Genius of Verulamium in Spenser's *Ruins of Time*, Humber's body functions as the source of transgression, national pride, and national geography. The play's overarching message is a xenophobic one ("Lo, here the harms that wait upon all those/That do intrude themselves in others' lands"), but in this moment of physical metamorphosis, Humber-as-outsider becomes part of the British landscape, and his melding with—and renaming of—the Humber River is an acknowledgement of the varied legends that contribute to the historiography of medieval England. Humber's transgressions, complaint, and final act of suicide, then, intersect as part of an etiology crucial to British history.

Elstred: An English Hecuba

Humber starves slowly in his "desert cave" (4.5.3) and eventually drowns in the river that will be named after him. Meanwhile, Elstred, his betrothed and now prisoner-of-war to King Lochrine, is so transported with the ecstasy of her griefs that she out-Hecubas Hecuba in her complaints. Elstred's complaint functions as a performative utterance that easily blurs the line

For God is just, injustice will not thrive:
He plagues the prowde, preserves the good alive. (17r).

⁶⁰ Joseph Roach has observed that "carefully calculated tableaux" in which actors would hold poses for indefinitely periods of time "became the signature of eighteenth-century acting style." Roach, *The Player's Passion*, 68-69.

between the political and the erotic. When Elstred takes the stage to utter her complaint, she is a former mistress to Humber and a prisoner of war to Lochrine. In a key passage, Elstred shifts her address to Hecuba, that “wretched queen of wretched Pergamus” (4.2.59), to demonstrate the urgency of her situation:

The gods that pitied thy continual grief,
Transformed thy corpse, and with thy corpse thy care;
Poor Estrild lives despairing of relief,
For friends in trouble are but few and rare.
What, said I few? Ay, few or none at all,
For cruel Death made havoc of them all...
O, soldiers, is there any misery
To be compared to Fortune’s treachery? (4.2.63-69, 74-75)

Hecuba can find consolation in the Trojan women who mourn alongside her, whereas Elstred lives with no one to witness her woes. Elstred’s articulation of distress is so profound that Lochrine, in overhearing her, is moved to love her; indeed, her complaint demonstrates what Lynn Enterline has referred to as the “unexpected erotic consequences of apostrophe.”⁶¹ Elstred claims that she is utterly alone, but in uttering her complaint in the court, she does garner an audience, and her complaint does generate sympathy from those who hear it, even if it is initially spurred by her isolation. In the *Mirror for Magistrates*, Elstred, in narrating her own story, observes the effects of her body and voice on members of the court. Her words and gestures are able “to tice all ears, and all griefes teach” (299). Each version of Elstred’s complaint demonstrates the power of her words and her gestures: In the *Mirror*, Elstred recalls her excessive tears and hand-wringing; in Lodge’s *Complaint of Elstred*, she describes the way her “careless scattered locks”⁶²

⁶¹ Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare*, 13.

⁶² Phillis, *Honoured with Pastorall Sonnets, Elegies, and Amorous Delights. Where-unto is annexed, the tragicall complaynt of Elstred* (London: John Busbie, 1593), 195.

engender pity in Lochrine; and in *The Lamentable Tragedy of Lochrine*, Elstred's complaint is so eloquent that Lochrine instantly falls in love with her.

If she have cause to weep for Humber's death,
And shed salt tears for her overthrow,
Lochrine may well bewail his proper grief;
Lochrine may move his own peculiar woe...
...I, being conqueror, live a lingering life,
and feel the force of Cupid's sudden stroke (4.2.81-84, 87-88)

There is a transitive property at work in this echo chamber of complaints: Humber's complaint and ultimate death result in Elstred's complaint; Elstred's complaint is bolstered by—and surpasses—Hecuba's complaint; and Lochrine, in witnessing Elstred's complaint, is compelled to utter his own. In this scene, Lochrine absorbs Elstred's performance of grief and it transfers itself onto him so that he cannot help but complain of his own lovesickness and his own dissatisfactions with the limits of kingship. In following Elstred's complaint with his own, Lochrine passes over the grief of Elstred, a widow who is now a prisoner of war, and soon to be his concubine, hidden away in an underground maze.⁶³ In some ways, complaint is the most competitive of rhetorical modes: no articulation of dissatisfaction is complete without a response from a witness or a counter-complaint from another complainant.⁶⁴ When Elstred completes her complaint with an apostrophic exclamation and rhetorical question, Lochrine shifts the focus to himself as he responds to her complaint with one of his own.

Richard III

⁶³ Henry II also hides his concubine Rosamond in Daniel's *Complaint of Rosamond* and Drayton's *Englands Heroicall Epistles*, which I discuss in Chapters Two and Four.

⁶⁴ For more on what Clemen refers to as the "outbidding topos," see *English Tragedy before Shakespeare*, 231.

Complaint is often presented as useless without action: Gwendolyn and her brother Thrasimachus must purge the evidence of Lochrine's scandalous love affair before the kingdom can be stable again. The play does not rely on just one treatment of complaint; however. Though Gwendolyn and Thrasimachus determine that complaint is "womanish," it is a life force for Humber, whose only sustenance for years seems to be his own complaint. Humber's death, too, proves that complaint has some generative force: Humber's drowning in the river, and its eventual renaming, ensure that the English landscape is imbued with complaint and lamentation. In *Richard III*, complaint also enacts a powerful transformation onstage. For the women who lament the loss of their family members at the hands of the tyrannous Richard, Shakespeare's playtext foregrounds performances of complaint as a complex process of both consolation and indictment. In several scenes, characters alternately attempt to suppress dissatisfaction in a brutal regime and expel their grief as a protest against that brutality. Complaint in *Richard III* is not just personal, but political: it functions as a form of emotional purgation in a repressive regime, provides evidence of Richard's tyranny, and eventually offers consolation to complainants, even if their situation cannot change.

Like *The Lamentable Tragedy of Lochrine*, *Richard III* has a rich, highly allusive engagement with texts that precede it. Shakespeare's *Richard III* is haunted by previous versions; in each new retelling of the king's narrative there is a kind of "ghosting" that presents "the identical thing they have encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context."⁶⁵ Shakespeare's *Richard III* departs from its literary antecedents, foregrounding the complaints of

⁶⁵ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 7.

women onstage instead of Richard's complaints. In the complaint poems uttered by Richard III in *The Mirror for Magistrates*⁶⁶ and Giles Fletcher's *Licia, or Poemes of Love* (1593), Richard is the primary complainant, outbidding the women's complaints that surround his, suggesting that his dissatisfactions as king hold more importance than those of mistresses and concubines. In Fletcher's poem, Richard opens as a ghost soliloquizing on his past crimes:

The stage is set, for Stately matter fitte,
 Three partes are past, which Prince-like acted were,
 To play the fourth, requires a Kingly witte,
 Els shall my muse, their muses not come nere.
 Sorrow sit downe, and helpe my muse to sing,
 For weepe he may not, that was cal'd a King. (L2r)

In these opening lines, Richard announces his status as a dramatic figure on a stage and looks for company for his weeping. Throughout the poem, his voice is uncontested as the main narrative lens through which to understand the gravity of events that unfolded during his reign. In Shakespeare's *Richard III*, however, Richard's complaints are completely replaced with the polyvocal lamentations of women mourning the loss of their husbands and children. In these lamentations, women wail against the loss of their loved ones, accuse Richard of wrongdoings, and provide evidence of their suffering. The play stages these lamentations as affective rituals that can provide consolation to mourners. Various characters also stage resistance to these lamentations and invectives, particularly those of Queen Margaret. Complaint derives its rhetorical power from its ability to transform lamentation into invective, and even revenge. I describe the lamentations of the women in *Richard III* as complaints in order to underscore the power of their doubleness of their utterances as both sorrowful and vindictive.

⁶⁶ For my treatment of Richard III's complaint in *The Mirror for Magistrates*, see Chapter One.

Earlier in this chapter I observed that the line between emotional calamity and madness is easily blurred in complaint literature, most frequently by characters who doubt or mistrust the power of complaint onstage. When, in *King John*, Constance laments her son's inevitable death, Cardinal Pandolph doubts her sanity, even as her complaint reveals that she remains sane enough to catalog her specific woes in her lamentation. Literary critics also have a tendency to downplay the sanity of those who utter dissatisfaction in heightened emotional performances. In his assessment of Queen Margaret's performance in *Richard III*, Antony Hammond observes that Margaret "is almost entirely ritual: a crazed figure of impotence brought back from the past to represent the brutal, un-Christian, Old Testament concepts of retributive justice."⁶⁷ While Queen Margaret does draw from pre-Christian rituals of invective and lamentation, her complaint is entirely methodical. Queen Margaret's litany of curses and complaints offends Richard and others onstage because she insists on emblemizing their transgressions from a war that they want to forget. As Katherine Goodland observes, "Margaret emerges mysteriously from the other side of the channel, hovering around the edges of the action like a ghost caught between the realms of the living and the dead. Bringing the weight of the dead with her, she ignites memories of past wrongs."⁶⁸ All Margaret can do is remember the losses of the war, which is why no character can bear the sound of her voice. When Buckingham watches her leave the stage in Act 1 Scene 3, he registers his horror at her utterances, saying, "My hair doth stand on end to hear her curses" (304). Margaret's series of invectives provides an example of the importance—and rhetorical power—of repetition in the complaint tradition.

⁶⁷ Introduction to *King Richard III*, ed. Antony Hammond (London: Arden, 1981), 110.

⁶⁸ "Obsequious Laments," 50.

Margaret's curses are disagreeable to everyone who hears them, but she refuses to quiet her rage, insisting that she must repeat herself. When Richard tells Margaret to stop speaking, she announces that she must catalog his crimes: "But repetition of what thou hast marred:/That will I make before I let thee go" (1.3.165-166). Margaret is not only a figure of voluminous, unstoppable invective; her curses are also cyclical, and repetitive. She asks for the patience of her audience both onstage and off when she says, "Bear with me. I am hungry for revenge,/And now I cloy me with beholding it" (4.4.61-62). Her performance of invective that "cloys" her is an indulgence, a gratification, a satisfaction for what bereaves her.⁶⁹ Margaret's desire for revenge parallels Gwendolyn's in *Lochrine*. When Gwendolyn imagines the satisfaction that she will derive from killing Sabrina, the illegitimate daughter of Lochrine and Elstred: "Find me young *Sabren*, *Lochrines* only joy,/That I may glut my mind with lukewarm blood" (5.6.99-100). The complainant's urge to "glut,"⁷⁰ or satisfy, the desire for revenge connects these women as Hecuba-like figures whose griefs are so powerful that they must be satisfied. Gwendolyn and Margaret differently articulate what will satisfy them: Gwendolyn, who still wields military and regal power, is capable of "glutting" her need for vengeance by taking Sabrina's life. Margaret, deprived of the throne, her husband, and her children, uses a surfeit of words to satisfy her desire for justice.

Richard III consistently blurs the lines between revenge and history. Though it is not a revenge play in the tradition of Marlowe and Kyd, the text does carry the elements of revenge in the rhetoric of Margaret and the other lamenting women. Margaret must speak the record of

⁶⁹ *OED*, s.v. "cloy."

⁷⁰ For the various meanings of "glut," see *OED*, s.v. "glut."

transgressions that others have committed as a memorial for those who cannot speak from the dead. To do this, she not only provides exhaustive recountings of misdeeds but also repeats litanies of rhetorical questions that accumulate dramatic power when left unanswered. Consider the syntactical repetitions in this passage, in which Queen Margaret's questions further enunciate Queen Elizabeth's suffering:

Where is thy husband now? Where be thy brothers?
 Where are thy two sons? Wherein dost thou joy?
 Who sues, and kneels, and says 'God save the Queen'?
 Where be the bending peers that flatter'd thee?
 Where be the thronging troops that follow'd thee? (4.4.92-96)

In a play that rarely demonstrates violence upon tortured and murdered bodies onstage, Margaret's accumulation of "where...where..." remains unanswered but alludes to the chilling reality: the bodies of the men and boys that she has catalogued have vanished from sight, and their absence is in part what causes Elizabeth's lamentation to be especially voluble. Throughout the play, complaining characters ask others onstage to look, behold, and witness the evidence brought against not only Richard but anyone who was a bystander to the atrocities of the War of the Roses. Margaret's "where...where" echoes the moment in Act 1 Scene 2 when Anne points to her dead husband's body as proof of Richard's "butcheries" (55-60) and repeatedly asks the pallbearers to "behold" and "see" the "pattern" of Richard's violence on Henry's body. Margaret also echoes Hieronimo's final staging of complaint in *The Spanish Tragedy* when Hieronimo reveals the body of his dead son when no other form of evidence is persuasive. After he reveals that Bel-Imperia, Lorenzo, and Balthazar are really dead, he reveals the body of his own dead son:

See here my show, look on this spectacle:
 Here lay my hope, and here my hope hath end;
 Here lay my heart, and here my heart was slain;
 Here lay my treasure, here my treasure lost;
 Here lay my bliss, and here my bliss bereft:
 But hope, heart, treasure, joy, and bliss,
 All fled, fail'd, died, yea, all decay'd with this. (4.4.89-95)

Hieronimo's emphasis on "here" at the beginning of four lines in a row functions as a directive to audience members and characters onstage. The deictic "here" emphasizes the urgency of seeing the body as evidence, and of Hieronimo's suffering. Margaret's unanswered questions—all of which are repeated by the mourning women later in the scene⁷¹—are the more haunting in a regime that hides its murdered bodies.

Margaret continues her litany against Elizabeth with a syntactical repetition that contrasts Elizabeth's former greatness with her current dejection. Margaret uses antiphonal repetition to create substitutions for what the queen once was versus what she now is:

For happy wife, a most distressed widow;
 For joyful mother, one that wails the name;
 For one being sued to, one that humbly sues;
 For Queen, a very caitiff, crown'd with care... (4.4.98-101)

Margaret establishes an arithmetic in which she substitutes Elizabeth's former greatness for her status as a now-despised queen. In doing so, she not only castigates Elizabeth for her former crimes, but identifies with her too: with each new line, the characters onstage—and audience offstage—would have heard the echoes of Margaret's own narrative of demise. Earlier in the scene, Margaret uses the same syntactical repetition to show the Duchess of York that she has no pity for her. Margaret creates an identical syntax from one line to the next, easily conflating the "Richards" that have damaged her:

⁷¹ See 4.4.140-148 for the women's use of Margaret's syntactical structures in their interrogation of Richard.

I had an Edward, till a Richard kill'd him;
 I had a husband, till a Richard kill'd him:
 Thou hadst an Edward, till a Richard kill'd him;
 Thou hadst a Richard, till a Richard kill'd him. (4.4.40-43)

In this passage, Margaret equates the crimes that have committed against her and the Duchess. Even if two different “Richards” committed the crimes against two different “Edwards,” this blurring of identities under one name provides a rhetorical accumulation that equalizes the suffering of the two women. As Margaret observes to Richard in a confrontation from earlier in the play, Richard is the “slander” of his “mother’s heavy womb” (1.2.231). The Duchess’s birthing of the evil Richard is incontrovertible proof of her wrongdoing. In Act 4, the Duchess admits the fault of her womb when she apostrophizes her lament against herself: “O my accursed womb the bed of death/A cockatrice hast thou hatched to the world” (4.1.53). The Duchess, then, is as responsible for the bloodshed that has been hidden from view as anyone else onstage.

Margaret compulsively returns to the list of transgressions that each of the “Richards” has committed. Her compulsion is contagious, and soon enough, the Duchess herself is using Margaret’s repetitive syntax. After Margaret repeats her Edward/Richard lines, the Duchess of York says: “I had a Richard too, and though didst kill him;/I had a Rutland too: thou holp’st to kill him.” Margaret continues the Duchess’s repetitions in her response, mirroring her syntax to launch a counter-accusation: “Thou hadst a Clarence too, and Richard kill’d him” (4.4.44-46). With her litany of lines that perform both anaphora and epiphora, it seems as if the Duchess has been infected by Margaret’s compulsive need for invective. This infection of words is the only weapon that the women have. The play uses words as evidence of these murders, but never

reveals the bodies as evidence onstage. The reiterations of Margaret and the Duchess function as echoes of bloody crimes that remain an unsolved problem in a corrupted regime.

Elsewhere in the play, the Duchess has resisted the power of lamentation, at least in the public view of the court: In Act 2 Scene 2, when Elizabeth enters the stage with her “hair about her ears” and wails against the death of her husband and king Edward, the Duchess says, “What means this scene of rude impatience?” (2.2.38), frustrated with Elizabeth’s inability to “bear suffering with equanimity.”⁷² Even when she realizes that Edward, who is her own son, has died, she will not give Elizabeth the pleasure of seeing her lamentation; instead, she claims that Elizabeth’s woes are nothing compared with her own (2.2.47-61). The Duchess of York competes with Elizabeth, attempting to outbid her daughter-in-law in her lament:

Thou art a widow, yet thou art a mother,
And hast the comfort of thy children left.
But death hath snatched my husband from mine arms
And plucked two crutches from my feeble hands,
Clarence and Edward. O what cause have I,
Thine being but a moiety of my moan,
To overgo thy woes, and drown thy cries? (2.2.55-61)

Elizabeth may see her situation as the worst, but the Duchess is there to remind her that it could be much worse: she could be deprived of her children, as the Duchess has been with the death of both Clarence and Edward. Just as Elstred bemoans her isolation, suggesting that it is worse than Hecuba’s grief, so too does the Duchess outbid Elizabeth. In a moment when every woman onstage has been deprived of son, husband, or father, the women must compete against one another in order to for their own lamentation to be heard and received. This outbidding continues

⁷² Hammond, *King Richard III*, 196n38.

throughout the play. In Act 4, Queen Margaret continues this convention, announcing her woes as the most severe:

If ancient sorrow be most reverend,
Give mine the benefit of seniory,
And let my griefs frown on the upper hand.
If sorrow can admit society,
Tell o'er your woes again by viewing mine. (4.4.35-39)

Margaret, like Hecuba, has survived her loved ones and now lives as an elderly woman banished from everything familiar to her. Margaret's complaint takes "seniory" over the woes of the other women, and she encourages the other women to accept her story as a model against which to compare their own. Her imperative to "Tell o'er your woes again" is both a challenge and an important educational exercise, not so unlike the exercises in *narratio* in the early modern classroom.

In some cases, the isolation that Margaret rails against is preferable to the company of other complaining women. This is especially true in Act 2, when the Duchess of York refuses to offer her pity to Queen Elizabeth, and Elizabeth assures the Duchess that she can mourn on her own. Elizabeth compares herself to a spring that can produce a superfluity of complaint:

Give me no help in lamentation.
I am not barren to bring forth complaints.
All springs reduce their currents to mine eyes,
That I, being governed by the wat'ry moon,
May send forth plenteous tears to drown the world.
Ah, for my husband, for my dear Lord Edward! (2.2.66-71).

The loss of her husband, coupled with the eventual loss of her young sons, does in some ways render Queen Elizabeth "barren"; even so, her ability to complain is so abundant that her tears could, in her hyperbolic figuration, supplant her actual conditions.

As these moments of competition indicate, the polyvocality of complaint on the stage frequently turns into a competition for sympathy from various characters. However, *Richard III* also stages various contestations of the complaints in order to demonstrate its power as a process that allows for emotional purgation and eventual consolation. The women in *Richard III* are alike in that they all know that Richard is the agent at the source of their suffering. By Act 4 Scene 4 they group together to lament their losses. In this scene, they sit together to grieve and stage a collective complaint against the terror of Richard.⁷³ The women's decision to collectively share their grief in this scene is, I would argue, central to its emotional charge. Antony Hammond finds it "shocking" that Queen Elizabeth would join Queen Margaret in her lamentations and ask for lessons in how to better curse her enemies,⁷⁴ but the moment at which Elizabeth, and eventually the Duchess of York, join Margaret in her cursing emphasizes the power of complaint as a performative utterance, even if it doesn't change the actual circumstances of the plot. The curses throughout *Richard III* are part of a narrative structure that points to the evidence of Richard's wrongdoing.

Margaret's curses have their roots in ancient rhetoric—Cicero, Quintilian, and Aristotle position invective as central to the function of forensic oratory. Invective held a central position in the juridical rhetoric of the classical and early modern periods; as David Rutherford has demonstrated, invective "was a weapon to be used against an opponent or a weapon to be repelled when defending a client in a lawsuit or a prosecution...The purpose of forensic and

⁷³ Sitting as a sign of inconsolable grief was a common stage device on the early modern stage; see 3.1.68-73 in *King John*, 4.2.31 in *Titus Andronicus* and 1.3.5. and 3.8.39 in *The Spanish Tragedy*.

⁷⁴ Hammond, introduction to *King Richard III*, 110.

deliberative invective was to discredit and vilify an opponent with the precise aim of getting a judgment against him or of turning policy and opinion against him.”⁷⁵ In the most riveting moment of that scene, Queen Margaret once again demonstrates her compulsion to repeat in her lesson on the power of cursing. Queen Elizabeth asks her how to best curse those who have wronged her, Queen Margaret replies:

Forbear to sleep the nights, and fast the days;
 Compare dead happiness with living woe;
 Think that thy babes were sweeter than they were,
 And he that slew them fouler than he is.
 Bett’ring thy loss makes the bad causer worse.
 Revolving this will teach thee how to curse. (4.4.118-123)

Queen Margaret doesn’t merely prescribe a “pondering,” but a turning, a remembering, rethinking, and working through.⁷⁶ The “revolving” required for a successful invective becomes the instructor in a rhetorical exercise that results in excessive emotional utterance. In Margaret’s formulation of cursing, the invective reverberates and “revolves” with no prescribed end, which lends it its rhetorical power.

After Margaret provides her instruction, the Duchess of York is still unconvinced of the power of cursing. As Margaret exits the stage, the Duchess says to Elizabeth: “Why should calamity be full of words?” (4.4.126) Elizabeth’s response provides an answer to those who would doubt the power of invective:

Windy attorneys to their clients’ woes,
 Airy succeeders of intestate joys,
 Poor breathing orators of miseries:

⁷⁵ *Early Renaissance Invective and the Controversies of Antonio da Rho* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 2005), 18.

⁷⁶ Other meanings in the period include “To restore; to turn, bring, or roll back.” *OED*, s.v. “revolve.”

Let them have scope, though what they will impart
 Help nothing else, yet do they ease the heart. (4.4.127-131)

“Calamity full of words” might be as ineffective as a person who has died intestate; even so, these words “do ease the heart” and provide some connection with the other sufferers onstage. Elizabeth, in joining the incantatory cursing of Margaret, refutes what Richard said earlier in the play: that “none can help our harms by wailing them” (2.2.103). As Goodland observes, “The Duchess and the Queen are skeptical about the cosmic efficacy of cursing and lamentation, but nevertheless recognize its rhetorical and emotional power.”⁷⁷

The Duchess, ever an enemy to Margaret and to stagings of excess emotion, finally comprehends the power of Margaret’s rhetoric and is convinced by it. Before Richard appears onstage, the Duchess enters into a pact with Elizabeth that will bind their voices of woe into a unanimous chorus:

If so, then be not tongue-tied; go with me
 And in the breath of bitter words let’s smother
 My damned son, that thy two sweet sons smother’d.
 The trumpet sounds; be copious in exclams. (4.4.132-135)

This scene stages a successful lesson in the rhetorical force of complaint. By this point in the scene, the lamenting women are seated on the ground, a sign of their unbearable woe for themselves and for audiences. Their sitting in abject misery, and the process by which they become “copious in exclams,” reveals “the process by which a speaker identifies with the pain of the one to whom he or she speaks.”⁷⁸ The bodily postures of the characters onstage, coupled with their voluminous laments and invectives, attests to the power of emotional transference that

⁷⁷ “Obsequious Laments,” 58.

⁷⁸ Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare*, 182.

Wright and Bulwer so carefully anatomized in their treatises on emotion and gesture. When Richard does enter the scene, the Duchess and Queen Elizabeth interrogate Richard with the same pattern of rhetorical questions that Margaret uttered earlier in the scene. The Duchess sustains her attack on her son, demanding that he listen to her specific grievances and her curse for his reign. Richard repeatedly tries to quiet his mother, at first aligning his own qualities with hers (“Madam, I have a touch of your condition,/Which cannot brook the accent of reproof” [4.4.158-159]), then by attempting to critique her rage (“You speak too bitterly” [4.4.181]). Richard tries to reduce the impact of his mother’s cursing by feminizing her laments as careless gossip: “Let not the heavens hear these tell-tale women/Rail on the Lord’s anointed” (4.4.151). However, he does not provide—or perhaps is unable to provide—an adequate response to the curse of the Duchess, which lingers in the air long after she has left the stage.

Ultimately the women’s complaints do little to change Richard’s behavior. By the end of the play, so much blood has been shed both in court and on the battlefield that it does seem, as Richard says, that he is “far in blood” (4.2.64). Even so, the women’s lamentations signal the need for regime change.⁷⁹ Richard’s death does finally purge the kingdom of its corruption, and the lamentations of the women are met with the justice of Richmond ascending the throne. Complaint may not enact change in the conditions of the mourning women, but it does allow them to expiate their grief, expose the wrongs with their forensic use of invective, and derive some satisfaction from their repetitive utterances.

Conclusion

⁷⁹ I borrow this idea from Hutson, who observes that the audience’s “compassion for Hieronimo’s cause” in the *Spanish Tragedy* is “necessarily also awareness of the need for regime change.” *The Invention of Suspicion*, 70.

These plays repeatedly ask the central question: What effect does complaining have as an utterance? Does it affect the patterns of dramatic events on the stage, and in the world? Or, as Lee Patterson asks, is it “simply ornament and compensation” for traumatic loss?⁸⁰ In these dramatic adaptations of complaint poems, complainants alternately function as memorial devices and agents who demonstrate the power of emotional excess *as* action. Humber’s various complaints in *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine* provides an emblematic memorialization of that character’s grief. As he becomes a part of the English geography in death, his emotional distress and ceaseless complaining extends beyond his body to suffuse the countryside. In *Richard III*, the lamenting women provide singular and choral lamentations in order to demonstrate the power of complaint as a process, one that if uttered in “copious exclams” can unite the women against their common enemy.

In their discussion of *Richard III*, Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin argue that Shakespeare’s lamenting women are a collective entity whose only function is to become an undifferentiated chorus of ritual lamentation, curse, and prophecy that enunciates the play’s providential agenda. In this reading, the women’s laments become a unified demand for “the obliteration of patrilineal genealogy.”⁸¹ Certainly, the collective sharing of grief is what makes the scenes of lamentation so powerful. However, as my reading of complaints by Humber and the women of *Richard III* demonstrates, complaint is not specifically gendered as female in every case. Rather, it is a rich rhetorical mode that allows characters to remember and articulate

⁸⁰ “Writing Amorous Wrongs: Chaucer and the Order of Complaint” in *The Idea of Medieval Literature: New Essays on Chaucer and Medieval Culture in Honor of Donald R. Howard* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), 57.

⁸¹ *Engendering A Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare’s English Histories* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 116.

their dissatisfaction, often repeatedly, until that articulation *becomes* a kind of action onstage.

This was an especially powerful phenomenon in a culture that was, with increasing frequency, suppressing the uses of Catholic rituals in order to privilege more secularized, juridical frameworks of thought.

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