

Weeping, Wailing, Sighing, Railing:  
Shakespeare and the Drama of Complaint

Emily Elizabeth Shortslef

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# ABSTRACT

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Speech acts described as forms of “complaint”—lamentations, accusations, supplications—permeate early modern theatrical tragedy. “Shakespeare and the Drama of Complaint” explores and theorizes the largely unexamined relationship between complaint and tragedy in light of the fact that in the early modern period, “complaining” was cultural shorthand for ineffective, effeminate, and shameful responses to loss and injury. Focusing on familiar Shakespearean tragedies such as *Richard III*, *Richard II*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*, as well as contemporaneous plays by other writers, including Thomas Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy*, Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*, and Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher’s *Maid’s Tragedy*, I argue that complaint was at the very heart of the way the genre of tragedy was conceptualized in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. As I show, speeches and scenes of complaint were central to the construction of tragic plots and characters, and to the genre’s didactic and affective objectives. But the intersection of tragedy with complaint is more than simply formal and stylistic. I argue that through its engagement with a dazzling array of rhetorical modes and literary forms of complaint, tragedy recuperates “complaining” as a valuable mode of social expression and action.

The first half of “Shakespeare and the Drama of Complaint” focuses on plays that attribute ethical value and political efficacy to complaining—to articulating individual and collective grief and grievance, alone and in community with others. Its first chapter explores the ethical dimensions of the existential complaints of the characters of *King Lear* in relation to what I call the “complaint-shaming” rife in Stoic and Calvinist moral philosophy. My second chapter, picking up on *Lear*’s notion of

complaining as an act of bearing witness to the suffering of others, looks at the plays of Shakespeare's first tetralogy, and particularly *Richard III*, as unconventional revenge tragedies in which reiterated speech acts of complaint are politically powerful and efficacious. The second half of the project pivots to plays that take up the interpellative and affective force of complaint within their narratives in order to reflect on the particular agency, and social value, of tragedy itself: my third chapter reads *Hamlet* as a meditation on how the structure of complaint, incorporated into tragic narrative, might strike theatrical audiences' consciences, while my final chapter, on *Richard II*, shows how performances of complaint, even if they do nothing else, might move audiences to tears. As a staging ground for complaint, the early modern theater and its tragic shows oriented audiences to respond to and participate in social modes of complaining—and taught them to be more sophisticated spectators and consumers of tragedy.

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*To Fred*

## INTRODUCTION

### WEEPING, WAILING, SIGHING, RAILING: SHAKESPEARE & THE DRAMA OF COMPLAINT

Behold in me the tragedy of fate,  
The true Idea of this worldly woe:  
The Eris and Erynnis that proceeds  
From wretched life.  
—Thomas Lodge, *The Tragicall Complaint of Elstred*

What boots complaint when there's no  
remedy?  
—Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*

Complaint—inherently dramatic, often histrionic, always agonistic—makes for good drama. Think of Lear, raging against the elements, his daughters, and “ingrateful man!” on the heath, or the lamenting women of *Richard III* who assault Richard with their tears and their accusations, stripped of virtually all power yet “not barren to bring forth complaints,” or Hamlet bemoaning his too too solid, or sullied, or sallied flesh (*Lear* 3.2.9, *Richard III* 2.2.67, *Hamlet* 1.2.129).<sup>1</sup> Sighing, exclaiming, groaning, whining, wailing, and bemoaning figures filled the early modern stage, often skirting the line between pathos and bathos. There is Richard II, complaining to and about his face in the mirror: “Hath sorrow struck / So many blows upon this face of mine / And made no deeper wounds?” (4.1.267–69). There is the confessional complaint of Annabella in John Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, who “descant[s] on my vile unhappiness” as she unfolds in soliloquy “A wretched woeful woman’s tragedy” (5.1.16, 8).<sup>2</sup> There is the cry of John Marston’s Antonio in the opening scene of *Antonio and Mellida*, “Heart, wilt not break?

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations of Shakespeare’s plays, unless otherwise noted, are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008). I am quoting from the conflated text of *Lear*.

<sup>2</sup> John Ford, *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (pr. 1633), ed. Derek Roper (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).



And thou abhorred life, / Wilt thou still breathe in my enraged blood? / Veins, sinews, arteries, why crack ye not, / Burst and divulsed with anguish of my grief?" (1.1.1–4).<sup>3</sup> There is Lavinia, mutilated and bleeding and sobbing, whom Titus Andronicus calls "my speechless complainer" (3.2.39). There are the complaints of once-mighty figures brought low by the turns of Fortune's wheel: the Viceroy of Portugal in Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* bewailing Fortune's "mind more mutable than fickle winds" as he falls to the ground, or Bajazeth, Emperor of Turkey, cursing the day and Tamburlaine alike as he complains from inside the cage on which he will bash out his brains (*Spanish Tragedy* 1.3.30, *Tamburlaine* 5.1.286–304).<sup>4</sup> And, like her mother's maid and a long line of aggrieved female figures before her, there is Desdemona, complaining through "an old thing," a willow song, about the oldest of all things, the treachery of men (4.3.28).<sup>5</sup>

Speeches of complaint gave external form to what characters suggested was inward and ineffable grief, making that anguish palpable, an almost physical presence on the stage. With equal force they directed that grief outward, hurling it at someone else as a plea or accusation. Curses were forms of complaint, as prayers might be as well; the complaints of Shakespeare's Queen Margaret, "well skilled in curses," who says that she "will not think but they ascend the sky / And there awake God's gentle sleeping peace," are at once both curses and prayers, rising into the open air above the theater (*Richard*

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<sup>3</sup> John Marston, *Antonio and Mellida* (pr. 1602), *The Malcontent and Other Plays*, ed. Keith Sturgess (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Citations of *The Spanish Tragedy* (pr. 1592) and *1 Tamburlaine* (pr. 1590) are from *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, eds. David Bevington et al. (New York: Norton, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Although Desdemona's song refers to the scornful lover as "he," in existing variants of this song it is the speaker's mistress who has done the scorning. See Ernest Brennecke, "Nay, That's Not Next!": The Significance of Desdemona's 'Willow Song,'" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 4 (1953): 35–38. On songs of complaint, see Caralyn Bialo, "Popular Performance, the Broadside Ballad, and Ophelia's Madness," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 53.2 (2013): 293–309. For examples of these songs, see John Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and 'Female Complaint'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) and Gary Taylor and Andrew J. Sabol, "Middleton, Music, and Dance" in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to the Collected Works*, eds. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 119–81.

III 4.4.116, 1.3.285–86). Dramatic scenes of complaint, such as the “plaints and prayers” that the Duchess of York utters as she kneels before the newly-crowned Henry IV and begs him to pardon her treasonous son, often reflected the juridical contexts in which to complain was to petition or supplicate those in positions of authority to act on one’s behalf (*Richard II* 5.3.125).<sup>6</sup> To complain was to invoke the only power available in a position of powerlessness. When Isabella in the last act of *Measure for Measure* asks that the Duke will “dishonour 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!” she articulates what all complainants demand of their addressees—and what one might suggest they ask of their theatrical audiences as well (5.1.22–25). Pointed and poignant, these performances heighten tension. They create suspense. They move spectators to tears.

None of these complaints is exceptional. As I show in “Weeping, Wailing, Sighing, Railing: Shakespeare and the Drama of Complaint,” in early modern England complaint was a familiar dramatic language, a repertoire of rhetorical, visual, aural, and gestural conventions for performing grief and grievance and asking for redress.<sup>7</sup> But it was more than this. I argue that in theory and in practice, complaint was the voice of early modern tragedy. This project traces that voice as it weaves in and out of the tragedies of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, crossing back and forth between those plays and other loci of complaint such as lyric and narrative poetry. In doing so I offer a new approach to the tragedy of the early modern period. I show that complaint was central to tragedy’s characters, narratives,

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<sup>6</sup> Scenes of legal complaint appear frequently in what Lorna Hutson has called the “evidentiary drama” of late sixteenth-century England, which makes forensic procedure, the methodical investigation of truth, and the authorized determination of justice central to its plot. See Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> We might conceptualize complaint as a “theater-gram,” Louise George Clubb’s term for what Robert Henke describes as “plot modules, topoi, characters, character systems, dialogic agons, speech-acts, places, and framing devices” that “constituted a common European theatrical language.” See Henke’s introduction to *Transnational Exchange in Early Modern Theater* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008) p. 2. See also Clubb, *Italian Drama in Shakespeare’s Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

themes, and its didactic and affective technologies to an extent that has not been recognized. Indeed, I argue that scenes of complaint in tragic plots—moments that stage the articulation and reception of stylized performances of wretchedness—are compressed images of the genre itself, theatrical tragedy’s *mise en abyme*.

If performances of complaint are sites of tragedy’s self-reflection, I also read them as emblematic representations of the genre’s professed theme, the misery of life. From this perspective, complainants look outward to the audiences whose gaze they invite, presenting to them their experiences of injustice and loss, and questioning the appropriateness of complaint as a response to these experiences, for complaint was not only a dramatic convention but an everyday as well as formalized cultural practice. English theatrical drama arose in a culture awash in social, political, and juridical complaint,<sup>8</sup> one that I contend tragedy engaged through the rhetorical form at its structural and aesthetic core.<sup>9</sup>

As W. B. Worthen writes, “the distinctive behaviors of the ‘theater of action’ themselves relate to—intensify, reverse, quote, epitomize, reduce, alienate, embody, what verb you will—the formalities of behavior in that other theatre just offstage.”<sup>10</sup> Mapping the connections amongst these different types of complaint as they were presented on stage, I argue that through theatrical performances of complaint early modern tragedy recuperates *complaining*—a term typically used to signify shameful and ineffective responses to suffering—as a valuable mode of ethical and political action in the social world.

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<sup>8</sup> On this “culture of complaint,” see Lawrence Manley, “London and the languages of Tudor complaint,” in *Literature and Culture in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) pp. 63–122.

<sup>9</sup> In referring to complaint as a form I am not suggesting a prescribed set of formal characteristics or an unchanging essence, but using the term in what Henry S. Turner describes as the heuristic, Foucauldian sense, i.e. to refer to the patterns and conventions that make a thing recognizable and intelligible as itself across many types of texts, the ideas and ways of thinking that become concretized across time under its name, and the capacity of each of these historically-specific arrangements to structure the questions that may be asked of it as well as the knowledge produced through it. On this sense of form, see Turner’s introduction to *The English Renaissance Stage: Geometry, Poetics, and the Practical Spatial Arts 1580–1630* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 1–40.

<sup>10</sup> W. B. Worthen, *Drama: Between Poetry and Performance* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) p. 92.

The plays that I examine in the following chapters represent this value as deriving from the position of vulnerability, marginalization, and weakness from which complainants speak, and from complaint's interpellative and affective force as a speech act. And by recuperating complaining—by asserting the ethical and political value of performing grief and grievance on the stage of the world, and by doing so through a speech act long associated with tragic literature—early modern writers, I argue, were ultimately articulating the social value of theatrical tragedy itself.

### The drama of complaint

One of the central arguments of this project is that tragedy's recuperation of the ethical and political value of complaining is mutually dependent upon, and hence analytically inextricable from, the aesthetic dimensions of theatrical complaint. As Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne note, formal complaints laid claim to a certain moral force in early modern England;<sup>11</sup> as I will suggest, the possibility of theatrical complaint harnessing this force depended upon the rhetorical, visual, aural, and gestural conventions that marked certain speech acts as instances of complaining. Integral to what the act of complaining meant, these tropes were also crucial to what it could do, since the way complaint looked and sounded and felt in performance invariably shaped how audiences, both onstage and theatrical, experienced and responded to it. To stage complaint, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dramatists inherited and adapted tropes from a dizzying array of texts and traditions: classical, medieval, and contemporary; dramatic, narrative, lyric, and prose; epic, tragic, pastoral, romance; literary, philosophical, religious, political, juridical; English, Continental, and Latin.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See the introduction to *Rhetoric, Women, and Politics in Early Modern England*, eds. Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 1–24.

<sup>12</sup> For the genealogies of what Kerrigan calls this “ample, generically complicated literature” (2), see *Motives of Woe*; Wolfgang Clemen, *English Tragedy Before Shakespeare: The Development of Dramatic Speech*, trans. T. S. Dorsch (London:

The literature of antiquity contributed a cast of stock complainants to early modern tragedy—the Chorus-like company of lamenters, the vengeful complaining ghost, the figure who complains of Fortune and fate, the abandoned woman railing against her perfidious lover—as well as a set of conventional complaints. As Lynn Enterline has argued, from the grammar school practice of imitating the passionate speeches of complaint that Virgil and Ovid and Seneca assign to figures such as Hecuba, Niobe, and Dido, Shakespeare and his contemporaries learned techniques for creating early modern drama’s oft-praised interiority effects and found an effective rhetorical template for expressing grief and rage.<sup>13</sup> This template includes repetitive language suggestive of emotional excess, self-referential admissions of the “bootlessness” of complaining coupled with professions of the impossibility of refraining from doing so, requests for witnesses or features of the natural world or even parts of the complainant’s own body to join in the complaint, and allusions to iconic figures of grief.<sup>14</sup> Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher’s *Aspatia*, for example, attempts to literally embody her prototype, demanding that she be seen as a “miserable life” of Ovid’s Ariadne “stand[ing] upon the sea breach now, / Mine arms thus, and mine hair blown with the wind, / [. . . ] / Sorrow’s monument” (*The Maid’s Tragedy* 2.2.78, 68–74).<sup>15</sup> Like *Aspatia*, in the theater each complaining figure was a palimpsest: the character, the actor, and, somewhere beneath that, the outlines of yet another complaining figure.

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Methuen, 1961) pp. 211–12; and Lee Patterson, “Writing Amorous Wrongs: Chaucer and the Order of Complaint,” in *Acts of Recognition: Essays on Medieval Culture* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010) pp. 181–97.

<sup>13</sup> On these pedagogical practices and their implications for the theater, see Enterline, *Shakespeare’s Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012) and *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). See also Cora Fox, *Ovid and the Politics of Emotion in Elizabethan England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> On these conventions of complaint, see Clemen, *English Tragedy*, pp. 228–36; and Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*.

<sup>15</sup> Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Maid’s Tragedy* (pr. 1622), in *English Renaissance Drama*. As Kerrigan and others have shown, Ovid’s *Heroides* was highly influential for early modern representations of feminine grief. On the reception of the *Heroides*, see the essays in *The Rhetoric of Complaint: Ovid’s Heroides in the Renaissance and Restoration*, eds. Susan Wiseman and Alison Thorne, special issue, *Renaissance Studies* 22.3 (2008).

Complaint was not only, or even necessarily, verbal. *Hamlet*'s play-within-a-play features the Player Queen "mak[ing] passionate action" over the dead body of the King in a dumb show, and the conventional "O, O, O" of lamenters, like Lear's "Howl, howl, howl, howl," not only mimics the bodily sounds of grief but suggests the inadequacy of language to express such anguish (*Hamlet* 3.2.128-7, *Lear* 5.3.256).<sup>16</sup> Medieval and early modern narrative poems such as Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* and Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint* describe an extra-linguistic vocabulary for grief that included solitude, pale skin, a tear-stained face, torn hair and garments, shrieks and wails, and swooning. In *Chirologia, or The Naturall Language of the Hand* (1644), John Bulwer describes hands raised to the sky as a silent gesture of complaint—a multivalent gesture, I might add, that perfectly reflects what I will suggest was the capaciousness of the term "complaint" in early modern writing: hands lifted up, Bulwer writes, are signs of "bitter anguish of Minde" through which "we acknowledge our offences, aske mercy, beg reliefe, pay our vowes, imprecate, complaine, submit, invoke, and are suppliant."<sup>17</sup> Likewise, in lamenting their grief through complaint, speakers might confess their wrongs or encourage others to repent of theirs, describe an injury or fall they have suffered, utter a curse, make an accusation, or plead with their addressees for mercy, vengeance, or justice. Often they do several of these things at the same time.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> On lamentation and sound, see Linda M. Austin, "The Lament and the Rhetoric of the Sublime," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 53 (1998): 279–306, and Michael C. Clody, "The Mirror and the Feather: Tragedy and Animal Voice in *King Lear*," *ELH* 80 (2013): 661–80.

<sup>17</sup> J[ohn] B[ulwer], *Chirologia, or, The naturall language of the hand* (1644) p. 14. For an approach to gesture informed by recent developments in cognitive science, see Evelyn B. Tribble, *Cognition in the Globe: Attention and Memory in Shakespeare's Theatre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Thomas Nashe's polemic complaint *Christ's Tears Over Jerusalem* (1593), which he describes in his dedicatory epistle as a "quintessence of holy complaint" in which he both repents of his satirical attacks upon Gabriel Harvey and (imitating Christ crying over Jerusalem in the Gospel of Luke) pleads with Londoners to repent of their sins and be spared from the plague.

In all its dimensions complaint was highly formulaic and stylized, the very definition of the “trappings and suits of woe” that Hamlet scorns. I argue that for early modern audiences the significance of complaint depended upon its conventionality, its intelligibility *qua* complaint. From the end of the thirteenth century, “complaint” referred at once to everyday utterances of dissatisfaction, lament or other formalized poetic expressions of grief, accusations against another, and—perhaps most importantly for my purposes—formal articulations of grievance brought before a juridical authority for redress.<sup>19</sup> (An etymological felicity impossible for poets to resist, as myriad Petrarchan lyric personae representing themselves as plaintiffs suing for mercy from cruel but beloved tyrants demonstrate.<sup>20</sup>) Noting the permeation of poetic and dramatic complaint with the language and imagery of the law, Thorne proposes that “Of all the popular literary genres of this period none exploited their connections with forensic rhetoric more vigorously than complaint in its many and various guises.”<sup>21</sup> The very specific legal connotation of “complaint,” I suggest, is why the term is used so liberally in early modern

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<sup>19</sup> The *OED* gives a sense of how broadly the term could be applied, defining “complaint” as: “1. The action of complaining; the utterance of grief, lamentation, grieving. 2. a. An expression of grief, a lamentation, a plaint. b. *spec.* A plaintive poem, a plaint. 3. Outcry against or because of injury; representation of wrong suffered; utterance of grievance. 4. A. (with *a* and *pl.*) An utterance or statement of grievance or injustice suffered. b. *spec.* A statement of injury or grievance laid before a court or judicial authority (esp. and properly a Court of Equity) for purposes of prosecution or of redress; a formal accusation or charge.” On the etymologies and complexities of this “motile, slippery term” (1) and the relationship between its legal and literary meanings in medieval literature, see Wendy Scase, *Literature and Complaint in England, 1272–1553* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). On complaint and the law, see also Matthew Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Joanne Diaz, “Grief as Medicine for Grief: Complaint Poetry in Early Modern England, 1559–1609,” (PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> E.g. Sidney’s Astrophil, who asks his grief to “do thou complain / For my poor soul” (*Astrophil and Stella* 94.5–6).

<sup>21</sup> Alison Thorne, “‘O, lawful let it be/ That I have room . . . to curse a while’: Voicing the Nation’s Conscience in Female Complaint in *Richard III*, *King John*, and *Henry VIII*,” in *This England, That Shakespeare: New Angles on Englishness and the Bard*, eds. Willy Maley and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010) pp. 113–14.

texts, where in addition to naming lamentation, accusations, and juridical supplication it is frequently applied to speech acts we might more readily categorize as curses, prayers, and confessions.<sup>22</sup>

Building on Richards and Thorne's suggestion that early modern texts attribute moral authority to the complaint form, I argue that the speech act of complaint, wherever it appears in early modern texts, at once assumes and poses the question of the complainant's *right to complain*. I maintain that whether it manifests as an underlying assumption, an explicitly invoked privilege, or a matter of contestation, the notion that the aggrieved might possess this right fundamentally animates all complaint. Grounded in the prevalence of juridical complaint in early modern culture and the respect that supplication receives in the literature of antiquity and the Hebrew Bible, this notion underpins plaintive speeches and poems of cursing, prayer, supplication, and lamentation,<sup>23</sup> the antagonistic, questioning complaints of the type that Latin writers called *querela*—existential, forensic complaints like those of Boethius to Lady Philosophy about the power of Fortune and Time, the fragility of the flesh, and the brevity and misery of human life<sup>24</sup>—and the poems and pamphlets of protest and petition known as “complaint against the times” that critiqued moral and social ills.<sup>25</sup> To borrow a phrase from a

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<sup>22</sup> On the relationship between speeches of dramatic complaint such as Alice Arden's in *Arden of Faversham* (c. 1580s) and confessional broadside ballads and pamphlets, see Katharine A. Craik, “Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint* and Early Modern Criminal Confession,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53.4 (2002): 437–59.

<sup>23</sup> On classical tragedy and the far-from-quiescent cultural practice of lamentation, see Nicole Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning*, trans. Corinne Pache (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), and Helene P. Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). On lamentation in early modern tragedy, see Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> In *Motives of Woe*, Kerrigan notes that Chaucer is the first in English to use “complaint” interchangeably with “lament” (p. 7). In their translations of Senecan tragedy and Boethius' *Consolatione*, sixteenth-century English writers translate as “complaint” what Latin writers distinguished as either *planctus* or *querela*.

<sup>25</sup> On complaint against the times, see John Peter, *Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956). Terms like “railing” or “ranting” that are contiguous or synonymous with “complaining” in some literary and dramatic contexts were politically charged terms, connoting similar but more generalized modes of social critique and anger. On these modes, see Maria Teresa Micaela Prendergast, *Railing, Reviling, and Invective in English Literary Culture, 1588–1617: The Anti-Poetics of Theater and Print* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012).



lyric poem attributed to the Protestant martyr John Bradford and printed in 1559 as “The complaynt of veritie,” such complaints are, or at least represent themselves as, “lawful moans.”<sup>26</sup>

The legal tropes that punctuate complaint not only assume or invoke a perceived right to complain, but a right to be heard. Complainants frequently speak of their complaints as explanations of their “cases” or “causes,” bring “accusations” or “charges” against someone else, refer to their listeners as their “judges,” and structure their complaints like forensic orations, all of which highlight how these performances demand both audiences and answers.<sup>27</sup> As I will show, some of its most well-worn tropes (such as the plea for a listener to “bear witness” to the complaint, or the ostensibly rhetorical question “what boots it to complain?”) foreground complaint’s address to an audience and its anticipation and generation of a response, or, to use Bakhtin’s terms, its addressivity and answerability,<sup>28</sup> in ways that productively intersect with the concerns of theatrical tragedy. For example, as Thorne suggests, the dialogism of the dramatic medium demonstrates how complaint might create “an empathetic community of mourners.”<sup>29</sup>

This project takes two primary points of departure from other studies of early modern complaint, the most comprehensive of which are John Peter’s *Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature* (1956) on “complaint against the times” and the *de contemptu mundi* theme from antiquity to the early modern period, John Kerrigan’s *Motives of Woe* (1991), on the themes and formal

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<sup>26</sup> Ostensibly written when Bradford was held in the Tower before his execution in 1555, “The complaynt of veritie” addresses “O Heaven, O earth! to thee I call, / To witness what I say, / Which am causeless in England thrall, / And put to great decay,” asks for “a judge upright, / To listen to my cause,” and laments that “Thus do I weep with abundant tears, / With sighs and eke with groans. / Ah, that men will not give their ears / Unto my lawful moans!”

<sup>27</sup> E.g. in *The Tragedy of Soliman and Perseda* (pr. 1592), the character Erastus, betrayed by his former friend Soliman and filled with “galling sorrow,” says, “What boots complaining where’s no remedy? / Yet give me leave, before my life shall end, / To moan Perseda, and accuse my friend” (5.2.94, 87–89).

<sup>28</sup> See the introduction to M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, eds. Caryn Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

<sup>29</sup> Thorne, “O, lawful let it be,” p. 121.

characteristics of poems and dramatic speeches of “female complaint,” and Katharine Goodland’s *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama* (2005) on lamentation and dramatic tragedy. Crossing the lines of genre, theme, and gender that have typically delimited its critical treatment, I approach complaint as a versatile speech act always inflected, but never totally bound, by these categories.<sup>30</sup> My concern is precisely with the multiple and overlapping rhetorical and literary and intellectual histories sedimented in complaint, for I wish to explore what speech act theorists, following J. L. Austin, refer to as the performative or illocutionary dimension of complaint: what it means to utter a complaint and thereby perform the *action* of complaining.<sup>31</sup> In short, while other critics who have written on complaint, such as Kerrigan, Enterline, Heather Dubrow, Georgia Brown, and Richard Helgerson, have been interested in what a particular complaint says, and who says it, I am primarily concerned with what the speech act of complaint does, and how.<sup>32</sup>

More specifically, I ask what it means to complain on the early modern stage. (An irony that cannot go unnoted, given Austin’s invocation of the theater as the prime example of a setting in which

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<sup>30</sup> For genre-specific studies of complaint see Louis R. Zocca, *Elizabethan Narrative Poetry* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1950); Alison Thorne, “Large complaints in little papers: negotiating Ovidian genealogies of complaint in Drayton’s *Englands Heroicall Epistles*,” in *The Rhetoric of Complaint*, 368–84; and Clemen, *English Tragedy*. Thematically organized studies include Peter, *Complaint and Satire*; Paul Budra, *A Mirror for Magistrates and the de casibus Tradition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); and Georgia Brown, “Shame and the subject of history,” in *Redefining Elizabethan Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 178–223. For studies of so-called female complaint, see Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*; Götz Schmitz, *The Fall of Women in Early English Narrative Verse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Heather Dubrow, “A Mirror for Complaints: Shakespeare’s *Lucrece* and Generic Tradition,” in *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*, ed. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986) pp. 399–417; Anna Swärdh, “From hell: *A Mirror for Magistrates* and the Late Elizabethan Female Complaint,” in *Narrative Developments from Chaucer to Defoe*, eds. Gerd Bayer and Ebbe Klitgård (New York: Routledge, 2011) pp. 97–115; and Danielle Clarke, “Signifying, but not sounding: gender and paratext in the complaint genre,” in *Renaissance Paratexts*, eds. Helen Smith and Louise Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) pp. 133–50. I explore female complaint in more detail in my fourth chapter.

<sup>31</sup> The *locus classicus* for speech act theory is Austin’s *How to Do Things with Words*. I have consulted the second edition, eds. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

<sup>32</sup> Most critical work on complaint focuses on writers’ use of the form to construct particular personae, experiences, and emotions. For a representative example, see Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*; Enterline, “Rhetoric and the Passions in Shakespeare’s *Schoolroom*,” in *Shakespeare’s Schoolroom*, pp. 9–32; Dubrow, “A Mirror for Complaints;” Brown, “Shame and the subject of history;” and Helgerson, “Weeping for Jane Shore,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 98.3 (1999): 451–476.

language is used in a manner that is “not serious,” and his exclusion of all explicitly fictive contexts from his analysis of speech acts—an opposition that later theorists would deconstruct on several fronts.<sup>33</sup>) The medium of drama and the setting of the theater, which Sarah Beckwith, Lynne Magnusson, and others have shown to be particularly rich ground for speech-act analysis, not only make possible but call attention to the very aspects of complaint with which I am concerned: its performative, social, and dialogic dimensions.<sup>34</sup> Performative speech acts are transformative in more than one sense, changing things by the mere act of performing the utterance (by making a promise I have changed something) as well as by virtue of their perlocutionary effects, the effects that follow from an utterance. What Austin calls “the total speech situation”—the performance of the speech act as well as its perlocutionary effects—is built into theatrical complaint in a way that distinguishes these complaints from those in other literary contexts: unlike lyric complaint, theatrical complaint is contextualized within a larger narrative plot, and in contrast to complaints found in narrative verse or prose texts, it is performed by an actual person who complains in the actual presence of other people.<sup>35</sup> Theatrical performance, then, asks us to think about performativity on two different levels, that of the fictive dramatic narrative whose plot includes scenes of complaint’s reception and response following its performance, and that of the theatrical audience, which also experiences and responds to those same performances of complaint.

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<sup>33</sup> Austin notes that a performative utterance such as a vow will “be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage” (*How to Do Things with Words*, p. 22, author’s italics). For a genealogy of the critical dismantling of Austin’s distinction between “ordinary” uses of language on the one hand and “literary” or “non-serious” uses on the other—a genealogy that includes Derrida, Judith Butler, and Stanley Fish—see James Loxley and Mark Robson’s introduction to *Shakespeare, Jonson, and the Claims of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> For a sample of Shakespeare criticism that draws on speech act theory and takes dramatic utterance as its subject, see Lynne Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); David Schalkwyk, *Speech and Performance in Shakespeare’s Sonnets and Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); and Loxley and Robson, *Shakespeare, Jonson, and the Claims of the Performative*.

<sup>35</sup> Complaint in other genres often aspires to this kind of embodied immediacy, particularly epistolary complaint like that of the *Heroides* and one of the early modern texts it inspired, Michael Drayton’s *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (1597), whose complainants describe their tears falling onto the paper on which they write the letter, their shaking hands, etc.

Such performances have effects on each of these levels, I argue, which is where my work differs most strikingly from that of Alison Thorne, who also attends to the dialogism of dramatic complaint but focuses only on its role in the dramatic narrative.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, as my readings of early modern tragedies will show, performativity is an integral part of theatrical complaint's own conceptual framework, as dramatic complainants and their onstage, fictive audiences frequently speculate as to what the act of complaining accomplishes.

To address this question in relation to theatrical audiences necessitates accessing and interpreting that elusive object of knowledge, audience experience. My work is grounded in speech act theory's premise that meaning is a product of contextually specific, mutually recognized, socially constructed conventions,<sup>37</sup> and it shares the commitment to historicized understandings of literary form that characterizes the various critical approaches that together comprise what has been called historical formalism.<sup>38</sup> My chapters delineate and explore the many discursive contexts that would have informed early modern audiences' understanding of the complaint form, and they consider how theatrical performances of complaint hewed to these conventions as well as reconfiguring or subverting them in meaningful ways.<sup>39</sup> Because I am interested in how theater in particular engages audiences through the registers of affect, sensation, perception, and cognition, and in how audiences experience and process the specific theatrical action of complaint, I often turn to the language and conceptual

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Thorne, "O lawful let it be."

<sup>37</sup> The fundamental dictum of speech act theory is that a performative is only "felicitous," i.e. effective as a performative, if the speaker and the audience recognize and accept a shared set of conventions, or rules, governing its use. See Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 25–38.

<sup>38</sup> For an overview of historical formalism, see *Shakespeare and Historical Formalism*, ed. Stephen Cohen (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> In thinking about the effect of performing conventions in unconventional and subversive ways, I am influenced by Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which she likens to (but also distinguishes from) theatrical performance. See Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006).

concerns of phenomenological inquiry.<sup>40</sup> As will become evident, phenomenological-philosophical approaches to early modern drama, particularly the work of Julia Reinhard Lupton and Paul Kottman, have been important rhetorical and intellectual influences, if less visible direct interlocutors, for my analyses of how speeches and scenes of complaint orient their theatrical audiences to the action occurring on the stage, and for my claim that the encounters staged through these speeches and scenes—encounters between complaining characters and other figures within the world of the play, and between complainants and theatrical audiences—mimetically represent as well as constitute actual encounters in the world.<sup>41</sup> What my approach adds to these is a focus on the generative potential of form to call up its own histories, histories that not only shape the speech act’s structure of address and the audience’s experience of it but the possibilities for its response as well.

As I have suggested, conceptualizing complaint as a speech act and exploring it in historical-formal and phenomenological terms is a new approach to complaint, which has never been systematically considered as a specific textual unit with multiple layers of meaning, or with regard to its performative dimensions, or in relation to its effects upon audiences. This is also a new approach to early modern tragedy, for although criticism’s affective turn has elaborated tragedy’s representations of suffering and passion and its elicitations of sympathy and compassion,<sup>42</sup> there are as yet no book-length

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<sup>40</sup> On the way that theatrical meaning arises from combinations of such signifiers as utterances, bodies, gestures, sounds, setting, music, costumes, objects, lighting, etc., see Jerzy Limon, *The Chemistry of the Theatre: Performativity of Time* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> For a summary of recent strands of phenomenological approaches to Shakespeare, see Julia Reinhard Lupton, “Shakespearean Softscapes: Hospitality, Phenomenology, Design,” in *The Return of Theory in Early Modern English Studies*, Vol. II, eds. Paul Cefalu, Gary Kuchar, and Bryan Reynolds (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) pp. 143–64. As Lupton notes elsewhere, “Drama and phenomenology are thus closely linked, since each makes the company of others into a condition of action.” Lupton, *Thinking with Shakespeare: Essays on Politics and Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> On the affective turn in literary studies, see *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, ed. Patricia Ticineto Clough (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). For recent overviews of critical work on affect and early modern literature in particular, see the introduction to *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture*, eds. Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), and Richard Meek’s introduction to “Shakespeare and the Culture of Emotion,”

critical studies that consider complaint in all its forms as crucial to the genre's affective, aesthetic, and ideological work. "Shakespeare and the Drama of Complaint" contributes to the literary histories of each by exploring their intersection with the other.

At the end of this introduction I will return in more detail to the critical conversations in which this project participates, but for now I just want to note that whatever its limitations or excesses as an assertion about drama as a whole, Kottman's suggestion that there exists an "ontological parity of world and stage"<sup>43</sup> is particularly resonant with theatrical scenes of complaint, whose speakers—performing their vulnerability to injustice, suffering, and forces more powerful than themselves—present themselves as "mirrors" for audiences of their own existential condition, actors whose actions are imitations of theirs, and figures whose grief compels a response from their addressees. As I argue, theatrical drama actualizes complaint's inherent performativity and dialogism, while the dialogism and formal history of complaint allows drama to address audiences as witnesses and as potential complainants themselves, both in the setting of the early modern theater and in the *theatrum mundi*. It is to the conceptual intersection of these tragic stages to which I now turn.

### Complaint and the matter of tragedy

"When we are born we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools" (*King Lear* 4.6.176–77). In medieval and early modern literature, complaint was the soundtrack and emblem of the tragic pageants

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special issue, *Shakespeare* 8.3 (2012): 279–85. Recent studies which make affect a central term include Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen, *Pain and Compassion in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012) and Steven Mullaney, *The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). On tragedy and sympathy, see Heather James, "Dido's Ear: Tragedy and the Politics of Response," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52 (2001): 360–82, and Allison P. Hobgood, *Passionate Playgoing in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Tanya Pollard has recently argued that early modern tragedy was indebted more than we have recognized to Greek tragedy and its models of female passion, particularly that of grief. See Pollard, "Conceiving tragedy," in *Shakespearean Sensations: Experiencing Literature in Early Modern England*, eds. Katharine A. Craik and Tanya Pollard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) pp. 85–100.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Kottman, *A Politics of the Scene* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008) p. 7.

of human existence—in Lear’s famous words, the prototypical and primal speech act. In Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia*, the character Plangus, whose name, from the Latin *plangere*, means to complain, similarly laments that “wretched human-kind” are merely “players placed to fill a filthy stage” on which “all [is] jests, save only sorrow’s rage.”<sup>44</sup> He suggests that humans are miserable because they are “wrapped in flesh,” bound to a body that is “A shop of shame, a book where blots be rife” (14, 22). In the Latin *de contemptu mundi* tradition whose disdain for the flesh and the world statements like these echo, complaint inexorably arises out of the very conditions of existence itself. As George Gascoigne’s translation of one of the most famous of these poems announces, “all men generally are borne, without knowledge, without speach, without virtue, without power, weeping, wayling, weake, feeble, and but little differing from brute beasts [. . .] we are all borne crying, that we may thereby expresse our misery [. . .] eche of these soundes is the voyce of a sorrowful creature, expressing the greatnesse of his grefe.”<sup>45</sup> From its inception, life generates complaint doomed, like life itself, to meaningless and increasingly painful repetition. The pre-linguistic cries of the infant, Lear and Plangus suggest, are at once lamentation for, and protest against, this condition.

In existential complaint the personal is always universal. Boethius, lamenting his imprisonment, questions why providence allows “slydyng Fortune [to] turneth so grete enterchaungynges of thynges;” the melancholy Hamlet describes the world as “an unweeded garden / That grows to seed,” filled with “things rank and gross in nature” that “Possess it merely” (*Boece* 1.Met.5.33–34, *Hamlet* 1.2.135–37).<sup>46</sup> In

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<sup>44</sup> Citations of the *Arcadia* are from *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia (The Old Arcadia)*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). For Plangus’ complaint, see pp. 129–34. Lines 11, 16, 18.

<sup>45</sup> George Gascoigne, “The View of Worldly Vanities,” from *The Droomme of Doomes Day* (1576), A3r. This is a translation of Innocent III’s late-twelfth-century *De contemptu mundi*. On this tradition and its concern with the “baseness, moral and physical, of mankind as a whole,” see Peter, *Complaint and Satire*, p. 63, and Willard Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1936).

<sup>46</sup> Citations of Boethius’ *De consolazione philosophiae* are from Chaucer’s *Boece*, unless otherwise noted. All citations of Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

addition to articulating a tragic worldview in which humans are, to steal a phrase from Plangus, merely “Balls to the stars, and thralls to Fortune’s reign,” these complaints also reflect what critics have called a materialist understanding of subjectivity, a concept of the human self as thoroughly enmeshed in and affected by the physical world.<sup>47</sup> Representing creaturely existence through tropes of heaviness, flesh unhappily bound to the earth, cries that fail to penetrate the heavens, and a body through which the storms of passion rage, existential complaints lament a life that is inherently vulnerable and painful. In the context of bodies and a world fatalistically bound to decay, complaint is depicted as thoroughly natural, but fundamentally pointless: as Plangus puts it, “Long since my voice is hoarse, and throat is sore, / With cries to skies, and curses to the ground, / But more I plain, I feel my woes the more” (4–5, 6).

If early modern writers described life as a tragedy, they also described the genre of tragedy as a reflection of life that demonstrated what Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry* (1595) calls “the uncertainty of this world.”<sup>48</sup> Speeches of complaint served this emblematic purpose. As Wolfgang Clemen notes in a study of set speeches in early modern drama, “For the Elizabethan playwright the formal lament represented a means by which he could combine the expression of painful emotion and suffering with melancholy

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<sup>47</sup> This particular notion of subjectivity is rooted in humoral theory, the idea (derived from Aristotle via Galen) that physiological and mental states alike were the result of the interaction and balance of the body’s four humors, which were part of and affected by the natural world. On this historical conception of subjectivity, and its difference from other models of understanding subjectivity, see Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, eds. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, eds. Garrett A. Sullivan Jr. and Mary Floyd-Wilson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>48</sup> I am quoting from Peter C. Herman’s edition of the *Apology, Sir Philip Sidney’s An Apology for Poetry and Astrophil and Stella: Texts and Contexts* (Glen Allen: College Publishing, 2001). Cf. Chaucer’s lines in the Prologue to *The Monk’s Tale*: “Tragedie is to seyn a certeyn storie, / As olde books maken us memorie, / Of hym that stood in greet prosperitee, / And is yfallen out of heigh degree / Into myserie, and endeth wrecchedly” (7.1973–77).



reflections on life.”<sup>49</sup> In the sixteenth century, I suggest, complaint was considered to be formally constitutive of tragedy. In Spenser’s poem *The Teares of the Muses* (1591), for example, Melpomene, Muse of Tragedy, who bemoans the “wretched world the house of heauinesse” where “all mans life me seemes a Tragedy, / Full of sad sights and sore Catastrophees,” announces that her “professed skill” is to “fill the Scene with plaint and outcries shrill / Of wretched persons, to misfortune borne.”<sup>50</sup> Medieval and early modern writers recognized a clear affinity between complaint, “the style of heavy heart,”<sup>51</sup> and tragedy’s representation of “weighty” matter. In *The Fall of Princes* (c. 1431–38), John Lydgate’s translation of Boccaccio’s *De casibus virorum illustrium* in which “a cumpanye / Off myhti prynci, full pitousli wepyng” complain about their falls, Lydgate describes the “dites of murnyng and off compleynyng” that fill “the tragedies which that I shal write” as flowing with gall, the bitter bile secreted by the liver and associated with melancholy, heaviness, and the element of earth.<sup>52</sup> William Webbe’s *Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586) similarly defines “tragicall verse” as composed of “dolefull complaynts, lamentable chaunces, and what soeuer is poetically expressed in sorrow and heaviness.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> See Clemen, *English Tragedy*, p. 214.

<sup>50</sup> Edmund Spenser: *The Shorter Poems*, ed. Richard A. McCabe (London: Penguin, 1999). ll. 123, 157–58, 151, 153–54. See also the first act of *The Tragedy of Soliman and Perseda*, in which it is said that Melpomene intends “in seas of tears, / And loud laments to tell a dismal tale.” John Ford’s glossing of the character of Penthea as “complaint” in the *Dramatis Personae* of *The Broken Heart* (1633) also indicates the structural and thematic importance of complaint to tragedy.

<sup>51</sup> Sidney, *Arcadia*, 302.

<sup>52</sup> The *De casibus* was probably finished around 1360; it was revised sometime before 1374. *The Fall of Princes* is a verse translation of a French prose translation of the *De casibus*, Laurent de Premierfait’s *Des cas des nobles hommes et femmes* (c. 1409). On Lydgate’s changes to Laurent’s translation, and on Laurent’s numerous additions to Boccaccio, see Patricia May Gathercole’s introduction to *Laurent de Premierfait’s “Des cas des nobles hommes et femmes,” Book I, Translated from Boccaccio* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968). Although Boccaccio’s Latin text did not circulate widely in England, many fifteenth- and sixteenth-century English readers were familiar with the *De casibus* through the *Fall of Princes*. In addition to being widely copied in manuscripts, Lydgate’s text was printed in 1494 and 1527 by Pynson, by Tottel in 1554, and again in 1554 by Wayland as *The Tragedies, Gathered by Ihon Bochas, of All Such Princes as Fell from Theyr Estates*. It was not printed again until the twentieth century (see Farnham, *Medieval Heritage*, p. 278). All citations of Lydgate are from *Lydgate’s Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen, Early English Text Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924–27).

<sup>53</sup> William Webbe, *Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586), D2v.

Complaint was so intimately associated with tragedy that it even became an easy mark for those poking fun at the genre. In the anonymous play *A Warning for Fair Women* (pr. 1599), “Tragedie” is described by her rival and fellow allegorical character Comedie as having a Chorus that “comes howling in,” or “a filthie whining ghost” that cries “*Vindicta*, revenge, revenge!” (52, 54, 58).<sup>54</sup>

In addition to the longstanding perceived affinities between complaint and tragedy, there was a literary-historical reason for their intersection in the late sixteenth century: the centrality of speeches of complaint to what Janette Dillon calls the “two printing events both conducive to the emergence of English tragedy.”<sup>55</sup> These were the publication of *A Mirror for Magistrates* (1559),<sup>56</sup> a massively popular and influential continuation of Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes*, and the publication of Jasper Heywood’s *Troas* (1559), a translation of Seneca’s *Troades* that set off a wave of Senecan translation and publication that would culminate in Thomas Newton’s collection *Seneca his Tenne Tragedies* (1581).<sup>57</sup> In structural terms, I would suggest that complaint is the most important type of speech in the *de casibus* and Senecan traditions: the *Mirror* was comprised entirely of verse monologues of complaint, described by the volume’s editor, William Baldwin, as “tragedies,” in which the ghosts of historical figures lament

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<sup>54</sup> *A Warning for Fair Women: A Critical Edition*, ed. Charles Dale Cannon (Paris: Mouton, 1975).

<sup>55</sup> Janette Dillon, *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare’s Tragedies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> On the bibliographic and editorial history of the *Mirror*, see W. F. Trench, *A Mirror for Magistrates: Its Origins and Influence* (Edinburgh, 1898) and Frederick Kiefer, “A Mirror for Magistrates,” *Sixteenth-Century British Nondramatic Writers, Third Series*, ed. David A. Richardson (Detroit: Gale Research, 1996) 116–27. I discuss the poems of the *Mirror* in more detail in my third chapter.

<sup>57</sup> For Seneca and the Inns of Court, and on the different phases of Senecan engagement, see Jessica Winston, “Seneca in Early Elizabethan England,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 59 (2006): 29–55. On Senecan translation, see Howard B. Norland, “Adapting to the Times: Expansion and Interpolation in the Elizabethan Translations of Seneca,” *Classical and Modern Literature* 16 (1996), 241–63; and Frederick Kiefer, “Seneca Speaks in English: What the Elizabethan Translators Wrought,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 15 (1978): 372–87. On the neo-Senecan tradition in early modern England, see Michael Ulliot, “Seneca and the Early Elizabethan History Play,” *English Historical Drama 1500–1660*, eds. T. Grant and B. Ravelhofer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) pp. 98–124.

“theyr greuous chaunces, heuy destinies, & wofull misfortunes,”<sup>58</sup> and Anglo-Senecan tragedy, the term I will use to describe the English translations of Seneca, was likewise saturated with speeches of complaint, which frequently open and conclude scenes. While the importance of both the *Mirror* and Anglo-Senecan tragedy for the development of English drama has long been acknowledged—amongst other things, they were key sources for plot material, and their speeches, including those of complaint, served as rhetorical models for creating dramatic dialogue, expressing passion, and constructing character—what has thus far gone unnoticed is that complaint, so central to these traditions of tragic literature, remained at the heart of theatrical tragedy.<sup>59</sup>

In *de casibus* and Anglo-Senecan tragedy, speeches of complaint were object lessons. Juxtaposing Stoic contempt for the world with a Christian and particularly Calvinist providential worldview, they reminded readers of the ephemerality of pleasure, favor, high estate, and all else enjoyed within the world, whose ultimate governance by divine providence was not incompatible with the perception of being subject to the vicissitudes of capricious Fortune.<sup>60</sup> Their logic, as Lydgate says in a prologue to *The Fall of Princes*, was that “The fall of one is a cleer lantern / To teche a-nother what he shal eschewe.” In the first act of his translation of *Troas*, Heywood positions the complaining Hecuba, who “protest[s]” the “yrefull might . . . / of goddes aduerse to me” and calls on the surviving Trojan women

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<sup>58</sup> All citations from the *Mirror* are from *The Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. Lily B. Campbell, (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960) p. 69.

<sup>59</sup> The classic study for the importance of the *Mirror* for early modern dramatic tragedy is Farnham, *Medieval Heritage*. See also Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy* (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1983) and Campbell, *Tudor Conceptions of History and Tragedy in 'A Mirror for Magistrates'* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1936). On Senecan tragedy and early modern drama, see Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy: The Influence of Seneca* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) and Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger's Privilege* (New Haven: Yale, 1985).

<sup>60</sup> On the cosmology of Anglo-Senecan tragedy and the metaphysical and philosophical continuities of Anglo-Senecan and *de casibus* tragedy, see Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*. For the history of the piecemeal and informal merging of Stoicism and Christianity as far back as the second century CE, see Audrey Chew, *Stoicism in Renaissance English Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988).

to “Beate on your brestes and piteouslye / complayne,” as an emblem of “How fraile and brittle is thestate, / of pride and high degree” (I.I.329, 329–30, 407–8, 287–88).<sup>61</sup> The Chorus Heywood adds to the act makes this point explicit, telling its audiences that “Hecuba that waileth now in care, / that was so late of high estate a Queene / a mirrour is, to teache you what you are” (I.Chorus.569–71).

The 1580s and 1590s constitute a pivotal moment in the history of English tragedy, marking the genre’s gradual and uneven transition to a primarily dramatic medium, its institutionalization in the public theater, its thematic expansion to include secular, non-classical, and ordinary subjects and settings, and its reorientation from explicit moral and political didacticism to eliciting fear and pity from audiences.<sup>62</sup> “Shakespeare and the Drama of Complaint” suggests that performances of complaint were an explicit formal link between tragedy’s past and one of its futures. In the early modern theater, I argue, complaint operated as a profoundly liminal form, located on the threshold between what critics such as Glynne Wickham and Catherine Belsey have described as a residual allegorical and emblematic model of tragedy and an emergent illusionistic one.<sup>63</sup> Performances of complaint were at once emblematic “speaking pictures” presented to theatrical audiences as such, and actions located within the narrative frame and world of the play, and as such these performances operate at both presentational

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<sup>61</sup>All citations of *Troas* and *Thyestes* are from *Jasper Heywood and His Translations of Seneca’s Troas, Thyestes and Hercules Furens*, ed. H. De Vocht (Louvain: A. Uystpruyt, 1913). On Hecuba as a model of female grief for early modern dramatists, see Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare*, and Pollard, “Conceiving tragedy.”

<sup>62</sup>For an overview of the development of tragedy during this period, see Rebecca Bushnell, “The Fall of Princes: The Classical and Medieval Roots of English Renaissance Tragedy,” in *A Companion to Tragedy*, ed. R. Bushnell (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 289–306. On the use of the term “tragedy” in print, see Peter Berek, “Tragedy and Title Pages: Nationalism, Protestantism, and Print” *Modern Philology* 106 (2008): 1–24. For an overview of early modern English tragic theory, see Timothy J. Reiss, “Renaissance theatre and the theory of tragedy,” *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) pp. 229–47.

<sup>63</sup>On the historical and dramatic coordinates of this shift, which Catherine Belsey describes as the difference as between an allegorical, emblematic mode of drama and an illusionist, proto-realistic one, see Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages: 1300 to 1700*, 2 vols. (New York: Routledge, 1963) and Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (New York: Routledge, 1991). See also Turner, *English Renaissance Stage*, and Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion*.

and representational levels.<sup>64</sup> The complaint of Edward IV's former mistress Jane Shore, from Part Two of Thomas Heywood's *Edward IV* (pr. 1599), perfectly encapsulates how these performances signified at both of these levels. In this scene, Jane Shore sits outside the city gates in a simple sheet, her hair down and her feet torn up from having been paraded on Richard III's order through the streets of London. She repents of her sin and presents herself as an exemplar to others, much like the complainants of the *Mirror* ("Fair dames, behold: let my example prove, / There is no love like a husband's love" [20.316–17]).<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, the husband she has abandoned, who watches unbeknownst to her, also moralizes the spectacle: "Yonder she sits. How like a withered tree, / That is in winter leafless, and bereft / Of lively sap, sits the poor, abject soul. / [. . .] / . . . so short and brittle / Is this world's happiness" (20.180–5). Like many other theatrical complainants, Jane Shore is an object lesson for *two* sets of audiences at the same time.

The formal ubiquity of complaint in tragedy is inseparable from the thematic affinity between the two. I aim to show that in addition to the *de contemptu mundi* and *de casibus* traditions of existential complaint, a wide array of discursive traditions of complaint, including amorous complaint, elegiac complaint, juridical complaint, biblical complaint, and complaint against the times poetry, offered a rich vocabulary for articulating various kinds of themes associated with tragic literature.

"What other thyng bywaylen the crynges of tragedyes but oonly the dedes of Fortune?" Lady Philosophy asks Boethius.<sup>66</sup> The tragedies of the 1580s and 1590s, while not disinterested in the turnings

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<sup>64</sup> On the difference between presentational and representational theatrical practices, see Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition in the Theater* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). Briefly put, Weimann identifies presentational practices as those that stress "the immediacy of the physical act of histrionic delivery," and representational as those that are "vitaly connected with the imaginary product and effect of rendering absent meanings, ideas, and images of artificial persons' thoughts and actions" (11).

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Heywood, *The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV*, ed. Richard Rowland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

<sup>66</sup> *Boece* (II. Pr. 2, 67–68).

of Fortune's wheel, would give different answers to her rhetorical question. As I will argue, speeches and scenes of complaint speak to the relationship between subjective agency and structural and systemic networks of power, the intensity of passion and of suffering, the inexorability of fate, the injustice of men and the indifference of the gods, the relationship between phenomenological experience and linguistic representation, and the capacity of language to articulate suffering while failing to alleviate or procure redress for it—matters of concern not only to tragedy's characters, but its audiences as well.

Focusing on complaint brings certain often overlooked aspects of tragedy into focus. To see complaint at the center of early modern tragedy is to see its continuity with medieval tragedy. It is to see characters not as individuals but as generic types. It is to see abjection rather than heroism, or perhaps a heroism rooted in abjection. It is to see a feminine rather than masculine subject. It is to think about human agency in terms that continue the task that Hugh Grady describes as creating "an account of agency, of the potentially creative, power-resisting activity of the self within the world" while refusing "myths of complete individual autonomy from the social."<sup>67</sup> It is to see speech acts as forms of action.

For speeches of complaint were not simply emblems of wretchedness. Rather, as James Loxley and Mark Robson note, performative speech acts "draw attention to force, affect and active intervention in the world through and by means of language."<sup>68</sup> In the tragedies that I explore, when characters lament, express outrage, or demand redress for an injustice committed, they act in the world. I want to suggest that it was through these speeches of complaint, with their agonistic and adversarial structure and their acknowledgement of points of continuity with their audiences—bodily vulnerability, social marginalization, susceptibility to passions of grief and rage—that early modern

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<sup>67</sup> Hugh Grady, "On the need for a differentiated theory of (early) modern subjects," *Philosophical Shakespeares*, ed. John J. Joughin (London: Routledge, 2000) pp. 34–50.

<sup>68</sup> Loxley and Robson, *Shakespeare, Jonson, and the Claims of the Performative*, p. 12.

tragedies dramatized social acts of articulating grief and grievance. In other words, complaints are *about complaining* and the kind of force it represents. As I will show, this is significant because in early modern England “complaining” was a matter of some contention.

### The tragedy of complaint

One of the perennial questions critics pose of complaint is the extent to which it accomplishes anything—a fair question, given that complainants frequently ask this themselves.<sup>69</sup> In an essay on medieval complaint poetry, Lee Patterson suggests that complaint, with its conventional declaration of its own “bootlessness,” speaks to the problem of all language (“Can language express the subject? Can it have an effect upon the world?”) and to the problem of poetry in particular; what makes it uniquely suited to ask these question is the fact that “the claim it lays upon the world is virtually always self-cancelling,” that “its uselessness is programmatic.”<sup>70</sup> Like poetry, complaint makes nothing happen.

The declaration in poetic and dramatic contexts of complaint’s bootlessness, I argue, reflects the pervasive and cross-discursive deprecation of “complaining.” This trope, which still exists today, has deep roots. In early modern discourses of moral philosophy, “complaining” was shorthand for an entire mode of engagement with the world—weeping, protesting, cursing, resisting—that was considered morally dubious, ineffective, passive, effeminate, and solipsistic. As I will show, what I call the rhetoric of complaint-shaming permeated early modern literature as thoroughly as did speeches of complaint.

In Stoic and Calvinist thought, for example, both of which valued patience and self-control and taught that what looks like capricious Fortune is merely the working out in the temporal realm of fate or providence’s plan for all nature, no response to grief is more pointless and presumptuous than

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<sup>69</sup> E.g. Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007) and Helgerson, “Weeping for Jane Shore.”

<sup>70</sup> Patterson, “Writing Amorous Wrongs,” pp. 182–83.

complaining.<sup>71</sup> In the *De consolatione philosophiae*,<sup>72</sup> a touchstone for both of these strands of moral philosophy, Lady Philosophy leads Boethius from his “olde complaynt / And a ful comen vsed question” to the light of reason, teaching him along the way that “in complayntes [*querelae*] lyeth no remedy.”<sup>73</sup> Stoic and Calvinist writers consistently suggest that to complain was to lack the correct perspective on one’s suffering, that—as William Cornwallis writes in *Discourses upon Seneca the Tragedian* (1601)—“the exclamations of the world” and “all that we call calamity, & think worthy of the bewayling” are the result of “superfluously taking the survey of things, not penetrating the depth.”<sup>74</sup> Characters in early modern theatrical drama often echo the counsel of the Chorus of Anglo-Senecan tragedy, which, like these other Stoic voices, advises that its listeners “Let our complaynts yet goe, and feare be past” (*Thyestes* IV.Chorus.2270). In each of the tragedies I examine—*King Lear*, *Richard III*, *Hamlet*, *Richard II*—complaints are countered with views like that of *The White Devil*’s Flamineo, who calls such expressions “whining passion” (3.2.309).<sup>75</sup> Moral weakness, the fruitlessness of lamentation, the “womanishness” of responding to loss and grievance by turning to words and tears rather than “action,” and solipsism are all grounds on which various dramatic characters, and often complainants themselves, criticize complaining.

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<sup>71</sup> On the continuity of Stoic and Christian moral philosophy, see Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England* and Isabel Rivers, *Classical and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1994). On the Stoic ideal of a man ruled by reason, virtuous in his freedom from passion, see Chew, *Stoicism in Renaissance English Literature*. I discuss moral philosophy and the rhetoric of complaint-shaming in more detail in the following chapter.

<sup>72</sup> The *Consolatione* was immensely influential in the Middle Ages and was translated into Old English, Provençal, Old High German, Anglo-Norman, Old French, Middle English, and early modern English; particularly famous translations include those of Alfred (c. 900), Chaucer (1380), and Elizabeth (1593). Other English translations of the *Consolatione* include John Walton’s (pr. 1525), George Colvile’s (1556, dedicated to Queen Mary), and that of I.T. (1609). On these translations, see Chew, *Stoicism in Renaissance English Literature*.

<sup>73</sup> *The boke of comfort called in laten Boetius de Consolatione philosophie*, trans. John Walton (pr. 1525). Bk. 5, Prosa 4. Bk. 1, Prosa 2.

<sup>74</sup> William Cornwallis, *Discourses upon Seneca the Tragedian* (1601).

<sup>75</sup> John Webster, *The White Devil* (pr. 1612), *English Renaissance Drama*.



And it is true that complainants speak and act in ways that make them appear mired in self-indulgent and almost masochistic grief.<sup>76</sup> Their refusal of consolation looks like a stubborn attachment to their own pain, and is often paired with their own bewildered acknowledgement of their willful perversity.<sup>77</sup> Heywood's translation of Seneca's *Thyestes* highlights this Petrarchan coupling of pain and pleasure in Thyestes' observation that "From face that wolde not weepe the streames do fall / and howlyng cryes amynd my woords aryse, / My sorowe yet thaccustomde teares dothe loue / and wretches styll delight to weepe and crye. / Unpleasant playntes it pleaseth them to moue" (5.2.2375–79). Thyestes' complaint exemplifies the torturously self-agonistic rhetoric of complaint, where the futile repetition of the speech act itself is a sign of the condition it bemoans: the complainant is an object lesson of bootlessness in speaking to no effect, again and again. If to a modern reader these complainants seem to be suffering from Freudian melancholia, the diagnosis is less anachronistic than one might think, for it is indeed "plaints, in the old sense of the word" — "Anklagen," accusations—to which Freud compares the complaints (the "Klagen") of those suffering from melancholia in "Mourning and Melancholia": "Ihre Klagen sind Anklagen gemäß dem alten Sinne des Wortes."<sup>78</sup> "Everything derogatory that they say about themselves is at bottom said about someone else," he writes.<sup>79</sup> The complaint is a grievance against another that might be rhetorically directed at oneself, incorporated into and manifesting in the body. The most melancholy of complainants, Milton's

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<sup>76</sup> On complaint and masochism in early modern lyric poetry, see Catherine Bate, *Masculinity, Gender, and Identity in the English Renaissance Lyric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>77</sup> On complaining as a form of self-consolation as well as a means of getting satisfaction for one's grievances, see Joanne Diaz, "Grief as Medicine for Grief."

<sup>78</sup> "The behaviour of the patients, too, now becomes much more intelligible. Their complaints are really 'plaints' in the old sense of the word." Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: Norton, 1989) p. 586; "Trauer und Melancholie," in the *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 10 (London: Imago, 1991) p. 433.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

Samson,<sup>80</sup> suggests that he must complain precisely because his complaint cannot be answered.<sup>81</sup>

Blinded and enslaved, succumbing to “faintings, swoonings of despair,” he complains:

My griefs not only pain me  
As a ling’ring disease,  
But finding no redress, ferment and rage,  
Nor less than wounds immedicable  
Rankle, and fester, and gangrene,  
To black mortification. (617–22)

The theater puts that suffering, complaining body on display, where it says that it must complain. I argue that theatrical tragedy was an arena for articulating and dramatizing a longstanding cultural debate about appropriate ways of responding to the inherent vulnerability of humans to various kinds of loss and injury inflicted by others or stemming from the weakness of the body. In making a case for the positive ethical and political value of complaint—as I argue these plays do—they pick up on and develop strands of thought we see elsewhere in recognitions of complaint’s inevitability and necessity. Even as staunch a complaint-shamer as Milton has his Chorus admit, in response to Samson’s complaints, that “with th’ afflicted in his pangs,” all the “Consolatories writ / With studied argument [. . . ] / Little prevails, or rather seems a tune / Harsh, and of dissonant mood from his complaint” (660, 657–62). A passage from Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale* encapsulates the opposing sides of the question that theatrical tragedy explores: while Arcite, who “wepth, wayleth, crieth pitously,” scolds himself for doing so—“Allas, why pleynten folk so in commune / On purveiaunce of God, or of Fortune?”—Palamon, also complaining, argues that it cannot be otherwise, that “man after his deeth moot [must] wepe and pleyne” (1221, 1251–52, 1320). If early modern complaint has been so rich for psychoanalytic

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<sup>80</sup> On Samson as suffering from both early modern and Freudian senses of melancholia, see Drew Daniel, “My Self, My Sepulcher,” in *The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013) pp. 200–27.

<sup>81</sup> John Milton, *Samson Agonistes* (1671), in *The Complete Works of John Milton*, Vol. 2, ed. Laura L. Knoppers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) pp. 65–120.

approaches it is not only because of the pleasure its speakers say they take in rehearsing their pain but because its speakers insist that this compulsion to complain reveals a truth about human subjectivity.

In arguing that theatrical tragedy uses speeches and scenes of complaint in ways that reconfigure the trope of “complaining” to recuperate complaining as a valuable action in the world, “Shakespeare and the Drama of Complaint” contributes to a growing body of scholarship concerned with how early modern literature, and particularly dramatic texts, represent corporeal and social vulnerability. If this trend represents a return to humanism or existentialism, it is one with a difference that Julia Lupton describes as “a philosophy oriented around human being in the trembling vulnerability of our multiple dependencies on each other,” dependencies which include “our constitutive reliance on speech, housing, clothing, and the attention of others for both physical survival and social recognition.”<sup>82</sup> At the center of this body of scholarship is the notion of the human as a vulnerable and social creature.<sup>83</sup>

One of the underlying premises of this project is that (to quote Michael Witmore) Shakespeare and other dramatists “used the specific resources of theater [. . . ] to say equally specific things about the relatedness of beings in the world and their mutual participation in some larger, constantly changing whole.”<sup>84</sup> Paul Kottman’s concept of the scene, by which he means “any particular horizon of human interaction, inaugurated by the words and deeds of someone or some group, here and now, with the result that a singular relationship or web of relationships is brought into being, sustained, or altered

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<sup>82</sup> Lupton, *Thinking with Shakespeare*, p. 14.

<sup>83</sup> The same is true of recent philosophical-critical work on the implications for ethics of vulnerability and exposure, particularly that of Judith Butler and Adriana Cavarero, which (like the work of Lupton and Kottman) derives its impetus from Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben. See, for example, Butler’s *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004) and *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), as well as *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), which unites her theories of speech acts and performativity with a consideration of vulnerability, injury, and ethics.

<sup>84</sup> Michael Witmore, *Shakespearean Metaphysics* (London: Continuum, 2008) p. 7.

among those on the scene,”<sup>85</sup> is useful for thinking about the implications and effects of speeches of complaint, which mark interactions—and create relationships—between characters on stage and/or between the complainant and the theatrical audience. Indeed, although the critical work I have been describing has often included performative speech acts (contracts, vows, blessings) amongst their considerations of dramatic actions, complaint has been overlooked. The various scenes constituted through performances of complaint will appear in slightly different terms across these chapters, reflecting the different ways they appear in the plays I discuss: an ecology of complaint in *Lear* proper to human creatureliness; differing kinds of complaint articulated by different characters across different plays in the first tetralogy whose repetitions figure the political force of scattered and diverse speech acts of grievance; the interpellative spectral complaint that *Hamlet* uses to explore the potency of tragic narrative; in *Richard II*, scenes of sympathetic responsiveness that position theatrical tragedy as an interface for experiences of intersubjectivity.

Together these chapters explore a series of questions: what do scenes of complaint in theatrical tragedy reveal about early modern understandings of human nature and action and the implications of vulnerability for ethical and political life? To what kinds of encounters and experiences in the social world do these scenes correspond? What kinds of affective responses, attunements, and actions do they foster? And—the overarching question that each chapter asks—what do these complaints, which were so central to the genre, tell us about how early modern writers and their audiences conceptualized, constructed, and experienced tragedy? To address these questions my readings toggle between the two levels of early modern theater, the representational and the presentational—between considering the action of complaining as an imitation, a mediation, of a “real” action within the fictively closed-off world of the play, and considering it in its immediacy, as an encounter between actors and audience.

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<sup>85</sup> Kottman, *A Politics of the Scene*, pp. 10–11.

Throughout, although close reading can only tell us what writers are doing, I hope to give a sense of the experiential possibilities that performances of complaint might actualize.

My chapters revolve around the question of what tragedy does with and through speeches and scenes of complaint. One line of analysis in each is devoted to elaborating the ways in which complaint was a constitutive tragic convention; the other line of analysis concerns the significance of these formal and thematic arrangements to the work some tragedies were doing, and to the work they were suggesting the genre as a whole might do. Chapters 1 and 2 explore what tragedies suggested about complaining as a social practice and mode of engagement with the world. By focusing on how particular plays take up and reconfigure the conventions of tragic complaint as well as more discursively diffuse commonplaces about complaining—that it is morally dubious, that it is ineffective—I argue that those plays recuperate complaining (protest, articulating dissatisfaction, expressing grief) as a valuable ethical and political action. Chapters 3 and 4, which examine plays that represent tragic complaint not as solipsistic but as interpellative and affectively powerful, argue that these complaints were instrumental to tragedy’s simultaneous questioning and articulation of its own social value.

In my first chapter, I situate Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine the Great* and Shakespeare’s *King Lear* in relation to philosophical and dramatic histories of representing complaint as the characteristic speech act of the tragic subject, and in relation to what I call “complaint-shaming,” the characterization of those who complain as morally (and physically) weak and effeminate. Responding to the complaint-shaming rife in the English translations and imitations of Senecan tragedy popular in the 1560s–80s, *Tamburlaine*, I suggest, constructs its titular hero around a self-conscious refusal to complain. Famous for its dramatic novelty and influence, *Tamburlaine* created a model of transcendent tragic heroism dependent on the avoidance of complaint. I argue that *Lear* responds to these same philosophical and dramatic histories, but in radically opposite terms. Showing how Shakespeare’s play invokes an ecology

of complaint in which the weight of grief is unbearable, I contend that *Lear*, with its existential complaints, recuperates complaining as an ethical imperative to bear witness to suffering. In *Lear*, creaturely vulnerability not only validates and redeems, but necessitates, complaint.

But can complaining do more than testify to suffering? The most common of all commonplaces about complaint is that it is “bootless.” In my second chapter, I argue that Shakespeare plots the history plays that comprise the first tetralogy (Parts 1, 2, and 3 of *Henry VI*, and *Richard III*) as a long revenge tragedy that culminates with an act of avenging justice. I show that while the typical role of complaint in the narrative trajectories of contemporary revenge tragedies such as Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* and Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* was to be an ineffective foil to revenge, the tetralogy inverts this trope, making the words of complaint the very instrument of vengeance. This is particularly significant because these plays emplot the history of the Wars of the Roses, and thus the emergence of the Tudor state. I suggest that these history plays, like the “complaint against the times” poetic tradition of petition and protest with which they engage, highlight the historically productive role that the articulation of grievance plays in the body politic as a force that generates change. They suggest that dissent and antagonism are the fundamental ground of the commonwealth, rather than its undoing, and they ascribe political force to the bitter words of the marginalized, the losers.

In my third chapter, I turn to the question of how complaint addresses an audience, focusing on the way in which the Ghost in *Hamlet* interpellates Hamlet with his complaint and command to “Remember me.” While one form this remembrance is supposed to take is revenge, by showing the play to be in conversation with the spectral complaints of narrative verse tragedy, I argue that Hamlet’s promise to the Ghost also binds him to telling the story that the Ghost tells him, the purported truth of his father’s death. By looking at Hamlet’s truncated attempts to tell this story, particularly his ambiguously successful attempt to make Claudius identify his own role in it, we can see how the play

uses the interpellative force of complaint as an occasion to explore the interpellative force of tragedy as a genre that makes its audiences confront discomforting truths.

My fourth chapter explores another way in which speeches and scenes of complaint address theatrical audiences. In it I suggest that writers used tearful scenes of complaint modeled on “female complaint” poetry to elicit sympathy from audiences. Focusing on Part 2 of Heywood’s *Edward IV*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard II*, and Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The Maid’s Tragedy*, I argue that the apparently solipsistic recursivity of complaint’s self-reflexivity, particularly in its most explicitly feminized forms, promotes an aesthetic ideal of sympathetic responsiveness in which the complainant and the tragic spectator grieve together. I suggest that affectively compelling scenes of female complaint both model and promote this ideal. These scenes, I argue, helped writers to position theatrical tragedy as an interface for experiences of intersubjective grieving and transport, helping to frame the theater as a site of affective and aesthetic community.

I have taken Shakespeare’s tragedies as my primary object of analysis not because they are exceptional, but because doing so offers a frame for what I would suggest is a much larger phenomenon in early modern tragedy; by moving outside the parameters of Shakespearean tragedy in my readings of *Tamburlaine*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Edward IV*, and *The Maid’s Tragedy*, I have attempted to gesture toward this broader field. To the extent that this project tells a story about complaint, it is neither a developmental nor a unified one. While some critics have suggested that highly rhetorical and formulaic and stylized representations of emotion gave way around the turn of the sixteenth century to more naturalistic ones,<sup>86</sup> formal complaint did not disappear and in fact was, if anything, heightened and more artificial in Restoration and eighteenth-century tragedy. Nor did complaint as a mode of

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<sup>86</sup> See Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 100. Paul Menzer challenges this idea in “That Old Saw: Early Modern Acting and the Infinite Regress,” *Shakespeare Bulletin* 22 (2004): 27–44.

expression give up its political resonances: pamphlets of complaint exploded in the early seventeenth century in the years immediately preceding the Civil War. And if my focus has been on tragedy's recuperation of complaint for ethics and politics, and its potential to speak for the marginalized, I am not suggesting that it is necessarily or inherently progressive: during the Commonwealth years Royalist supporters frequently turned to the iconography and rhetoric of complaint, for example.<sup>87</sup> It would be more accurate to say that complaint emerges from a structural position of marginalization that anyone could potentially occupy, given specific circumstances.

In modernity, complaining remains a vexed trope. My last two chapters raise a question about complaint that still haunts its literary representations: is complaint political, or an avoidance of political engagement? Lauren Berlant's work on sentimentality, particularly *The Female Complaint* (2007), argues that the "complaint genres of 'women's culture'"—mass cultural forms such as films and novels—substitute for the sphere of the political an aesthetic sphere of belonging and intimacy that legitimates feeling and, she argues, "keep people attached to disaffirming scenarios of necessity and optimism in their personal and political lives" to the extent that their conventionality "provides an affective confirmation of the idea of a shared confirming imaginary in advance of inhabiting a material world in which that feeling can be actually lived."<sup>88</sup> The association of complaint with repetitive and ineffectual speech has also lingered in the western cultural imagination. The internet, modernity's theater of memory, is a virtual storehouse of complaint. Although I would prefer to argue that complaint is political—or even that it is definitely not political—the answer is that it might or might not be, that it depends on the context. My readings of these plays argue that various tragic narratives

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<sup>87</sup> The famous example here is the figure of Charles I on the title page of *Eikon Basilike*.

<sup>88</sup> Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) pp. 2–3.



showed how complaining might be a form of testimony and critique, an efficacious and generative articulation of political grievances, and a speech act with the force to interpellate or affectively compel its addressees. These plays, I suggest, imagine that actions grounded in vulnerability might exercise a particular power of their own. But they do not say that those speech acts inevitably will do so. The “total speech situation” of any performance is specific to it alone. What complaint does depends on the always changing, diverse, infinitely particular audience. There is no definitive and overarching answer, only a progression of scenes that repeat, again and again, “what boots it to complain?”

## CHAPTER ONE

### I MUST HERE COMPLAIN: *KING LEAR* AND THE SUBJECTS OF TRAGEDY

What ryght hastow to pleyne? . . . thow that art put in the commune  
realm of alle.

—Chaucer, *Boece*

Comfort's in heaven, and we are on the earth,  
Where nothing lives but crosses, cares, and grief.

—Shakespeare, *Richard II*

'Tis all men's office to speak patience  
To those that wring under the load of sorrow,  
But no man's virtue nor sufficiency  
To be so moral when he shall endure  
The like himself.

—Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*

The first part of this chapter's title, a common phrase in poetic and dramatic speeches of complaint, adumbrates its argument: the necessity of complaining for a subject, an "I," situated in a particular place, "here." More precisely, in what follows I delineate two opposing strands of thought that I suggest run through early modern moral philosophy and dramatic tragedy: one that identifies "complaining"—a term for passion-fueled actions of lamentation, defiance, and the refusal of consolation—as the sign par excellence of bad or weak character to the extent that the complainant deviates from the proper human role of submission to the authority responsible for his being (fate, a god, providence), and another that suggests complaining to be wholly appropriate to this human creature. As I will show, *King Lear* juxtaposes these competing views, in jarring scenes—the howling king carrying Cordelia's body, daring his onlookers to show themselves "men of stones"—and through scattered, echoing fragments of discourse about the relationship between human nature, as the play constructs it, and outbursts of passion: Edgar, the play's voice of Stoic reason, suggesting that "Men must endure / Their

going hence even as their coming hither;” Lear, “preaching” to Edgar and Gloucester, that “We come crying hither” (5.3.255, 5.2.9–10, 4.6.174).<sup>1</sup> Before I turn to early modern drama, however, I want to begin with a very brief reading of a very long eighteenth-century lyric complaint that demonstrates the weight that moral philosophy attaches to the notion of “complaining,” as well as the role that theatrical drama, with its speech acts of complaint, was enlisted to play in constructing notions of human nature and actions appropriate to that nature.

“Yet why complain? or why complain for One?” is the question posed by the despairing speaker of Edward Young’s nine-part poem *The Complaint: Or, Night-Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* (1742–5), who suspects that “I mourn for Millions: ’Tis the common Lot.”<sup>2</sup> Written in blank verse, the poem moves from one cause of complaint to another as its speaker’s imagination wanders through “various Scenes of Life and Death” only to confirm that on the stage of the world each actor “some Tragic Story tells.”<sup>3</sup> The poem reiterates the notion that his complaint is somehow singular, while the condition it bemoans is not, in its ninth and final part, titled “The Consolation,” where to conclude this perpetual narrative of woe Young resorts to a *deus ex machina*. Granted a vision of Judgment Day, “the mighty Dramatist’s last Act,” in which “a God, indeed, descends, / To solve all Knots; to strike the Moral home,” the speaker imagines a cloud of witnesses who burst into thunderous, (almost) unanimous applause at “see[ing] Creation’s godlike Aim, and End, / So well accomplish’d! so divinely clos’d!” It is in the midst of this soundscape of satisfaction that he hears himself, the one lone note of discord:

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<sup>1</sup> All citations of *King Lear* are from the conflated text in *King Lear*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Arden, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Edward Young, *The Complaint: Or, Night-Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality* (1773) p. 8. The first seven parts of the poem were printed in 1742, with the eighth and ninth parts added in 1745. A third reprint in 1748 appended to the end of *The Complaint* Young’s “A Paraphrase on Part of the Book of Job.”

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2, 188.

Hence, in one Peal of loud, eternal Praise,  
The charm'd Spectators thunder their Applause;  
And the vast Void beyond, Applause resounds—  
WHAT THEN AM I?—

Amidst applauding Worlds,  
And Worlds celestial, is there found on Earth,  
A peevish, dissonant, rebellious String,  
Which jars in the grand Chorus, and Complains?

The rhetorical question, the capital letters, the syntactical and metrical interruption that mirrors the narrative break: everything marks the speaker's "WHAT THEN AM I?" as a moment of self-recognition catalyzed and marked by the act of complaining. The question that follows this one—"is there found on Earth, / A peevish, dissonant, rebellious String, / Which jars in the Grand Chorus, and Complains?"—blends his voice with that of the "mighty Dramatist" himself, calling out his unhappy spectator. This is the poem's climactic moment of conversion: turning away from his "peevish Grief's COMPLAINT, / Who, like a Daemon, murm'ring, from the Dust, / Dares into Judgment call her Judge," the speaker incorporates his voice into the "grand Chorus" of creatures praising their creator.<sup>4</sup> The sign of his former defiance he both denounces and renounces. Declaring that "My Change of Heart a Change of Style demands," he proclaims that "The CONSOLATION cancels the COMPLAINT, / And makes a convert of my guilty Song." The speaker and the poem are alike transformed, complaint is swallowed up in consolation.

The lesson that the speaker of Young's poem learns over its trajectory is the same one that early modern Calvinist and Stoic moral philosophy teach.<sup>5</sup> (Indeed, in terms resonant with the conclusion of *The Complaint*, an early seventeenth-century translation of Seneca's *De providentia* suggests that those

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>5</sup> On the points of continuity between Stoic and Protestant moral philosophy, especially with regard to passion, see Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England*. Schoenfeldt notes that while there is a conflict between the "ethical value of Stoic apathy and Christian affect," both shared a "common vocabulary and ethical goals of discipline and moderation," as the Neo-Stoic writings of Justus Lipsius delineated (p. 18). Boethius' *Consolatione*, which is also about the movement from complaint to consolation, was a key shared interlocutor for Stoic and Calvinist moral philosophies.

who protest the undeserved nature of their suffering should imagine divine providence silencing them with the rhetorical question, “What cause haue you [. . .] to complaine of me?”<sup>6</sup>) In Calvinist and Stoic discourses, “complaining”—as I will show, the catch-all term for actions that suggested excessive grief, resistance to consolation, or quarrelling with providence—was not only diametrically opposed to ideals of constancy and calm resignation, but was also, I argue, the signifier of a particularly shameful kind of character failing. It was an indicator of moral weakness, the mark of a soul governed by passion instead of reason, a person too much attached to the world. To bluntly summarize this view, the right kind of person does not complain. Two particularly well-known texts that circulated in the period make exactly this point. A widely-read letter of consolation sent from Plutarch to his friend Apollonius after the death of his son cautions the grieving father that “to weepe and waile, was but a feminine and servile passion, nothing at all befitting grave persons, well descended, or honestly brought up,” characteristic of “Barbarians rather than Greeks” and “the worse sort of people.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, sixteenth-century Calvinist commentary on (somewhat surprisingly) the archetypal figure of exemplary patience, Job, focuses on the problem of Job’s “outrageous talk” and “immoderate complaints,” which seem strikingly inconsonant with “the person of a godly man.”<sup>8</sup>

Although the early modern theater’s engagement with these discourses was inconsistent, piecemeal, and likely as opportunistic as ideological in motivation, I argue that English theatrical tragedy also represents complaining as a matter of *ethos*, the Aristotelian term for character that refers

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<sup>6</sup> The *De providentia* was translated into English and printed as “His Discourse of Providence” in *The workes of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, both morrall and naturall* (1614), p. 508.

<sup>7</sup> “A Consolatorie Oration Sent Unto Apolonius Upon the Death of His Sonne,” in *The Philosophie, commonlie called, the morals written by the learned philosopher Plutarch of Chaeronea* (1604), p. 523.

<sup>8</sup> I am quoting from Arthur Golding’s 1574 translation of the *Sermons of Master John Calvin, upon the booke of Job* p. 2, 250.

specifically to moral disposition as revealed through speeches and reflected in action.<sup>9</sup> Consider Claudius' famous reproof to Hamlet, his claim that "to persever / In obstinate condolement is a course / Of impious stubbornness, 'tis unmanly grief," demonstrating "a will most incorrect to heaven, / A heart unfortified, a mind impatient, / An understanding simple and unschooled" (1.2.92–94, 95–97).<sup>10</sup> These lines, which exemplify what I call the rhetoric of complaint-shaming—the representation of complaining as effeminate, perverse, and incorrect—also demonstrate how such rhetoric is truly rhetorical in the classical sense of the word, explicitly framed as persuasive speech within dramatic narratives, and implicitly instructive to its theatrical audiences as well.

What unites the texts I examine in this chapter is their sustained concern with the tragic subjection of humans to forces more powerful than they are, a condition that they represent as occasioning complaint. The first part of this chapter focuses on what I suggest was the construction of dramatic character through existential complaint—complaints about Fortune, fate, and the misery of life—in early English tragedy. I argue that plays such as *Gorboduc*, *The Tragical Reign of Selimus*, *The Tragedy of Soliman and Perseda*, and *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine* represent complaining as the characteristic speech act of what *The Duchess of Malfi*'s Bosola calls "womanish and fearful mankind" (5.5.120).<sup>11</sup> These characters complain because they are victims of Fortune, fate, and other characters, their complaints only reinforcing the sense that they are weak. The precise moral disposition of these characters is less important here than it is in the moral philosophies by which they are informed; what primarily matters is that we see them as stock tragic types, embodiments of the vulnerability that I argue

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<sup>9</sup> On character as "something *produced* by rhetorical performance" (p. 132), see Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom*.

<sup>10</sup> With the exception of *Lear*, all quotations of Shakespeare's plays are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Cited from *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*. On the gendering of complaint, see Jennifer C. Vaught, *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008).

those plays represent as a fundamental and universal human condition. I suggest that this is the logic that Christopher Marlowe exploits in *Tamburlaine* to construct a singular figure that stands out from a crowd of complaining others. My reading of the play shows that it is not only his military prowess but his self-conscious rejection of complaint that signifies Tamburlaine's exceptionality, his transcendence of the limits that characterize other subjects. Thus Marlowe's tragedy, I argue, introduced to the stage a negative rhetorical model of heroism, one in which the refusal to complain—offset against a soundscape of complaint—is the distinctive mark of the tragic hero.

While the plays I explore here demonstrate that complaining is the rule in the world of tragedy, I would suggest that these speeches of complaint do not construct their speakers simply as weak individuals. Rather, I argue that these complaints foreground the complainant's *creaturely* being, a word I use (as Julia Lupton, Laurie Shannon, Eric L. Santner, and others have done, following Hannah Arendt) to emphasize the intimate connections, continuities, and interdependencies between humans, animals, things, and the world they all inhabit, and particularly to call attention to the shared vulnerability that these interdependencies reveal.<sup>12</sup> (The term *creaturely*, of course, also has theological resonances that I will explore in my conclusion.) One of the overarching arguments I make in this chapter, by teasing out an intellectual thread that runs through the rhetoric of complaint-shaming and defenses of complaining alike in moral philosophy, dramatic tragedy, and elsewhere, is that early modern writers define human nature precisely in terms of this creatureliness, and situate complaining as its sign. I suggest that complaining figures make visible an *ecology of complaint*—a network of speakers, addressees, and witnesses of complaint comprised of divine, human, and animal actors, supernatural

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<sup>12</sup> *Creaturely life* or *creatureliness* is roughly identical to Aristotle's *zoe*, or Agamben's "bare life," terms which refer to biological existence, sensation, appetite, and corporeal necessity, as distinct from Aristotle's *bios*, i.e. public and political and historical life. The term usually appears in philosophical, critical, and literary contexts that stress an ethics that begins with the material, vulnerable, immanent body. One strand of this thought focuses on the human subject (Arendt, Levinas, Butler), another on the vitality and potential agency of the object and the nonhuman (e.g. critical animal studies, object oriented ontology, actor network theory, ecocriticism, posthumanism).

powers and forces of nature, animate and inanimate features of the material world.<sup>13</sup> In tragedy, to be creaturely is to belong to this ecology of complaint. Premised on the early modern assumption of physical and social interconnectedness across different forms of life, the act of complaining, I argue, not only calls upon these relationships, but calls new ones into existence.

In the second part of this chapter, I go to *King Lear*, which I argue brings this ecology of complaint into sharp focus through Lear's unsuccessful attempt to avoid complaining. I argue that the play explicitly engages with the terms of complaint-shaming and the moral valences attributed to complaint in both moral philosophy and dramatic tragedy, and that it recuperates the ethical value of complaining. I suggest that it does so on the same grounds for which it was maligned in moral philosophy—as an act of bearing witness to the fundamental weakness of human nature, which I suggest *Lear* figures in terms of the body's inability to endure extremes of physical and emotional strain, particularly the weight of grief. Just as the speaker's complaint is in Young's poem, in *King Lear*, Lear's grief is not only the cause but also the answer to his question "Who is it that can tell me who I am?" (1.4.221). His grief, bursting into complaint, identifies him as a creature. I argue that by concluding on a note of summative tragic authority that tells us that "the weight of this sad time we must obey" by "speak[ing] what we feel," the play suggests that its theatrical audiences are part of this same ecology of complaint, and that they too must complain. In doing so, it turns on its head the didacticism of the rhetoric of complaint-shaming. I suggest that the play models a kind of tragedy that would correspond to a world where complaining is not just a signifier of creaturely being but a signifier of collective creaturely responsibility.

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<sup>13</sup> On the critical turn to various kinds of ecological thought, see the essays in *The Indistinct Human in Renaissance Literature*, eds. Jean E. Feerick and Vin Nardizzi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).



## Part 1. Complaining and not complaining in early English tragedy

### I. Complaining

Foremost among the “handfuls of tragical speeches” that Thomas Nashe accused contemporary theatrical dramatists of cribbing from “English Seneca” was the complaint.<sup>14</sup> Complaint was not only a standard formal component of two models of tragic literature highly influential for the stage—*de casibus* and Anglo-Senecan tragedy<sup>15</sup>—but also represented more clearly than any other type of speech the conception of human nature that those tragic traditions had constructed. As I will suggest, in plays such as *Gorboduc*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Selimus*, *Soliman and Perseda*, and *Lochrine*, complaint signifies the body’s susceptibility to passion and pain, and the sheer powerlessness of will and action to change Fortune and fate. Complaints and complaint-shaming alike fill these plays.

The play that many scholars identify as the first English tragedy, Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville’s *Gorboduc* (1562), even begins *in medias planctus*, with the queen, Videna, lamenting after a sleepless night that “now the day renews my grievful plaint” (1.1.6).<sup>16</sup> The titular king also complains of his misfortune upon hearing that his son Ferrex is raising forces against his other son Porrex, likening his own grief to that of “Hecuba, the woeful’st wretch / That ever lived to make a mirror of” (3.1.14–15). But *Gorboduc* also represents complaining as especially unbecoming to a king: one councilor tells Gorboduc, “O king, appease your grief and stay your plaint,” another councilor warns him that his

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<sup>14</sup> Nashe’s words are from the preface to Robert Greene’s *Menaphon* (1589), p. 3. On the importance of Seneca for English dramatic tragedy, see Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy* and Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition*. See also Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* and Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*.

<sup>15</sup> By Anglo-Senecan tragedy I mean the English translations of Seneca centered around the Inns of Court and printed between 1559 (the publication date of Jasper Heywood’s *Troas*) and 1581, when Thomas Newton’s compilation *Seneca his Tenne Tragedies* appeared. For a fuller discussion of the importance for theatrical tragedy of these plays and their complaints, and of *de casibus* tragedy, see my general introduction and Chapter 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Gorboduc, or, Ferrex and Porrex*, ed. Irby B. Cauthen, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970).

“wailful plaints” may cause his “hastened death,” and yet another cautions that “now is no time / To wail and plain and waste your woeful life” (3.1.44, 106, 138–39). The play suggests that to complain is to show oneself to be ruled by passion, a dangerous quality in a monarch that points to the possibility of chaos and the rebellion of his subjects—as, in *Gorboduc*, the king’s lack of reason results in the “cruel flames of civil fire” (3.1.188).<sup>17</sup> In contrast to the passion-driven *Gorboduc*, the ideal king of Senecan tragedy is that prescribed by the Chorus of Jasper Heywood’s translation of *Thyestes* (1560), which suggests that “A kyng he is, that feare hath layde asyde, / and all affects that in the brest are bred,” a man who “gladlie runs his fatall daie to meete, / nor ought complaynes or grudgeth for to dye” (2.Chorus.1418–19, 1436–37).<sup>18</sup>

*Gorboduc*’s councilors echo the view commonly expressed in contemporary physiological discourse that passion is a material threat to the body, a notion I will return to in my reading of *Lear*.<sup>19</sup> In his treatise *The Passions of the Mind in General* (1604), the moral philosopher Thomas Wright argues that “the Passions which coarct [compress, constrict] the heart (as fear, sadness, and despair), as they bring more pain to the mind, so they are more dangerous to the body,” as an excess of “melancholy blood”—black bile—both “extinguisheth the good spirits” and causes “grief and heaviness.”<sup>20</sup> The “heaviness” that Wright describes is not metaphorical: Tanya Pollard notes that “the Greek word

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<sup>17</sup> As many critics have shown, neo-Stoicism, with its ideal of the self-controlled, constant, rational subject, was influential to early modern political philosophy, constituting an attractive political philosophy for disempowered individuals and groups. On early modern neo-Stoicism as a political practice, see Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy*; Rivers, *Classical and Christian Ideas*; and Rebecca Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). Bushnell argues that Seneca turns to the “intimate feminine language of passion” to represent tyrants as “possessed by the savagery of passion” and thus critique tyranny (p. 32–33).

<sup>18</sup> Jasper Heywood and His Translations of Seneca’s *Troas*, *Thyestes* and *Hercules Furens* (1913).

<sup>19</sup> On the importance of humoral theory for early modern understandings of the passions, see Paster, *Humoring the Body*; *Reading the Early Modern Passions*, eds. Gail Kern Paster et al.; and Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England*. Humoral theory posits that passion is material in its causes (deriving from the result of the balance of the humors) as well as in its effects (capable of changing that same balance of humors in the body).

<sup>20</sup> *The Passions of the Mind in General*, ed. William Webster Newbold (New York: Garland, 1986) p. 136, 138.

*melanchole* (black choler) refers literally to the darkening of the *splanchna*, or internal organs, as they fill with the liquid of heavy emotions.”<sup>21</sup>

The language that tragic complainants speak to describe their grief highlights their susceptibility to the disintegrating force of passion. The complaints of Bajazet, Emperor of Turkey, in *The Tragical Reign of Selimus* (1594), a play commonly attributed to Robert Greene, describe his mind as being “in sundry pieces torne / By care, by feare, suspition, and distrust,” his thoughts as “eat[ing] thee [himself] up,” and his heart as “heauie” (844–45, 9, 861).<sup>22</sup> They also express his emotional upheaval in figures that echo the same tropes commonly used in contemporary discourses of the passions: comparing himself to a “weake vessel” tossed in a storm at sea, Bajazet rails against the “swelling seas of neuer ceasing care, / Whose waues my weather-beaten ship do tosse” and complains that “my feeble barke cannot endure, / Your slashing buffets and outrageous blowes” (1769, 1764–65, 1772–73). His character is a perfect illustration of the conventional description of the soul governed by passion, which Wright likens to “the raging Gulf swelling with waves, surging by tempests.”<sup>23</sup>

Bajazet’s words suggest that he is literally overwhelmed by passion, drowning in his grief. Given the early modern assumption of a self profoundly and constantly shaped by “the bodily fluids that flowed from and to different bodily organs,” Gail Kern Paster argues that it is this existential vulnerability to passion—the potential for it to radically transform the self—that undergirds Stoic articulations of constancy.<sup>24</sup> Wright, citing Plutarch, notes that passions cause the “Metamorphosis and

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<sup>21</sup> Pollard, “Conceiving tragedy,” p. 96.

<sup>22</sup> *The Tragical Reign of Selimus* (1594), Malone Society Reprints (London: Chiswick Press, 1908).

<sup>23</sup> *Passions of the Mind*, 134.

<sup>24</sup> Paster, “The tragic subject and its passions,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. Claire McEachern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 154.

change of a man from himself,” transforming those who suffer them “from men into beasts.”<sup>25</sup> The rhetoric of complaint-shaming suggests at once that those who are not men—women, children, cowards, losers—may have “leave” to complain, and that complaining, like Circe, has the power to make men something other than men. “Let women weep, let children powre fourth teares, / And cowards spend the time in bootlesse mone,” *Selimus*’ Mustafa says contemptuously (1505–6).

These dramatic performances of complaint not only emphasize the weakness of complainants but the bootlessness of complaining, often by addressing obviously absent, indifferent, or even hostile audiences. Bajazet “fals in a sownd [swoon]”—a gesture that stage directions suggest to have been frequently performed with complaining—and complains that the gods are sadistic spectators who “glut your eyes, and take delight / To see sad pageants of mens miseries;” in Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* (perf. late 1580s, pr. 1592) the Viceroy of Portugal, removing his crown and flinging himself to the ground to embrace “this earth, image of melancholy,” complains that “Fortune is blind and sees not my deserts; / So is she deaf and hears not my laments” (*Selimus* 1274, 1275–77; *Spanish Tragedy* 1.3.12, 23–24).<sup>26</sup> When Spenser’s Melpomene, Muse of Tragedy, wishes for “a brasen voice that may with shrilling cryes / Pierce the dull heauens and fill the ayer wide,” and “yron sides that sighing may endure,” she represents herself as one of her subjects, a vulnerable body of complaining flesh.<sup>27</sup>

If complaining reflects particular characters’ vulnerability to injury, misfortune, and death, tragedies frame these performances in contexts that suggest that these characters are not unique in this vulnerability. These early Senecan-influenced plays, I want to suggest, are concerned with what they imagine to be, and construct as, a universal human condition. One example is *The Tragedy of Soliman*

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<sup>25</sup> *The Passions of the Mind*, p. 133–34.

<sup>26</sup> Cited from *English Renaissance Drama*.

<sup>27</sup> Spenser, *The Teares of the Muses*, ll. 117–18, 119. Originally published in *Complaints* (1591). *The Shorter Poems*, 189–209.

*and Perseda* (perf. c. 1592, pr. 1599), attributed to Kyd.<sup>28</sup> The play's plot is concerned with separated lovers and a treacherous friend, but its real subject, I would argue, is tragedy's obsession with the powerful forces that determine human life. It begins with an Induction in which the allegorical personae Love, Fortune, and Death argue over who should serve as Chorus, an argument that hinges on whose role is most integral to the events of this tragedy in particular and the genre of tragedy as a whole. Naturally, each figure insists that it is she: Death insists that *Soliman and Perseda's* "chiefest actor was my sable dart," Love declares that she will stand her ground until she "make[s] it known to you and to the world / What interest Love hath in tragedies;" and Fortune announces that she will "cease to turn my wheel, / Till I have shown by demonstration / What interest I have in a tragedy" (1.1.28, 31–32, 34–36). Each refusing to capitulate, these figures reappear at the end of each act, where, like sports commentators, they recapitulate the actions that the audience has just witnessed and debate whose influence was most at work, who "hath in the actors shown the greatest power" (1.6.2). What is on the one hand the play's framing joke—that the important "actors" in a tragedy are those playing the marginal figures of the Chorus, rather than those playing the titular characters—it also presents as a truth-statement.

Underlying the rhetoric of complaint-shaming is the notion that the inescapable fact of human subjection, which renders complaint pointless, should dissuade those who suffer from engaging in it. Paul Menzer argues that highly emotional actions on stage would have been interpreted as "fraudulent, possibly deranged, and certainly at risk," and that "passionate exhibition" of this sort "falls within a range of habits condemned as insalubrious, illegible, and possibly insane."<sup>29</sup> But as Joanne Diaz argues,

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<sup>28</sup> In *The Works of Thomas Kyd*, ed. F. S. Boas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901).

<sup>29</sup> See Paul Menzer, "The Actor's Inhibition: Early Modern Acting and the Rhetoric of Restraint," *Renaissance Drama* 35 (2006): 125–43, 86.

complainants frequently describe their complaining as a form of self-consolation.<sup>30</sup> *The Spanish Tragedy*'s Viceroy of Portugal, for example, answers his own question as to "Why wail I, then, where's hope of no redress?" by noting that "Oh, yes, complaining makes my grief seem less" (1.3.31, 32). The question initially seems rhetorical, but he treats it as if it is not; I would suggest that this serves a dual purpose—it gives voice to the normative view of complaint (why complain if it does nothing?) while also suggesting that there may in fact be a reason to complain, even if redress might not be available.

If we look at the language of self-consolation through complaint, we will see that complainants speak of complaining as a mode of purgation, a physical as well as emotional release of dangerously "heavy" passion. The Viceroy speaks of his grief seeming "less," and in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, in response to Lucius' plea that he will "Let reason govern thy lament," Titus defends his seemingly excessively complaints for Lavinia with their display of his "passions bottomless" on the grounds that "losers will have leave / To ease their stomachs with their bitter tongues" (3.1.216, 217, 231–32). In the section of *The Art of English Poesy* (1589) on "The form of poetical lamentations," George Puttenham similarly figures grief as a heaviness that might be "eased" through speaking: he suggests that it is "a piece of joy to be able to lament with ease and freely to pour forth a man's inward sorrows and the griefs wherewith his mind is surcharged [. . .] by making the very grief itself (in part) cure of the disease."<sup>31</sup> This understanding of grief eased by grief has resonances with Aristotle's notion of catharsis, where the release of emotional excess relieves and restores the sufferer to some kind of emotional balance, although here there is no suggestion that tragedy's representations or elicitations of such grief might serve those purgative ends for theatrical audiences.<sup>32</sup> But I am interested in the relationality that these

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<sup>30</sup> Diaz, "Grief as Medicine for Grief."

<sup>31</sup> *The Art of English Poesy*, eds. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 135.

<sup>32</sup> On the Aristotelian notion of tragic catharsis in early modern England, see Timothy J. Reiss, "Renaissance theatre and the theory of tragedy," *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.

seemingly monologic complaints imply, a relationality I would suggest we can see in their concern with the way complainants release, ease, lessen, and distribute their passion by complaining.

The complaints of Isabella and Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy* are instructive examples of how complaints are forms of release that allow passion to circulate through the complainant's environment. In language informed by humoral theory, these complaints and others like them describe passion in terms that suggest the capacity of passion to be materially transferred between subjects' internal and external environments.<sup>33</sup> Mourning her son's death, Isabella imagines that her tears and sighs, composed of water and wind, might foment until they become a storm: "Oh, gush out, tears, fountains and floods of tears! / Blow, sighs, and raise an everlasting storm! / For outrage fits our cursèd wretchedness," she cries (2.5.43–45). Her words gesture not only to the appropriateness of her "excessive"—too heavy—feeling but to the physical movement of rage out of the body, an idea echoed in Hieronimo's claim that he too has "surcharged the air / With ceaseless plaints for my deceased son" (3.7.3–4). What they envision, I am suggesting, is an ecology of complaint: their passions escape their bodies as tears and sighs and "windy" words that rush into the air, giving their burden ("surcharge") to it. Ironically, it is some of the most apparently solipsistic complaints that make this ecology visible, as tragic characters ask caves and hills to echo their cries, the skies and the flowing streams to weep with them, the heavens to send down their justice, or hell to inflict upon the earth its fury.

Whether complainants actually find their grief to be lessened by complaining varies from one context to another: the Viceroy says he does, but Hieronimo insists he does not, that despite

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229–47. Reiss suggests that the concept of restoring the spectator to a state of emotional homeostasis through heightening and purging of certain emotions has very little influence among sixteenth-century English writers of tragedy. For a different view, see Pollard, "Conceiving tragedy."

<sup>33</sup> Paster argues that the behaviors of early modern dramatic characters "express a physical, emotional, and psychological embeddedness in fictive worlds structured and made meaningful by correspondence between inner and outer, body and cosmos, emotions and weather." "The tragic subject and its passions," p. 164.

complaining “still tormented is my tortured soul / With broken sighs and restless passions” (3.7.10–11). Performances of complaint in Sidney’s *Arcadia*—where they appear as verses sung or spoken by characters in the presence of auditors of whom the complainants are often unaware—describe the dynamic as a feedback loop: the lovelorn Cleophila says that she wishes to “discharge her mind” and “cast from me part of my burd’nous cares,” but finds that the very act of complaining literally replicates her cares, for her thoughts, which “issue oft in sound,” in the air “with echo’s force rebound / And make me hear the plaints I would refrain.”<sup>34</sup> The very words of her complaint foreground a certain ambivalence: the claim that she “would refrain” her plaints suggests that she desires to cease or to repeat them—or to do both. This is, in a nutshell, the dynamic of tragic complaint: the complainant would cease the complaint but cannot because it has not been answered, and if it has not been answered it must be repeated, and ideally by as many voices as possible. Diaz and others have explored the compulsion attached to complaint—the insistence that one must complain—in psychoanalytic terms, but as I will elaborate in more detail when I move to *Lear*, I approach it in *ethical* terms, reading the language of compulsion and necessity as gesturing toward the responsibility of the self to the other.

The anonymous play *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine* (perf. c. late 1580s/early 1590s, pr. 1595) helps to make this compulsion to complain visible through its own blatantly compulsive imitation of the rhetorical style of Anglo-Senecan and Senecan-influenced tragedy. *Locrine* is so saturated with complaint as to border on parody.<sup>35</sup> The play begins with the deathbed complaint of Brutus, the mythical Trojan conqueror of Britain, whose kingdom, now divided between his sons Locrine, Albanact, and Camber, is about to be invaded by the Scythian Humber. Albanact, wounded to the

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<sup>34</sup> For Cleophila’s complaint, see *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia (The Old Arcadia)*, p. 104.

<sup>35</sup> In *English Tragedy Before Shakespeare*, Wolfgang Clemen notes “the author’s determination to bring in laments at all costs and as often as possible,” and counts “no fewer than five long point-of-death speeches and eleven laments” (p. 261, 93).



death, laments the treachery of Fortune. Mourning Albanact's death, Camber, Lochrine, and Lochrine's wife Guendoline each suggest that neither Priam nor Hecuba nor Niobe "lamented more than I for Albanact" (3.2.47).<sup>36</sup> Lochrine bewails his "overburdened heart" (5.6.44). Guendoline, abandoned by Lochrine for Humber's widow Estrild, asks the "gentle winds" that "Pass through the circuit of the heavenly vault" to deliver her complaints to Jove (5.3.1-2). Estrild laments for Lochrine's death, and her daughter Sabren, who asks the nymphs to "Come wail with me," laments for hers (5.6.142). And the play has not just one but two ghosts (Albanact and Corineus) that complain for vengeance.

In addition to its excess of complaint, what both distinguishes *Lochrine* from the plays it imitates and identifies it as parody is its inclusion of the decidedly un-Senecan clown characters Strumbo and Trompart,<sup>37</sup> who also speak—or attempt to speak—in the tropes of tragic complaint, to comic effect. "I must here wayment [lament]," Strumbo says; mistakenly believing Strumbo dead in the fighting between Albanact and Humber's armies, Trompart calls "O colliers of Croydon, and rustics of Roydon, / And fishers of Kent," along with "You briars and brambles, you cooks' shops and shambles" to "Come howl and yell. / With howling and screaming, with wailing and weeping, / Come you to lament," invoking an ecology of complaint that is not that of Senecan tragedy but very obviously that of the early modern social world (2.6.98-100, 107-8, 103-6).

While on the one hand the play echoes the rhetoric of complaint-shaming—Corineus taunts Albanact's brothers into action by asking them whether they think "to quell the enemy's warlike train / With childish sobs and womanish laments," and Guendoline, determined to avenge Lochrine's perfidy with the sword, bids farewell to "womanish complaints"—it also suggests, by its parody of the genre,

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<sup>36</sup> *The Lamentable Tragedy of Lochrine: A Critical Edition*, ed. Jane Lytton Gooch (New York: Garland, 1981).

<sup>37</sup> Trompart is the name that Spenser gives to the companion of Braggadocchio in the *Faerie Queene*; there, the name (from the French *tromper*, deceive) suggests his flattery and deceptiveness.

that tragedy requires complaint (3.2.62–63, 5.3.42). Its framing devices make the same suggestion.

Toward the end of the play, gazing upon the bodies of Locrine and Estrild, Sabren asks, “What fierce Achilles, what hard stony flint, / Would not bemoan this mournful tragedy?” (5.6.71–72). Deriving its force from its allusion to an iconic figure of unrelenting hardness and to the lithic as the very limit of the lamentable—the conventional role of stone in the ecology of complaint being to mark the threshold of creaturely sympathy<sup>38</sup>—Sabren’s question implies that complaint is appropriate, and its refusal unnatural. Her words are aimed at the theatrical audience, for she suggests that “they that live and view our tragedy, / May mourn our case with mournful plaudites”—that is, applause (5.6.83–84). Reflecting on “this mournful tragedy” and asking for “mournful plaudites” in the play’s last act, Sabren’s words implicitly gesture back to the entire performance of *Locrine* and show the play to have demonstrated the truth of the mournful rhetorical question with which its Chorus-figure, Ate, introduced it: “O what may long abide above this ground / In state of bliss and healthful happiness?” (1.1.20–21).

In a pronouncement at the play’s midpoint that will also be echoed by a complaint in its last act, Ate tells the audience that “All our life is but a tragedy” (3.1.17). In her last complaint before her death, Estrild draws an analogy between her role as an exemplary figure of complaint within the “glass” of the play and the tragic boundedness of subjects within the actual world. Crying “O fickle Fortune! O unstable world!” she repeats Ate’s words, asking, “What else are all things that this globe contains, / But a confused chaos of mishaps? / Wherein, as in a glass, we plainly see, / That all our life is but as a tragedy” (5.6.50, 51–54). In its parody of the genre, *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine* suggests that in the world(s) of tragedy everybody complains: only a stone would not weep.

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<sup>38</sup> On the trope of the insentient stones, and on the power and vitality attributed to stones in medieval writing, see Kellie Robertson, “Exemplary Rocks,” in *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: Ethics and Objects*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Washington, D.C.: Oliphant Books, 2012) pp. 91–121. Cohen’s description of stones and statues, in his introduction to the volume, as too often “objects condemned to silent roles in human dramas” is especially apt here (p. 6).

## II. Not complaining

The Prologue to Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* (perf. 1587–88, pr. 1590) introduces the play by announcing its novelty, inviting audiences to go “From jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits” to the “stately tent of war, / Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine / Threat’ning the world with high astounding terms / And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword” (1, 3–6).<sup>39</sup> I want to suggest that Marlowe constructs Tamburlaine’s “boundless ambition”<sup>40</sup> not only through his hyperbolic performative language, but by the startling novelty of what he does not say: he does not complain. Against the practice of representing tragedy’s characters as ultimately subjected to forces greater than themselves—a subjection conventionally signified through those subjects’ complaints—Marlowe invents a tragic subject whose triumph over the world that determines others is signified through his refusal to complain.

This is not to say that *Tamburlaine* contains no complaint. On the contrary, the play echoes the chorus of complaint that characterizes the worlds of Anglo-Senecan tragedy and tragedies such as *Gorboduc*, *Selimus*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, and *Lochrine*. But from its very beginning *Tamburlaine* situates the complaints of others as the background against which this new tragic hero emerges, not as a complaining subject himself, but as the subject of others’ complaints. In true Anglo-Senecan style, *Tamburlaine*’s action begins with a complaint—a comically deferred one, as the king of Persia, Mycetes, proclaims that he lacks the oratorical force and wit to complain as he would like. “I find myself aggrieved, / Yet insufficient to express the same, / For it requires a great and thund’ring speech,” he grumbles, asking first his brother Cosroe and then his counselor Meander to “tell the cause unto my

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<sup>39</sup> *Tamburlaine the Great*, Part 1, in *English Renaissance Drama*.

<sup>40</sup> The phrase is Eugene M. Waith’s, in *The Herculean Hero* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962) p. 60. On the way that Marlowe’s verse unites speech with action, see C. L. Barber, *Creating Elizabethan Tragedy: The Theater of Marlowe and Kyd* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

lords” and “Declare the cause of my conceived grief, / Which is, God knows, about that Tamburlaine” (1.1.1–3, 4, 29–30). It is through Meander’s rehearsal of the king’s previous complaints, as they appear to his memory, that we are first introduced to Tamburlaine as a fearsome figure: “Oft have I heard Your Majesty complain / Of Tamburlaine, that sturdy Scythian thief” who intends “To make himself the monarch of the East” (1.1.35–36, 43).

Not only Marlowe but his modern readers as well have pronounced Tamburlaine’s self-willed action in the world, his desire and capacity to transcend its limits, as something new on the stage. Willard Farnham famously suggested that Marlowe’s hero exemplifies the awakening of a “Renaissance spirit” absent in Senecan and *de casibus* tragedy, while Robert Weimann attributed to this same new anti-fatalistic spirit early modern tragedy’s enhanced capacity for tragic action, since “human destiny is no longer subject to some inscrutable fate—determined by arbitrary gods or the wheel of fortune—but ultimately conditioned by the deeds, though not the will, of men.”<sup>41</sup> Arguing the opposite, Frederick Kiefer suggests that Tamburlaine is “a negation of the tragic spirit” because “in him the audience witnesses triumph instead of defeat, aspiration instead of limitation.”<sup>42</sup> But *Tamburlaine*, far from negating the idea that the subjects of tragedy are wretched and limited, depends upon its validity to fashion its hero.

*Tamburlaine* constructs Tamburlaine as a hero by contrasting his invincibility with the vulnerability of his opponents, and Marlowe does this by repurposing the conventional ecological tropes of complaint: typically these illustrate the complainant’s need for external support, but in Tamburlaine’s mouth they show his powerful self-sufficiency. Likening his army to “windy exhalations” and his power to a heavy weight—terms used in other tragedies to describe complaints and the passion

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<sup>41</sup> See Farnham, *Medieval Heritage*, p. 13; and Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition*, pp. 179–80.

<sup>42</sup> See Kiefer, *Fortune and Elizabethan Tragedy*, p. 134.

they express—he declares that his army “with their weight shall make the mountains quake, / Even as when windy exhalations, / Fighting for passage, tilt within the earth” (1.2.49–51). Whereas tragic complainants like *Lochrine’s* Humber imagine their bitter words infecting the air and rebounding from the vault of the sky like weapons, Tamburlaine compares the blows of his powerful sword to an “exhalation” that violently ruptures the sky of its own force, in one fell swoop, “As when a fiery exhalation / Wrapped in the bowels of a freezing cloud, / Fighting for passage, makes the welkin crack, / And casts a flash of lightning to the earth” (4.2.43–46). Echoing the complainant’s pathetic plea for the sky to weep in sympathy with her, Tamburlaine asserts that his force makes the sky swell and rain as if struck with his sword: “here in Afric, where it seldom rains, / Since I arrived with my triumphant host / Have swelling clouds, drawn from wide gasping wounds / Been oft resolved in bloody purple showers” (5.1.457–60).

While Tamburlaine speaks of his rise and his ambitions, his victims complain of their falls and their griefs, signaling their subjection to the laws of the world in terms that align them with melancholy and the element of earth, dry and cold. Seeing his death approach, Cosroe complains that “An uncouth pain torments my grievèd soul,” that “The heat and moisture which did feed each other, / For want of nourishment to feed them both / Is dry and cold” (2.7.7, 46–48). Comparing his own complaints to those of the snakes in hell that cannot escape their containment, Bajazeth, the Emperor of Turkey, laments, “O life more loathesome to my vexèd thoughts / Than noisome parbreak of the Stygian snakes / Which fills the nooks of hell with standing air, / Infecting all the ghosts with cureless griefs!” (5.1.255–58). Bajazeth sees his complaints as “standing,” circulating in a completely closed ecology with no hope of help. Meanwhile, Tamburlaine’s “aspiring mind” and soul, “climbing after knowledge infinite,” rise up in the air, “always moving as the restless spheres” (2.7.20, 24, 25). His nature is the exact opposite of the complainant. While he himself boasts that “I hold the Fates bound fast in iron chains, / And with

my hand turn Fortune's wheel about," (1.2.174–75) Tamburlaine's defeated opponents, as Kiefer and Harry Levin have noted, resemble the figures of *de casibus* tragedy, who complain of their falls.<sup>43</sup>

At once acknowledging its resemblance and announcing its departure from the *de casibus* tradition, *Tamburlaine* presents these characters' falls primarily as reflective mirrors of Tamburlaine's triumph rather than didactic object lessons for audiences. When Zenocrate first comes upon the "grievous objects" of the dead bodies of Bajazeth and his wife Zabina, she laments for them and moralizes their falls. But her suggestion that "Those that are proud of fickle empery, / And place their chiefest good in earthly pomp" should "Behold the Turk and his great emperess!" turns into words addressed specifically to (the absent) Tamburlaine, whom she begs to "In fear and feeling of the like distress / Behold the Turk and his great emperess!" (5.1.252–53, 361–62). Tamburlaine also sees them as objects for him, but of a different sort than Zenocrate intends: when he comes upon the scene, he calls them "objects fit for Tamburlaine, / Wherein, as in a mirror, may be seen / His honor" (5.1.475–77). This kind of hero is what we see in the "tragic glass" the play's Prologue has promised (Prologue.7).

I want to build on Jonathan Dollimore's argument that Tamburlaine, "the self-determining hero bent on transcendent autonomy," embodies a cultural fantasy of subjectivity to suggest that the fantasy of subjectivity Tamburlaine exemplifies is not only that of transcending the limits set upon the self by objective and external forces, but of transcending the self's own inherent limitations, its creatureliness.<sup>44</sup> What Tamburlaine denies is his vulnerability, and his denial of complaint is metonymic for this. This denial is most on display when Tamburlaine is most vulnerable, when, in the

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<sup>43</sup> Kiefer suggests that the dying words of Mycetes, Cosroe, Agydas, Bajazeth, the Soldan of Egypt, and the King of Arabia "collectively, recall the seemingly endless procession of the fallen in *de casibus* tragedy," *Fortune*, p. 134. In *The Overreacher: A Study of Christopher Marlowe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), Harry Levin observes that "To watch this parade is to see the *Mirror for Magistrates* come to life, to hear the sad stories of their deaths acted out" (p. 34).

<sup>44</sup> Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004) p. 112.

play's sequel, audiences see Tamburlaine defeated at last, not by war or the gods, but by a "distemper" that comes upon him suddenly and prompts him to proclaim that "Sickness or death can never conquer me" (5.1, p. 123).<sup>45</sup> Dying, he asks incredulously, "Shall sickness prove me now to be a man, / That have been termed the terror of the world?" (5.3, p. 126). In his rage, his language refuses his creaturely identity. In an inversion of the complaint trope of assaulting heaven with tears and plaints, he orders his men to "let us march against the powers of Heaven, / And set black streamers in the firmament, / To signify the slaughter of the gods," as if to battle one last set of opponents who will fall before his sword. At last forced to confront his death, he frames his body's weakness as an effect of his soul's exceptional strength: "this subject, [is] not of force enough / To hold the fiery spirit it contains" (5.3, p. 129). To the end, his language denies his vulnerability. In one last inversion of the complaints of the dying, Tamburlaine says at the end of Part 2, in his very last words, that "My body feels, my soul doth weep to see / Your sweet desires deprived my company, / For Tamburlaine, the scourge of God, must die" (5.3, p. 131).

*King Lear* expresses no such concern for the deprivations of its onstage or theatrical audiences. Instead, it suggests that its characters, including its king, and its audiences all belong to the same ecology of complaint, and that they possess a shared vulnerability that requires their attunement to the complaints of others, and to their mutual complaining.

## Part 2. Creatures of complaint: speaking feeling in *King Lear*

*King Lear* ends on a note both imperious and sententious: "The weight of this sad time we must obey, / Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say. / The oldest hath borne most; we that are young / Shall

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<sup>45</sup> *Tamburlaine the Great, Part II*, in *Five Plays*, ed. Havelock Ellis (New York: Hill and Wang, 1956). This edition contains no line-numbers.

never see so much, nor live so long” (5.3.322–25). Articulated in rhyming couplets placed at the play’s conclusion, these lines ostensibly reflect back upon the tragedy and sum up the moral of its story. And yet, at its bleak end, they have seemed to many spectators and readers of the play to have missed the point rather stunningly: what does it mean to “speak what we feel?” Is this not what Cordelia has done? And how can speaking one’s feeling be other than saying what one “ought” to say if one “must obey” the command to do so? The lines seem both enigmatic and trite, and they tend to be easily dismissed.<sup>46</sup> But I read these lines as integral to the ethos of the play, and as commanding the speaking of passion that was typically shamed or refused in early modern tragedy. They reconfigure complaining, shifting its meaning from a moral weakness or subjective shortcoming to an ethical act of feeling and speaking with the other.<sup>47</sup> Complaint, I suggest, is an important facet of *King Lear*’s ethical landscape, a landscape populated with various acts of compassion through which characters demonstrate care for others, often at great cost to themselves, including Kent’s care of Lear, Gloucester’s concern for the king’s safety, and Cornwall’s servant’s attempt to save Gloucester’s eyes. I argue that *King Lear* represents complaining as another mode of ethical action grounded in “fellow-creaturely-feeling.”

*Lear* has long been the exemplary text for exploring Shakespeare’s representation of “human nature.” As Henry Turner notes, the play struck early- to mid- twentieth-century critics as “emblematic of subjectivity in its most acute, most essential aspect,” whether they interpreted it as illustrative of humanity’s journey through suffering to redemption, or as a nihilistic meditation on existence.<sup>48</sup> My

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<sup>46</sup> The lines are even unanchored to a specific speaker, assigned to Albany in the 1608 Quarto version of the play, *The True Chronicle History of King Lear*, and to Edgar in the 1623 Folio *Tragedy of King Lear*. On the differences between these two versions of the play, see Foakes’ introduction to the Arden edition, particularly pp. 110–46.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Schoenfeldt assumes that these lines are crucial to the play’s ethics, but he reads their command primarily as sound medical advice, given early modern beliefs about the threats passion poses to the body (“‘Speak what we feel’ may be not just an ethical principle but also a medical principle”). See Schoenfeldt, “Shakespearean pain,” in *Shakespearean Sensations*, eds. Craik and Pollard, p. 203.

<sup>48</sup> *The English Renaissance Stage*, p. 183. See also the entirety of Chapter 5, “Theatre as a Spatial Art,” 155–85.



reading of the play participates in and takes its cue from recently renewed critical conversations about this old topic, conversations that have revolved around the concept of *creatureliness*, the affinities and interdependencies between humans and other animals, particularly as these pertain to their shared, and sheer, corporeal vulnerability.<sup>49</sup> Some of this work, like Laurie Shannon's on *Lear*, destabilizes the binary between the human and the animal; some, like Julia Lupton's on Shakespearean drama, focuses on the shifting zones and interfaces between political life and what Agamben calls "bare life," and some considers the implications of vulnerability and the self-estrangement induced by grief for a conception of ethics.<sup>50</sup> The last of these conceptual frameworks is largely associated with Judith Butler, and here I draw loosely upon the insights of her work on vulnerability and on speech acts to think about creaturely complaint in *Lear*. But although the concepts of modern philosophy and critical theory help to illumine some of *Lear*'s meanings I also wish to show that the play engages with contemporaneous interlocutors, particularly the Book of Job, that also imagine the dimensions of creatureliness.

Lear's oft-quoted words to Poor Tom—"thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art"—suggest the most essential characteristic of the

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<sup>49</sup> For examples of these approaches to *Lear*, see James Tink, "Expose Thyself to What Wretches Feel: The Figure of Bare Life in *King Lear* and *Timon of Athens*," *Shakespeare Studies* 43 (2005): 37–61; Laurie Shannon, "Poor, Bare, Forked: Animal Sovereignty, Human Negative Exceptionalism, and the Natural History of *King Lear*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60 (2009): 168–96; Valerie Traub, "The Nature of Norms in Early Modern England: Anatomy, Cartography, *King Lear*," *South Central Review* 26.1-2 (2009): 42–81; Erica Fudge, "Renaissance Animal Things," *New Formations* 76 (2012): 86–100; Michael C. Clody, "The Mirror and the Feather: Tragedy and Animal Voice in *King Lear*," *ELH* 80 (2013): 661–80; Sean Benson, "'Like Monsters of the Deep': Transworld Depravity and *King Lear*," *Philosophy and Literature* 37.2 (2013): 314–29; Arthur Brown, "Gen-, Shakespeare, Heidegger, and the Nature of Mortal Being," *Philosophy and Literature* 37.1 (2013): 36–52; and Daniel Juan Gil, *Shakespeare's Anti-Politics: Sovereign Power and the Life of the Flesh* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>50</sup> On the play's concern with the category of the human, and its amenability to an egalitarian, Marxist-influenced "ethical humanist" reading that considers "the human cost of oppressive economic and social systems, looks optimistically towards a future in which human beings might flourish rather than perish, and is committed to the egalitarian notion that all human beings should be able to live their lives free from the evils and indignities of economic and social injustice," see Andy Mousley, "Care, Scepticism, and Speaking in the Plural: Posthumanisms and Humanisms in *King Lear*," in *Posthumanist Shakespeares*, eds. Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) pp. 97–113, p. 100.

human to be its corporeal vulnerability (3.4.101–6).<sup>51</sup> In *King Lear*, I want to suggest, it is complaint that sketches the contours of this creaturely vulnerability, a construction of specifically human nature that the play represents in terms of *feeling*, which it figures as a force that threatens to break, burst, or overburden the subject. Complaint is the catalyst that sparks recognition of creatureliness and of shared vulnerability. It is also the form of language that testifies to what the play represents as the unbearable weight of “heavy” feeling, and the speech act through which that testimony is addressed to another as a demand for recognition. Tracing *Lear*’s depictions of a feeling that is almost “too much,” I suggest that the play represents passionate speaking as testimonial language, redeeming complaint as proper and necessary to creaturely life.

## I. Feeling

Turned out of his daughters’ households, Lear vows that he will die before he will complain: “I have full cause of weeping,” he declares, “but this heart / Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws / Or e’er I’ll weep” (2.2.473–75). Lear’s words, which figure his grief as a force that might strain his heart until it shatters, echo those that other characters in the play use to describe the intensity of their feeling. The language of the play turns again and again to the concept of a feeling so powerful—so heavy, so sharp, so full—that it would destroy the one who feels it, and to the image of bodies and body parts strained, pressed, and weighed down until they break or burst or crack under their burdens.<sup>52</sup> “O, that my heart

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<sup>51</sup> As Laurie Shannon argues, the play represents the human body as *uniquely* vulnerable and fragile and hence delineates a “zoographic tradition” through which we might rethink the post-Enlightenment opposition between the human and the animal. See “Poor, Bare, Forked,” p. 170.

<sup>52</sup> In their respective readings of the play, Andy Mousley and Michael Schoenfeldt also explore its representations of bodies that break with grief, although to different ends than mine. Mousley suggests that by demonstrating the human susceptibility to “sensory overload,” both “the frailty of the flesh” and the dangers of “emotional onslaught,” the play serves as “an antidote to amnesia” about “the limits of the human,” (“Care, Scepticism, and Speaking in the Plural,” p. 110–111) while Schoenfeldt is exploring the relationship between early modern drama and contemporary beliefs about the physiological effects of passion, particularly pain (“Shakespearean pain,” especially p. 198).

would burst!” Edgar says as he tells Albany the “brief tale” he describes as threatening to “top extremity,” the story of Gloucester’s death (5.3.181, 180, 206). Kent’s “strings of life / Beg[in] to crack” with “puissant” grief (5.3.215–16, 215). “Man’s nature cannot carry / Th’affliction, nor the fear,” Kent prophesies of the storm (3.2. 48–49). Even Edgar’s Stoic perspective on death—“Ripeness is all”—suggests the body bursting, the soul spilling out over its cracked shell (5.1.11). Edgar attributes Gloucester’s eventual death to just such a final, unbearable strain of feeling, reporting that “his flawed heart, / Alack, too weak the conflict to support, / ’Twiext extremes of passion, joy and grief, / Burst smilingly” (5.3.195–98). Indeed, *King Lear* makes the vulnerability of the body and the strength of “feeling” conceptually inseparable: representing the human body as too weak to withstand intense physical sensation or intense passion, it defines human nature in terms of its ultimate limit, the breaking point at which feeling becomes too much to bear.

The play emphasizes the precariousness of existence by reiterating that the coordinates of this point can never be exactly determined in advance, only approximated. The terms that figure it are always relative: “too much,” “less than,” and, of course, “enough,” that undefined quantity that is at once exactly right and always verging on too much.<sup>53</sup> So the blinded Gloucester, giving his purse to Poor Tom, describes their transaction—a redistribution of wealth—as an effect of a divinely ordained redistribution of *suffering* that ensures that all feel “enough.” “Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man / That slaves your ordinance, that will not see / Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly,” he addresses the heavens, “so distribution should undo excess / And each man have enough” (4.1.70–72, 73–74). In Dover, where Gloucester determines that he has had enough and will now “Shake patiently my great affliction off,” he insists that his suffering body makes it impossible for his rational soul to endure without complaint, and to endure at all, that even “If I could bear it longer and not fall / To

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<sup>53</sup> On the play’s interest in quantity, see John Jones, *Shakespeare at Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

quarrel with your great opposeless wills, / My snuff and loathed part of nature should / Burn itself out” (4.6.36, 37–40). His survival of his “fall” forces him to recalibrate his breaking point and resolve to “bear / Affliction till it do cry out itself / ‘Enough, enough’ and die” (4.6.75–77).

Gloucester’s words, which construct an image of his grief involuntarily bursting into one climactic complaint, his affliction crying out “enough, enough!” before falling silent forever, are representative of how the play represents complaint as an eruption of feeling into language that occurs right on the cusp of annihilation. Like Gloucester, Lear—“full of grief”—feels his passion rising dangerously within him, threatening both his life and his resolve to “be the pattern of all patience” by “say[ing] nothing” (2.2.462, 3.2.37–38). Alluding to the condition commonly called “the mother,” Lear addresses “this mother [that] swells up toward my heart,” crying, “*Hysterica passio*, down, thou climbing sorrow, / Thy element’s below” (2.2.246, 247–48). Invoking the Stoic ideal of patient masculinity, he insists that he will not, of his own, perform a feminine passion. He does so in terms that reveal that he cannot be so strong of his own accord: “You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!” he pleads, “touch me with noble anger, / And let not women’s weapons, water-drops, / Stain my man’s cheeks” (2.2.462, 460, 465–67). Yet even as he employs the gendered rhetoric of complaint-shaming to express this wish, his weak body and his strong feeling conspire against him, threatening to erupt: “O me, my heart! My rising heart! But down!”; “O fool, I shall go mad” (2.2.310, 475). And in the storm, accompanied by “such bursts of horrid thunder, / Such groans of roaring wind and rain,” Lear himself bursts spectacularly into complaint (3.2.42–43).

## II. Speaking

The play frames the storm that appears in Act 3 as Lear’s outburst into complaint—the very rising up and spilling over of his grief into external expression that he has repudiated. In the Folio version of the

play, a stage direction for “Storm and tempest” follows Lear’s insistence that “No, I’ll not weep” (2.2.472). The storm erupts just as Lear vows not to, its winds and rains performing the very wailing and weeping that he rejects, its water-drops touching his cheeks in place of the “noble anger” for which he has wished. Lear initially faces the storm as if it were indeed an extension of his passion, the “climbing sorrow” that has climbed up and out of his heart into the world. Addressing “you elements” as if they are his agents, he “Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea, / Or swell the curled waters ’bove the main, / That things might change, or cease” (3.1.5–7).

Like other complainants, Lear asks the raging wind, the rain, the lightning and the thunder to reflect the turbulence of his passions, to enact revenge on all living things.<sup>54</sup> He imagines his cries reverberating, the whole world “cracking” with his rage as it pours out through these forces of nature:

Blow winds and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!  
 You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout  
 Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!  
 You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,  
 Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,  
 Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,  
 Strike flat the thick rotundity o’ the world,  
 Crack nature’s moulds, all germens spill at once  
 That make ingrateful man! (3.2.1–9)

Lear imagines that the storm has a face, and that it is his own: the wind has cheeks that crack, the “cataracts and hurricanoes” are eyes that gush water, lightning—better than thought—is “thought-executing fire” so hot and fast that it turns wish into action, the thunder a voice so powerful that need only “shake” for its will to be done, and the earth to be punished. All that is weakness in his body—the cheeks cracked with age, the watery eyes, the shaky voice—is sheer power in the storm, his surrogate complainant whose raging sighs and tears and sounds are signs of force instead of weakness. “Rumble thy bellyful! Spit fire, spout rain!” he commands, asking it to release from its imagined body the

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<sup>54</sup> On this trope see Clemen, *English Tragedy Before Shakespeare*, p. 225–52; and John Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*.

passions he wishes to keep contained in his (3.2.14). In ordering the storm to “strike flat” the heart of the world and destroy the very source of life, Lear laments his own “heart-struck injuries” (3.1.17) and wishes that his daughters will be struck with the “revenges” that he imagines as “the terrors of the earth” (2.2.468, 471). The words he speaks here as he complains—like those of *Selimus*’ Bajazet, who releases his “stormie passions” by “utter[ing] curses to the concaue skie, / Which may infect the regions of the ayre, / And bring a generall plague on all the world”—are conventional tropes of complaint that would have been familiar to early modern audiences (*Selimus* 1827, 1804–6). They situate Lear in an ecology of complaint in which he and the storm work together for the same ends.

But if from one perspective the storm appears in the play as a sympathetic ecologic counterpart to Lear’s passion, and particularly to his *hysterica passio*—a condition that Samuel Harsnett, one of Shakespeare’s sources for the play, describes as coming “of a wind in the bottome of the belly, and proceeding with a great swelling”<sup>55</sup>—the play also makes it clear that the storm exists outside him. By staging Lear’s complaint in relation to an actual, rather than figurative, storm—a storm whose winds and rains certainly appear as correlatives to his passion but are also independent of it—the play makes the broader outlines of its ecology of complaint spring into focus. As the Fool’s and Kent’s interjections about the need to shelter from the awful weather make clear, the storm does not exist *for* Lear, nor does it occur for him alone: others are exposed and vulnerable to the raging weather that he imagines he commands. Midway through his complaint—as the Fool reminds him that “Here’s a night pities neither wise men nor fools” and urges him to go “in”—Lear suddenly realizes that the storm is indifferent to him, that it does not do his bidding, that its rage and grief are not his (3.2.12–13).

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<sup>55</sup> See the note to ll. 246–7 in the Arden edition, pp. 241–42.

When he addresses it again, his words show this realization. They are a stark contrast to the tenderness he has earlier imagined that the heavens might show him, his wish that the gods might “touch his cheeks” with “noble anger” and protect them from tears:

You owe me no subscription. Why, then, let fall  
Your horrible pleasure. Here I stand your slave,  
A poor, infirm, weak and despised old man.  
But yet I call you servile ministers  
That will with two pernicious daughters join  
Your high-engendered battles 'gainst a head  
So old and white as this. O ho! 'tis foul. (3.2.18–24)

Notice the rapid shift exactly in the middle of the second line, from recognizing the storm as a phenomenon independent of him—“let fall your horrible pleasure”—to seeing it as a force aligned against him. This moment is the mirror-image of Lear’s initial identification of the storm as an extension of his passion. Just as its eruption occasioned Lear’s performance of the passion he swore he would not express—enabling him to complain with and through the storm—here its continued raging occasions another of Lear’s complaints, this time about the storm. And in complaining about and against the storm, Lear acknowledges who he is: a poor, infirm, weak and despised old man.

The speech thus forms a conceptual chiasmus in the play, with the complaining figure of Lear at its center. I suggest that it is through complaining—his solipsistic reflection on his grief—that Lear discovers his creaturely status, and this discovery takes him out of himself. “Contending with the fretful elements” and “Striv[ing] in his little world of man to outscorn / The to and fro conflicting wind and rain,” he comes up against his vulnerability, the limits of his physical body (3.1.4, 10–11). As the Knight reports, the “impetuous blasts with eyeless rage / Catch in their fury and make nothing of” his “white hair” (3.1.8–9, 7). The “eyeless” storm does not have a face, and it is not turned kindly upon him. The play shows Lear recognizing that it is not the storm whose feeling is like unto his own, nor the storm with which he should identify, but rather the other victims of the storm—the others on whose heads its

“horrible pleasure” falls, who are exposed to “the tyranny of the open night too rough / For nature to endure” (3.4.2–3). We see the shift in the way Lear’s language turns away from himself, and to these others who also suffer: “My wits begin to turn,” he says, and he turns to the Fool: “Come on, my boy. How dost my boy? Art cold? I am cold myself . . . Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart / That’s sorry yet for thee” (3.2.67, 68–73).

Like the “tempest in my mind” to which Lear compares the storm—a tempest that “Doth from my senses take all feeling else, / Save what beats there”—the storm makes Lear feel his exposure to it as it “invades [him] to the skin” (3.4.12, 13–14, 7). Stinging from “Necessity’s sharp pinch!” he recalls, and addresses, the “Poor naked wretches, wheresoe’er you are, / That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm” (2.2.399, 3.4.28–29). His own exposure attunes him to the sensations he imagines they must feel, leading him to ask a question—“How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides, / Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you / From seasons such as these?”—whose purpose is to chide himself for “hav[ing] ta’en / Too little care of this” (3.4.30–32, 32–33). His suggestion that “pomp” should “Take physic” and “expose thyself to feel what wretches feel” mirrors Gloucester’s wish that the gods would distribute “feeling” such that the mighty who forget their duties to those below them should be recalled to it (3.4.33, 34).<sup>56</sup> At the same time, in the context of a play so concerned with hearts that burst and break and sides that split, Lear’s words, in their evocation of the tattered clothing and exposed bodies of unhoused wretches, recall and continue the play’s construction of the human body itself as fundamentally vulnerable, for they figure all bodies as their own fragile houses, full of openings—windows and loops—through which life can escape. Here, more than merely showing the king to empathize with others who are creatures, *Lear* shows that the king *is* a creature.

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<sup>56</sup> On the play’s exposure of social injustice stemming from class hierarchies, see Kiernan Ryan’s chapter on *Lear* in *Shakespeare*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).



### III. Being

In this section I want to develop Julia Lupton's brief suggestion, in her reading of Shakespeare's engagement with the Book of Job, that "*King Lear* remains truer to the essence of Jobean complaint, at once courting and resisting all consolation, than any other work by Shakespeare,"<sup>57</sup> by examining Job's complaints in relation to early modern Calvinist commentary on them. As I will suggest, the relationship between the commentary and Job's complaints reveals a dynamic very similar to the one in dramatic tragedy between voices that shame complaint and voices who perform complaint. Put simply, while the commentators highlight the troubling contrast between Job's *ethos* or "person"—that of "a godly man"—and his complaints, Job suggests that it is this same identity that compels his complaint. Job's insistence on the propriety of his complaints, I argue, is what comprises "the essence of Jobean complaint," and it is this fittingness of complaint as a human action to which *Lear* "remains true." And in doing so, the play makes an argument for the ethical value of complaint.

While many critics have noted the continuities between the Book of Job and *Lear* with regard to their protagonists' (im)patience, and Hannibal Hamlin has made a persuasive argument for the direct influence of the former upon the latter,<sup>58</sup> I approach the texts as sharing a conceptual framework concerned with feeling (passion and physical sensation), speaking (complaining), and human nature (as these texts imagine it). As the commentary on the Book of Job suggests, the biblical text was a standard locus for discussions about passion and appropriate human responses to suffering, and as such, it both

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<sup>57</sup> Lupton, "The Wizards of Uz: Shakespeare and the Book of Job," in *Shakespeare and Religion: Early Modern and Postmodern Perspectives*, eds. Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011) pp. 163–87, p. 177. This article focuses primarily on *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, and *Timon of Athens*.

<sup>58</sup> For a brief summary of the history of criticism linking the Book of Job and *Lear*, and for a compelling "constellation of allusions" that connect the two texts, see Hannibal Hamlin, "The Patience of Lear," in *Shakespeare and Religion*, pp. 127–60. As Hamlin notes, *passion* and *patience* both derive from *patior*, "to suffer" (p. 144).

informs and reflects the ideas with which *Lear* engages, and which the play asks its audiences to entertain.<sup>59</sup>

Early modern commentators on the Book of Job seem to have been quite troubled by the implications for readers of the complaints that punctuate Job's speech. Calvin's sermons on Job, translated into English by Arthur Golding in the 1570s and reprinted twice by 1584, repeatedly explore the contradiction between these complaints and the *ethos* that should be proper to their speaker. Calvin's first sermon on the first chapter of the book explains that Job "raungeth here out of his boundes, and useth such excessive and outrageous talke, that in many points he seemeth a desperate person"—a judgment he reiterates as frequently as Job does his complaints.<sup>60</sup> In his own commentary on the text, translated into English and printed in 1589, Calvin's disciple Theodore Beza (who likens the Book of Job to "a Tragedie" in its "whole discourse [. . .] of enterchaungeable speeches to and fro") similarly suggests that Job's speeches do not fit what his character should be: describing Job's language as "Full of bitternes, and therefore not agreeing with Jobs person," he argues that "those immoderate complaints of Job being so farre out of square were most justly to be blamed."<sup>61</sup> As Beza's use of the phrase "out of square" to describe Job's complaints suggests—a square being both a guiding principle and a tool for "testing the exactness of artificers' work"<sup>62</sup>—this is the language of a specifically creaturely

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<sup>59</sup> It is also possible that the Book of Job was an interlocutor for discussions of tragic drama. Hamlin points out the indexical existence of an early modern Job play, Robert Greene's *The History or Tragedy of Job*. The play is not extant, but is recorded in the Stationers' Register in 1594.

<sup>60</sup> *Sermons of Master John Calvin, upon the booke of Job* (1574), p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> *Job Expounded by Theodore Beza* (1589) A7r, L2v. In his notes on Job, Edward Young writes, "The Book of Job is well known to be Dramatic, and, like the Tragedies of old Greece, is Fiction built on Truth" (p. 314, 1777 ed.).

<sup>62</sup> *OED* square, *n.*, I.1.a.

ethics and decorum. Job's complaints are "to be blamed" because they defy his position, and hence his maker.<sup>63</sup>

Thus Calvin suggests that complaining, with its eruption of passion in "excessive and outrageous" language, is not only an action uncharacteristic of a godly person such as Job, but one unbecoming to any person, because it constitutes an overstepping and exceeding of the proper human bounds. "There is not that man whiche can not skill to complayne," he writes, urging each reader to "looke to himselfe" and "beate back suche temptations."<sup>64</sup> Calvin suggests that the same passions that lead humans beyond their designated bounds reduce them to a beastly, less-than-human condition ("our affections are like wylde beastes which dashe vs against God").<sup>65</sup> Using the same tropes that Shakespeare and other early modern writers use to describe grief as a heavy, body-bursting weight, Calvin and his fellow commentators explain Job's outrageous, out-of-bounds complaints by recourse to the way his suffering makes him deviate from himself, as his "extremitie" of affliction strains and pushes him beyond his limits.<sup>66</sup> Beza attributes his complaints to "being ouercharged"—overburdened—with the greatnesse of his grieffe," while the commentators of the Geneva Bible suggest that it is his weak body, "the infirmities of his flesh," which "caused him to brast [burst] out into this error of the wicked."<sup>67</sup> Indeed, Calvin solves the didactic problem of Job's complaining by suggesting that his complaints, which demonstrate perfectly this "error of the wicked," have been providentially "set down" as *negative* exemplars for readers: "Heere ye see to what purpose the holy Ghoste setteth downe the

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Emily A. Ransom's argument, which also explores this commentary, that in *Paradise Lost* Milton draws upon Jobean complaint to show that dialogue and "righteous questioning" are key to a correct relationship between creature and creator. See Ransom, "Digesting Job in *Paradise Lost*," *Studies in Philology* 111.1 (2014): 110–31. p. 110.

<sup>64</sup> Calvin, p. 163.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>67</sup> Beza, A8v; The Geneva Bible (1560), commentary on chapter 3.

complayntes that Job made: namely, that we should not followe that which is to be condemned in hym,” he writes.<sup>68</sup>

Expanding upon this point to drive the moral home, Calvin urges readers to learn from Job’s shameful complaints to be ashamed of, and to silence, their own complaints rather than “commenc[ing] action” against God:

But forasmuch as euery man is a hangman to himselfe (as I haue sayd already) and our owne lusts, passions, and desires are the cause of our vnquietnesse and incomberance to whome or against whome shall we make oure complaint? Then let vs learne, that when we haue considered all well, we must not blame God, nor commence action against him: but only find fault with ourselues. For the final point whervnto we must come, is to know the shortnesse of our life, and to bee abashed at it when wee thinke therof.<sup>69</sup>

But although Calvin suggests that the Book of Job teaches readers to be “abashed” at their complaining and the “shortnesse of our life”—and especially at the one in the light of the other—it is precisely the brevity and fragility of life and the extremity of pain that Job says compels his passionate speaking. When his friend Bildad attempts to shame him by telling him that “the wordes of thy mouth [are] as a mightie wind,” Job points out the apt affinity between his words and his condition: “my lyfe is but a winde,” he says, “Therefore I will not spare my mouth, but I will speake in the trouble of my spirite, and muse in the bitternesse of my mynde” (8:2, 7:7, 11).<sup>70</sup> He gestures to the weakness of his body, its inability to withstand strain, in language resonant with the complaints of *Lear*, asking, “Is my strength the strength of stones? or is my fleshe of brasse?” (6:12). And as if in direct defiance of the commentators’ consensus that his complaints represent both a deviation from his own “person” and an outrageous overstepping of human bounds, Job insists that he speaks in the rightful spirit, and the

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<sup>68</sup> Calvin, p. 270.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 272, my italics.

<sup>70</sup> Citations from the Book of Job are from the Geneva Bible (1560).

voice, of his and others' creaturely being, that "mine harp is turned to mourning, and my organs into the voyce of them that weepe" (30:31).

The understanding of human nature that the Book of Job constructs is the same as that in *Lear*. While it would not be inaccurate to describe this conception of the self as that of early modern humoral discourse or of modern critical theory—this is certainly a pre-Cartesian, socially-constructed subject understood to be thoroughly embedded in and determined by the material and social world—I want to suggest that it is also an articulation of the human subject as a creature constituted through complaint. In *Lear*, when the mad Lear and blinded Gloucester meet in what Edgar describes as "thou side-piercing sight!" Lear delivers a very different sermon on existential complaint to Gloucester than Calvin does to his readers: "I will preach to thee: mark me," he says, "When we are born we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools" (4.6.85, 176–78). In the poem from Sidney's *Arcadia* that Shakespeare alludes to here, the character Plangus glosses the same commonplace with the claim that "The child feels that; the man that feeling knows, / With cries first born, the presage of his life"—in other words, that the infant's cry contains the seed of a later and fuller knowledge of misery to which feeling will remain a reliable guide.<sup>71</sup>

In the *Arcadia*, Plangus himself, who complains over the imprisonment of his beloved Erona, scoffs the moral philosophy that his friend Boulon invokes (to "tame these childish superfluties," to relinquish "female lamentations") and defends his complaining on the grounds of a different kind of ethics. "In moral rules let raging woes contained be?" he asks rhetorically, and vows that "If aught I cease these hideous exclamations, / While that my soul, she, she lives in affliction; / [. . .] / Then let me eke

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<sup>71</sup> On the *Arcadia* as Shakespeare's source for the Gloucester subplot, see D. M. McKeithan, "King Lear and Sidney's *Arcadia*," *Studies in English* 14 (1934): 45–49. Editions of both texts frequently note the resemblance between Lear's lines and Plangus' complaint. For Plangus' complaint, see *Arcadia*, pp. 129–34. ll. 19–20. Plangus' complaint exists in the so-called *Old Arcadia*, which circulated in MS during Shakespeare's lifetime, as well as in the two different printed versions of the text called *The Countess of Pembrokes Arcadia* (1590, 1593).

forget one hand from other; / Let me forget that Plangus I am called.”<sup>72</sup> Punning on his own name, from the Latin *plangere* (to beat in grief; to lament loudly, bewail), Plangus identifies himself with his complaint just as his complaint, with its suggestion of continuity between the weeping infant and the grown man, identifies all creatures with complaint.

Like the Book of Job, and like Plangus, *King Lear*'s construction of human nature in terms of creaturely vulnerability is bound up with a defense of the inevitability, and the necessity, of complaining. The voices of Job, Plangus, and Lear suggest human nature to be that of a creature who cannot help but complain. This insistence is an ironic rejoinder to the rhetoric of complaint-shaming, which cautions that one's identity comes under threat from excessive passion and “excessive speeches” of complaint: that men become beasts, or women, that the godly act like the wicked or (to go back to Plutarch) the worst sort of people. Calvin, for instance, warns that “our passions carrie us away in such wyse as we bee in a manner beside our selues.”<sup>73</sup> But Job and Lear each suggest that to be “carried away” by passion, to be taken outside the self and placed “beside our selues,” as it were, is to *recognize* the self. *Lear* stages this moment of recognition through the speech act of complaint, as Lear complains in the storm. His intense feeling, erupting into complaint, sparks a self-recognition (“A poor, infirm, weak and despised old man”) and an ethical epiphany (“Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are”) that are inextricable from each other. What we see happen to Lear during the storm resonates with what Judith Butler writes about the ethical potential of grief and injury in *Precarious Life*, that “passion and grief and rage, all of which tear us from ourselves, bind us to others, transport us, undo us, implicate us in lives that are not our own,” might provide opportunity “to reflect upon injury, to find out the mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from permeable borders, unexpected

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<sup>72</sup> *Arcadia*, pp. 132–33.

<sup>73</sup> Calvin, p. 264.

violence, dispossession, and fear, and in what ways.”<sup>74</sup> As she argues, grief takes the self outside of itself to see, as if for the first time, the social imbrications and vulnerabilities that have *always* defined and constituted it, the vulnerability that it shares (although not equally or in the same ways) with others. While this moment of recognition is one that the rhetoric of complaint-shaming inadvertently forecloses in its refusal to countenance a self that would acknowledge its own vulnerability, *Lear*, by putting the speech act of complaint at the heart of its staging of this experience, suggests an ethical value to “complaining,” to expressing the passions of grief and rage. Lear’s grief, erupting into complaint, attunes him to the suffering of others, making him perceive for the first time an ecology of complaint in which he has always been situated. Similarly, the play, I argue, uses his complaint(s) to attune the theatrical audience to its broader soundscape of complaint—and to incorporate them into it.

#### IV. Speaking feeling

In closing I turn to two invitations to speak feeling—to complain—that arrive at the end of the play, one addressed most directly to the stage audience (Lear’s “Howl, howl, howl, howl”) and the other to the theatrical audience (the injunction to “speak what we feel”). These invitations, which not only attune audiences to complaint but invite them to become complainants, frame complaint as a demand that its speaker makes of another, a demand based in the vulnerability that the play has constructed as constitutive of human nature.

Interrupting a moment of anxious anticipation (Albany has just sent a messenger to save Cordelia), Lear’s entrance onto the stage shatters this hope. He enters carrying her dead body and

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<sup>74</sup> Butler, *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 22, xii. In *Learning to Curse* (New York: Routledge, 1990), Stephen Greenblatt describes Lear’s fears in more historically specific terms that resonate with Butler’s description of what grief and injury might do to one’s sense of identity: the “terror of being turned out of doors or of becoming a stranger even in one’s own house; the fear of losing the food, clothing, and shelter necessary for survival, let alone dignity; the humiliating loss of parental authority; the dread, particularly powerful in a society that adhered to the principle of gerontological hierarchy, of being supplanted by the young” (p. 95).

crying in words that are both expressive and, grammatically speaking, an imperative: “Howl, howl, howl, howl!” (5.3.255).<sup>75</sup> The action he performs he suggests his onlookers should perform with him. Indeed, he shames them for their silence. “O, you are men of stones! / Had I your tongues and eyes, I’d use them so / That heaven’s vault should crack: she’s gone for ever” (5.3.255–57). In his reading of this scene, Michael C. Clody argues that Lear’s howling, with its approximation of animal sound, confronts audiences with the impossibility of making sense of this loss by defying signification: all that the howls communicate is “the experience that *the cry is*.”<sup>76</sup> But “howling,” as I have been suggesting, is a trope of complaint, and for early modern theatrical audiences this action—especially accompanied by Lear’s words about cracking heaven’s vaults with tongues and eyes—would thus have signified rather more than Clody suggests. Lear’s howls not only signify his creaturely nature but do so in relation to the gods to whom he addresses them.<sup>77</sup> Recalling other dramatic characters’ demands for justice—for example, Hieronimo’s “ceaseless plaints” that “Beat at the windows of the brightest heavens, / Soliciting for justice and revenge”—these howls, uttered as Lear is almost at his breaking point, are complaints, lamentation and supplication tinged with accusation, directed at the sky (*The Spanish Tragedy* 3.7.4, 13–14).<sup>78</sup> As an imperative, Lear’s “howl, howl, howl, howl!” orders his onlookers to turn their tongues

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<sup>75</sup> Lear’s lamentation for Cordelia as he cradles her dead body visually associates him with Marian lament, as Katharine Goodland suggests in “Inverting the Pietà in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*,” *Marian Moments in Early Modern British Drama*, eds. Regina Buccola et al. (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007) pp. 47–74.

<sup>76</sup> See Clody, “The Mirror and the Feather,” (671, author’s italics). For other arguments on the purely acoustic “meaning” of sound, see Nicole Loraux, *The Mourning Voice: An Essay on Greek Tragedy*, trans. Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), p. 39; and Linda M. Austin, “The Lament and the Rhetoric of the Sublime,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 53 (1998): 279–306, p. 279.

<sup>77</sup> See also Edgar’s description of Kent’s “bellow[ing] out / As he’d burst heaven” at the sight of Gloucester’s dead body (5.3.211–12).

<sup>78</sup> Joanne Diaz’s research on early modern bills of complaint shows that these legal documents did in fact describe the grief of the complainants in great detail. Like complaints of lamentation in literary contexts, these bills “emphasized the complainant’s extreme conditions of distress, an urge to recount the transgression in detail (however exaggerated or misremembered), 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.” See Diaz, “Grief as Medicine for Grief,” p. 82.



and eyes in the same direction and use them to complain with him, to put intense feeling into language so powerful that it might crack the vault of the heaven—as if those complaints, rather than the witnesses who would refuse to perform them, might be like stones, and as if it might be the impenetrable vault of heaven, rather than those who fling their complaints at it, who might break.

Just as it is Lear, the play's sovereign, who is made to acknowledge in the groans and roars of the storm his too-little-considered responsibility to his subjects, here he and the company of complainants that he interpellates together raise the complaint as a demand to an authority assumed to have not only the power but also the responsibility to redress the wrong. This collective complaint addressed to the gods foregrounds its speakers' creaturely identity in the specifically theological sense of the term, invoking the relationship between the complaining creature and creator—a relationship that specific complaints for divine justice and universalizing existential complaints similarly invoke (Sidney's Plangus, for instance, complaining about "wretched human-kind," demands "where was first that cruel cunning found / To frame of earth a vessel of the mind, / Where it should be to self-destruction bound?"<sup>79</sup>) In *Lear*, the silence of the gods in response to these complaints enables the play to pose the question of what creatureliness might mean without a creator, a question perhaps made easier to pose within its loosely Senecan cosmology. By this I do not mean that the play is making a metaphysical argument concerning the existence or justice of divine providence, but simply that the pointed absence of the divine justice for which these figures call in the world of the play requires its characters to turn, at its conclusion, to other ways of seeing themselves. They do so, I would suggest, in ways that we can read as embodying the notion of creatureliness that Lupton, glossing Arendt, describes as "indicat[ing] the contingency and enigma of our experience in the world at the behest of events, desires, and relationships that precede us, at once determining us in advance and providing the peculiar set of coordinates around

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<sup>79</sup> ll. 12, 7–9.

which we might exercise some form of freedom.”<sup>80</sup> The emphasis here is not on the relation between the creature and the creator, but on the relation between creatures. Albany sees in this possibility nothing but horror and chaos, suggesting, “If that the heavens do not their visible spirits / Send quickly down to tame these vile offences, / [. . . ] / Humanity must perforce prey on itself, / Like monsters of the deep” (4.2.47–51). The play, I would argue, situates an attunement to complaint, and a willingness to complain, as a precursor to other, less predatory ways of being together in the world.

Like Gloucester, who says that he can know the world “feelingly,” Lear claims that “A man may see how this world goes” provided that he only “Look with thine ears” (4.6.145, 146, 147). His howls align his own sounds of grieving with the soundscape of complaint that reverberates throughout the play; from the storm’s “bursts of horrid thunder” and “groans of roaring wind” to the “roaring voices” of the “Bedlam beggars” who “outface / The winds and persecutions of the sky” with “lunatic bans” and “prayers” (3.2.46, 47, 2.2.185, 182–83, 190). On the open air stage of the Globe, these complaints, circulating around the stage and rising up through its circle, are a form of testimony, making the world intelligible as comprised of an ecology of complaint, in which all can and do suffer, for social and political and natural reasons, and for no reason at all, but some more than others, and in circumstances that make that feeling both more intense and less bearable.

This brings us back to those last lines of *King Lear*. “The weight of this sad time we must obey, / Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say. / The oldest hath borne most; we that are young / Shall never see so much, nor live so long” (5.3.322–25). The last lines of the play, spoken with the dead bodies of Goneril, Regan, Lear, and Cordelia laid out across the stage, and Edmund’s offstage death announced, suggest that “the weight of this sad time” compels the speaking of feeling. There is no

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<sup>80</sup> See Lupton, *Thinking with Shakespeare*, 14–15.

mention of one's own suffering lessened, no recalibration of perspective on one's own grief.<sup>81</sup> On the contrary, that weight is described in terms of taking on what belongs to someone else. Drawing on material understandings of passion and the permeability of bodies to each other and their environment, the lines imagine what the play has represented as the unequally distributed weight of suffering distributed through this shared opening of selves, moving from one body into another. I would argue that whether it is spoken by Albany, the voice of sovereign authority, or Edgar, the voice of tragic authority, this *plange mecum*—complain with me—includes its theatrical audiences in its address, that the play positions complaint, tragedy's standard signifier of creaturely being, within a matrix of creaturely responsibility. In *Lear*, as in other tragedies, speeches of complaint do indeed recall audiences to their proper place: but if the play whispers the rhetorical question "who are you to complain," its representation of creatureliness suggests that the answer is that "I *must* here complain"—not only for oneself, but for others.<sup>82</sup>

This is the ground on which I would argue that *Lear* recuperates complaining from moral philosophy, attributing ethical value to it. But this recuperation fits uneasily with interpretations of the play's ending as redemptive or life-affirming. With their allusion to a weighty feeling that "must" be spoken, the play's last lines cannot help but recall its first scene, the way that its plot begins—just as it ends—with the command to speak one's feeling. Nor can its counsel to "speak what we feel" escape the echo of its many representations of heavy feeling and its eruption into language as precursors to the bursting of the body. Forced to give words to her "ponderous" feeling, despite her unwillingness to "heave / My heart into my mouth," Cordelia speaks too truthfully by saying that she feels exactly as she

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<sup>81</sup> Cf. Edgar's earlier Stoic consolation that "When we our betters see bearing our woes, / We scarcely think our miseries our foes," that the pains of others makes one's own "light and portable" (3.6.99–100, 105).

<sup>82</sup> On the Stoic literature of consolation and Lear's rejection of this tradition, see Fred B. Tromly, "Grief, Authority and the Resistance to Consolation in Shakespeare," *Speaking Grief in English Literary Culture: Shakespeare to Milton*, Eds. Margo Swiss and David A. Kent (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2002) 21–41.

should, as is fitting, “According to my bond, no more nor less” (1.1.78, 91–92, 93). It is this, not her “nothing,” that so incenses Lear. The play suggests that to speak feeling, one’s own or another’s—to say that one suffers just as one might be expected to, given the circumstances—may be to bring about one’s own end, depending on to whom one says it.<sup>83</sup> And yet, the play suggests, one must still complain.

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. Schoenfeldt, who sees the injunction to “Speak what we feel” as an instruction to speak sincerely, an antidote to the flattery that characterizes Goneril and Regan’s response to Lear’s love test (p. 206).

## CHAPTER TWO

### HISTORIES OF COMPLAINT: SPEAKING GRIEVANCE IN THE FIRST TETRALOGY

Let me sit heavy on thy soul tomorrow,  
Prince Edward, son to Henry the Sixth.  
Think how thou stabbedst me in my prime of youth  
At Tewkesbury. Despair, therefore, and die.  
—Ghost of Prince Edward to Richard

When I was mortal, my anointed body  
By thee was punched full of deadly holes.  
Think on the Tower and me. Despair and die.  
Harry the Sixth bids thee despair and die.  
—Ghost of King Henry to Richard

Let me sit heavy on thy soul tomorrow,  
I that was washed to death with fulsome wine,  
Poor Clarence, by thy guile betrayed to death.  
Tomorrow in the battle think on me,  
And fall thy edgeless sword. Despair and die.  
—Ghost of Clarence to Richard

Let me sit heavy on thy soul tomorrow,  
Rivers that died at Pomfret. Despair and die.  
—Ghost of Rivers to Richard

Think upon Gray, and let thy soul despair.  
—Ghost of Gray to Richard

Think upon Vaughan, and with guilty fear  
Let fall thy pointless lance. Despair and die.  
—Ghost of Vaughan to Richard

Dream on thy cousins, smothered in the Tower.  
Let us be lead within thy bosom, Richard,  
And weigh thee down to ruin, shame, and death.  
Thy nephews' souls bid thee despair and die.  
—Ghosts of the Princes to Richard

Bloody and guilty, guiltily awake,  
And in a bloody battle end thy days.  
Think on Lord Hastings, then despair and die.  
—Ghost of Hastings to Richard

Richard, thy wife, that wretched Anne thy wife,  
That never slept a quiet hour with thee,  
Now fills thy soul with perturbations.  
Tomorrow in the battle think on me,  
And fall thy edgeless sword. Despair and die.  
—Ghost of Lady Anne to Richard

O in the battle think on Buckingham,  
And die in terror of thy guiltiness!  
Dream on, dream on, of bloody deeds and death;  
Fainting, despair; despairing, yield thy breath.  
—Ghost of Buckingham to Richard

—Shakespeare, *Richard III*, 5.5.71–126

For all the despair of the rhetoric of complaint, its grammar often betrays a certain hopefulness. “The Lord send me a judge upright / To listen to my cause,” the speaker of John Bradford’s “The complaynt

of veritie” pleads.<sup>1</sup> The *Arcadia*’s Philoclea begs, “Let me be accepted for a plaintiff in a cause which concerns my life!”<sup>2</sup> The complaining ghosts that appear to Shakespeare’s Richard III tell him to “Let us be lead within thy bosom,” to “Despair and die.”

Complaints that wish, imagine, or ask for (or command) pity and justice from figures that will deny them occupy a prominent place in the early modern imagination. Speeches, scenes, and descriptions of failed complaint populate literary texts, from Chaucer’s “Complaint unto Pity,” whose speaker intends “to Pite to compleyne / Upon the crueltee and tirannye / Of Love” only to discover that Pity is dead (“A compleynt had I, writen in myn hond, / For to have put to Pite as a bille; / [. . .] / I held my pleynte stille, / [For] . . . / Withoute Pitee ther may no bille availe”) to Sidney’s *Astrophil*, who laments that “I no pity find” when “the breath of my complaints doth touch / Those dainty doors unto the court of bliss,” Stella’s ears, to the Genius of England who in Samuel Daniel’s *Civil Wars* appears to the character of Bullingbrooke on the eve of his rebellion in “A fearfull vision [which] doth his thoughts molest,” as “A faire and goodly woman all distrest,” with “full-weeping eyes and rented haire, / Wringing her hands (as one that griev’d and prayd) / With sighes commixt with words,” begging him to “Stay here thy foote, thy yet vnguilty foote.”<sup>3</sup> Complaint is so frequently without effect that even its speakers acknowledge it as “bootless.” In tragedy, as I have been arguing, it was the archetypal “bootless” speech act.

Nowhere is the failure of these speech acts so consistent as in the plot trajectories of revenge tragedy. In these plays, concerned with the impossibility of institutional justice, complaint is a dead end. As *The Spanish Tragedy*’s Hieronimo laments, “soliciting for justice and revenge” is bootless, for those

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<sup>1</sup> *The complaynt of veritie, made by Iohn Bradford* (1559).

<sup>2</sup> *Arcadia*, ed. Duncan-Jones, p. 183–84.

<sup>3</sup> *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp.640–41. *Astrophil and Stella* 44–5, 10–11. Samuel Daniel, *The Civil Wars* (1609), Book 1.87.3, 5, 6–8; 89.1–2.

who might hear “give words no way” (3.7.14, 18).<sup>4</sup> For justice to be done, words of complaint must themselves give way to action. And in revenge tragedy, they always do.<sup>5</sup>

Revenge tragedies were first staged during the late 1580s and early 1590s, the same span of years in which Shakespeare was writing the English history plays that have come to be called the first tetralogy (Parts 1, 2, and 3 of *Henry VI*, and *Richard III*, perf. c. 1591–93).<sup>6</sup> In this chapter, I argue that these plays plot the story of the Wars of the Roses as a revenge tragedy in which complaint plays an essential role—not as a speech act that fails to procure justice, but as one that performs it. While contemporary revenge tragedies feature a central, singular figure whose desire for and plotting of revenge drives the narrative action, the tetralogy has no such character. Rather, I argue, Shakespeare represents complaining as its generative, productive force, through the iteration and reiteration of speech acts that were recognized as types of complaint, including laments, supplications, accusations, and curses.<sup>7</sup> Together, as I will show, these articulations of grievance are powerful. Imitating the narrative trajectory of revenge tragedy while inverting the conventional trajectory of complaint within that narrative, the tetralogy ends, in *Richard III*, with a scene in which a series of echoing complaints successfully enact revenge.

The night before the decisive battle at Bosworth Field where he will be defeated by Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, Richard III is visited by a procession of ghosts, “the souls of all that I had

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<sup>4</sup> All citations from *The Spanish Tragedy* and other non-Shakespearean plays, unless otherwise noted, are from *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*.

<sup>5</sup> The classic study of early modern revenge tragedy and its conventions is Fredson Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587–1642*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1940 (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1959). On the importance of Senecan tragedy for English revenge tragedy, see Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition*.

<sup>6</sup> The first English experiments in revenge tragedy are said to be Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587), Marlowe’s *Jew of Malta* (c. 1589), the mysterious ‘Ur-Hamlet’ that we know existed prior to 1589, and Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* (c. 1594). For a list of the plays commonly classified as revenge tragedies, see Wendy Griswold, *Renaissance Revivals: City Comedy and Revenge Tragedy in the London Theatre 1576–1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> I give a fuller account of the capaciousness of the category “complaint” in my general introduction.

murdered” who, in the king’s own words, “every one did threat / Tomorrow’s vengeance on the head of Richard” (5.5.158, 159–60).<sup>8</sup> The ghosts deliver Richard’s doom in a series of fatal sentences that not only pass judgment on Richard and pronounce his punishment, but also effect that punishment—not as curses that harness supernatural power, but in a far more mundane way: as repeated statements that together insert Richard into a structure from which he cannot escape. Addressing Richard with a statement in the same imperative grammatical mood, articulated in the same syntax, and the same words, each ghost commands him to “Let me sit heavy on thy soul,” to “Despair and die.” The subject of these repetitious speech acts, their addressed or implied “you,” Richard internalizes the ghosts’ command that he must “despair”—a word Shakespeare uses more in this play than in any other—and in so doing visits their vengeance upon himself.<sup>9</sup>

At once resisting and embodying this new identity, Richard begins to refer to himself in both the first- and the third-person. “What do I fear? Myself? There’s none else by,” he panics, “Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I. / Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am. / Then fly! What, from myself? Great reason. Why? / Lest I revenge. Myself upon myself?” (5.5.136, 137–140). Discovering that “I myself / Find in myself no pity to myself,” Richard effectively becomes his own accuser, jury, judge, and executioner (5.5.156–57). He imagines the charges of the “thousand several tongues” that accuse him of “Perjury, perjury in the high’st degree!” and “Murder, stern murder, in the dir’st degree! / All several sins, all used in each degree” (5.5.147, 150, 151–52). As Richard envisions it, these tongues, “every tongue bring[ing] in a several tale” of his crimes, “Throng to the bar, crying all, ‘Guilty, guilty!’” (5.5.148, 153). Ventriloquizing his victims’ demands for justice, Richard transforms those demands into a verdict. “I

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<sup>8</sup> All citations of Shakespeare’s plays are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Björn Quiring’s argument that *Richard III* marks its performative speech acts, particularly curses, as always “empty” and “inherently unsuccessful.” *Shakespeare’s Curse: The Aporias of Ritual Exclusion in Early Modern Royal Drama*, trans. Michael Winkler and Björn Quiring (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 118.



shall despair,” he concludes (5.5.154). The rest of the story is almost anticlimactic: accepting their verdict by repeating its language, accepting his role in their structure and its larger narrative, Richard despairs, he will be defeated, he will die.<sup>10</sup> He is quite literally sentenced to death, weighed down by words.

Arriving at the end of the play with a conclusive rather than catalytic command to “Remember me,” the avenging ghosts of *Richard III* are strikingly different from the vengeful ghosts whose complaints punctuate other early modern tragedies. Richard’s ghosts speak directly to the one on whom they would enact vengeance, rather than to an intermediary who must carry out that vengeance on their behalf—as seems to have been the case with the Ur-Hamlet, whose ghost reportedly cries “Hamlet, revenge!”—or to the stage audience, as do the complaining ghosts of *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine*, or within a frame narrative removed from the action of the play, as the Ghost of Don Andrea does in *The Spanish Tragedy*.

Most importantly, unlike the complaining ghosts of the anonymous play *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third* (c. 1588–92)—one of the likely sources for *Richard III*—the ghosts in Shakespeare’s play appear on stage and speak as themselves. In the *True Tragedy*, the ghosts’ words exist only in Richard’s imagination, and he narrates their complaints to the audience himself: “Methinks their ghosts comes gaping for revenge / Whom I have slain in reaching for a crown,” he explains, describing how “Clarence complains and crieth for revenge, / My nephews’ bloods, ‘Revenge, revenge!’ doth cry, / The headless peers comes pressing for revenge, / And every one cries ‘Let the tyrant die!’” (xvii.1880–81, 1882–85).<sup>11</sup> By reconfiguring the ghostly complainants of the *True Tragedy*, giving form and speech to

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<sup>10</sup> Despair is conventionally linked with self-killing in early modern literature—Spenser’s Despair, for instance, or the personified Despayre that appears to Queen Cordila in the 1587 *Mirror* and offers her instruments of self-slaughter (including the blade Dido used to kill herself).

<sup>11</sup> *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third* (1594), Malone Society Reprints (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929).

them, Shakespeare's play emphasizes that these ghosts are not simply projections of Richard's guilty conscience. As Brian Walsh argues, it is "more accurate to view this moment as the representation of a supernatural phenomenon, one that is explicitly staged as such, rather than a projection of an interior experience," for although the ghosts appear to Richard in what he will later describe as a dream, the fact that these ghosts "have a stage *presence*" invites audiences to see them as possessing an actual existence.<sup>12</sup> But while critics have long read the ghosts as either dramatic externalizations of Richard's internal conflict or supernatural emissaries that puncture the Machiavellian world of the play, I want to suggest that the play offers us a way to understand the ghosts as "real" without seeing them as otherworldly agents of divine retributive justice. In this chapter, I argue that the ghosts that visit Richard figure the way that speech acts of grievance work as an irruptive force in history.<sup>13</sup> The play presents these speech acts to its theatrical audiences as both real and powerful. Performed as complaints, the efficacy of these speech acts attributes not only a political value but an active force to complaining, which was so often characterized either as bootless or passive, and often as both. By calling attention to the way that the tetralogy is haunted by its own language, I argue, *Richard III* shows history to be haunted with, and shaped through, the language of grievance.

Here I want to return to Richard's ghosts. By the time the play's audiences witness the encounter between Richard and the ghosts, they will have been well prepared to recognize it as an intentional echo of language. The scene explicitly repeats and revisits previous scenes in which Richard faces off against numerous speech acts of complaint. As I will show, by the end of *Richard III*,

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<sup>12</sup> See Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen's Men, and the Elizabethan Performance of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 154–55. For a similar reading of the reality of the ghosts, see Wolfgang Clemen, *A Commentary on Shakespeare's Richard III*, trans. Jean Bonheim, (London: Routledge, 1968), p. 214–18.

<sup>13</sup> Walsh also reads the ghosts as "a self-conscious figure for the play's own act of representing history," but he argues that their function is to reflect the capacity of theatrical performance to embody the absence of the historical real (*Shakespeare*, p. 157).

articulations of grievance have become freighted with significance due to repeated questions that the play poses about whether complaining possesses any kind of efficacy—whether complainants can successfully get the redress, vengeance, or justice for which they ask. With the ghosts' sentences, the play both echoes and answers these questions.

Most immediately, the ghosts' commands to Richard repeat and hence "answer" the complaints of Act 4. There, Queen Elizabeth, the widow of Richard's brother Edward IV and mother of the two young princes for whose deaths Richard is responsible, and the Duchess of York, Richard's mother, lament their losses and demand justice by calling upon the dead.<sup>14</sup> "Ah, my poor princes! Ah, my tender babes! / My unblown flowers, new-appearing sweets!" Elizabeth mourns, asking her sons' souls to "Hover about me with your airy wings / And hear your mother's lamentation" (4.4.9–10, 13–14). The Duchess complains that "So many miseries have crazed my voice / That my woe-wearied tongue is still and mute. / Edward Plantagenet, why art thou dead?" (4.4.17–19). Elizabeth asks, "Wilt thou, O God, fly from such gentle lambs? / And throw them in the entrails of the wolf? / When didst thou sleep, when such a deed was done?" (4.4.22–24). As many critics have noted, the stylized language and rhetorical questions of the women's complaints position them as early modern counterparts of the Chorus of classical tragedy.<sup>15</sup> In their grief, Elizabeth and the Duchess are commentators on the tragic events of the play, believing themselves helpless to avenge those events.

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<sup>14</sup> On the affective power and political expression that Greek tragedy gives to mourning women, see Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning*.

<sup>15</sup> On Shakespeare's invention of these scenes of female complaint see Harold F. Brooks, "Richard III, Unhistorical Amplifications: The Women's Scenes and Seneca," *Modern Language Review* 75 (1980): 721–37. On lamentation in *Richard III* in relation to conventions of tragic drama, see Marie-Hélène Besnault and Michel Bitot, "Historical legacy and fiction: the poetical reinvention of King Richard III," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*, 106–25. On classical and early modern female figures of rage and mourning, see Judith Weil, "Visible Hecubas," *The Female Tragic Hero in English Renaissance Drama*, ed. Naomi Conn Liebler (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 51–69.

Their perception of their agency changes when Queen Margaret, the widow of King Henry VI and the sworn enemy of the House of York, interrupts their grieving to recite her own list of sorrows in a double-entry account of suffering. “Thy Edward, he is dead, that killed my Edward; / Thy other Edward dead, to quite my Edward,” she says, gloating over their grief (4.4.63–64). The logic of this speech carries over into her invitation to the other women to “Tell o’er your woes again by viewing mine” (4.4.39). Telling her woes and theirs at once through a series of parallelisms—“I had an Edward, till a Richard killed him; / I had a husband, till a Richard killed him. / Thou hadst an Edward, till a Richard killed him; / Thou hadst a Richard, till a Richard killed him”—Margaret not only suggests to the women that they occupy the same position in relation to a common enemy, but also redirects their grief to the question of revenge (4.4.40–43). “Richard yet lives,” a “hell-hound that doth hunt us all to death,” she reminds them (4.4.71, 48). Just as her griefs were repaid by the deaths that Elizabeth and the Duchess mourn, so might their common grief be avenged, she suggests.

In its representation of the grieving women, *Richard III* suggests that sorrow animates language, turning it into a weapon that pierces and wounds its target. “O thou, well-skilled in curses, stay a while / And teach me how to curse mine enemies,” Elizabeth begs Margaret, but Margaret suggests that the only power that words need to tap into is the force of grief: to Elizabeth’s plea that “My words are dull. O quicken them with thine!” she responds, “Thy woes will make them sharp and pierce like mine” (4.4.116–17, 124–125).<sup>16</sup> Thus Elizabeth and the Duchess set their grief-infused words against Richard—not only to testify against him, as “windy attorneys to their client woes, / Airy recorders of intestate joys, / Poor breathing orators of miseries,” but as instruments of death (4.4.127–29). “Be not tongue-tied; go with me, / And in the breath of bitter words let’s smother / My damned son, that thy

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<sup>16</sup> Gina Bloom suggests that the lament and the curse are linked in the period through their “common material form,” that of breath (*Voice in Motion*, p. 94).

two sweet sons smothered,” the Duchess says to Elizabeth (4.4.132–34). And indeed, they attack Richard with words. “Thou toad, thou toad, where is thy brother Clarence? / And little Ned Plantagenet his son?” the Duchess of York demands of Richard; “Where is the gentle Rivers, Vaughan, Gray?” Queen Elizabeth asks; “Where is kind Hastings?” the Duchess asks (4.4.145–48). In this new chorus, “copious in exclams,” words of complaint are not only witnesses but weapons (4.4.135). Exemplifying how grief can “quicken” words—enliven, sharpen them—lamentation is transformed into curses and accusations. As James R. Siemon comments, woeful rhetorical questions addressed to the dead become indignant ones addressed to the living.<sup>17</sup> Little wonder, then, that Richard calls for a flourish of trumpets and a striking of drums (“A flourish, trumpets! Strike alarum, drums!”) to “drown [the] exclamations” of these “tell-tale women” who “rail” against him, striking him with their words (4.4.149, 154, 150, 151).

I want to suggest that Shakespeare represents the ghosts that visit Richard as echoes of the “quicken” language of grievance. The Duchess’ desire that Richard will “Take with thee my most heavy curse, / Which in the day of battle tire thee more / Than all the complete armour that thou wear’st” is replicated many times over in the ghosts’ commands to Richard to “Let me sit heavy on thy soul tomorrow” (4.4.78, 188–90, 5.5.71). Like the lamenting women of Act 4, the ghosts speak as a chorus, a set of individual voices united in one common cause. They reiterate the old and unanswered complaints that various characters have made against Richard in order to answer them, literally and figuratively: they describe the manner of their deaths, name Richard as their killer and pronounce his sentence, and, precisely by making Richard answer their accusations and their demands, they make him

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<sup>17</sup> *Richard III*, ed. James R. Siemon (London: Arden, 2009), p. 25.

answer for his actions.<sup>18</sup> What I want to emphasize is that this justice is accomplished by repeating complaints *as* complaints—as many-tongued accusations that collectively “Throng to the bar, crying all, ‘Guilty, guilty!’” (5.5.153). As the haunted Richard admits, the other “proof” set against him, the armor of soldiers, is nothing compared to the spectral words that testify and rule against him: “Shadows tonight / Have struck more terror to the soul of Richard / Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers / Armèd in proof and led by shallow Richmond,” he concedes (5.5.170–73). Stricken by words, “tomorrow’s vengeance” arrives early (5.5.160).

*Richard III* has occasioned much critical work on the agency of performative speech acts, particularly those of cursing and female lamentation.<sup>19</sup> In a recent article on the play’s “grammatical construction of passionate speech,” for example, Lynne Magnusson argues that the curses of Margaret and the play’s other women resemble the types of constructions in the optative mood that Lily’s Latin *Grammar* taught early modern schoolboys to speak and write—mistranslations, she suggests, that turned constructions meant to express the wishes or desires of a subject into requests for God’s direct intervention (e.g. Lady Anne’s wish that “God grant me, too, / Thou mayst be damnèd for that wicked deed” [1.2.102–3]). To the extent that the play’s conclusion shows these requests to have been successfully answered, its “apparently providential ending,” she writes, is enacted through a “language game.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Alison Thorne argues that *Richard III*’s intertwining of grief and anger positions complaint as an extra-legal instrument of justice by diagnosing moral and social ills and speaking truth to power. See Thorne, “O, lawful let it be.”

<sup>19</sup> We might see this work as a reconsideration of what Phyllis Rackin has argued is the passivity of lamentation. See Rackin, “Engendering the Tragic Audience: The Case of *Richard III*,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 26 (1993): 47–65. In contrast to Rackin’s argument, recent work on lamentation and complaint tends to argue for the political significance of discourses of (particularly feminine) mourning and bitterness. E.g. Susan Wiseman suggests that “the use of female voice as a disenfranchised and plangent commentary on political injustice is a key part of the way the ‘complaint’ genre was put to work.” See Wiseman, “Romes wanton Ovid’: Reading and Writing Ovid’s *Heroides* 1590–1712,” *Renaissance Studies* 22.3 (2008): 295–306, p. 301.

<sup>20</sup> Magnusson concludes that “The mistranslation changes the story. It substitutes for the ineffectual or nonexistent agency, however passionate, of wishing subjects a subject’s paradoxically potent passion—if it can awaken God’s agency on its

I also read the conclusion of *Richard III* as revelatory of a language game, but I argue that its winning move is the repetitious and reiterated quality of the complaints. I argue that the play attributes to those speech acts an inherent power, that it shows their agency to consist in their illocutionary rather than perlocutionary force, for what I will refer to as the “effects” and “answers” that these speech acts “produce” are, as I will show, duplications and reiterations of the speech acts themselves. The nature of complaint’s force is also where my analysis diverges most drastically from those of Gina Bloom, James Siemon, Alison Thorne, and Joanne Diaz, who all note that in the curses and laments of *Richard III*’s female characters we see the affective and political potential of such language. In this play, I would argue, complaint is not simply a memorial, or the voice of a collective conscience that moves its addressees, or a catalyst to action, or a speech act that enlists the aid of providence. Rather, here Shakespeare represents complaint as an efficacious action in and of itself, for if *Richard III* represents complaining as a force that shapes history, it also suggests this agency to be an intrinsic formal property of the speech act of complaint. Indeed, I will argue that the play ascribes a fantastical telos to the speech act itself, as if its success were bound up in its own structure rather than dependent on the answers of others to it.<sup>21</sup>

Why might Shakespeare have inverted the conventional tragic trope of complaint’s bootlessness like this? And why in *Richard III* in particular? The answer I will suggest in what follows speaks to a critical crux in early modern studies: the question of how Shakespeare’s English history plays represent history. While we have no reason to believe that the plays of the tetralogy were composed or performed

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behalf.” See Magnusson, “Grammatical Theatricality in *Richard III*: Schoolroom Queens and Godly Optatives,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 64 (Spring 2013): 32–43, p. 42.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Joanne Diaz’s reading of the women’s complaints, which suggests that their complaining “doesn’t change the actual circumstances of the plot” but only “allow[s] them to expiate their grief, expose the wrongs with their forensic use of invective, and derive some satisfaction from their repetitive utterances” (“Grief as Medicine for Grief,” p. 277, p. 280).

as a cycle,<sup>22</sup> *Richard III* quite blatantly attempts to retrospectively impose order and meaning on the chaos of the three *Henry VI* plays that preceded it on the early modern stage, each of which lacks closure.<sup>23</sup> I will argue that the order that *Richard III* imposes is one of genre—that the plot reflects, to borrow a phrase from David Scott Kastan, “the inescapable trajectory of the tragic action,” and, as I will suggest, the trajectory of revenge tragedy in particular.<sup>24</sup>

While other readings of the tetralogy have focused on the plays’ continuities with early modern revenge tragedy, none have considered how revenge tragedy’s narrative trajectory provided Shakespeare with a template for representing historical change.<sup>25</sup> More than simply ending in an act of vengeance, revenge tragedies feature entire plots structured by what seems to be an inevitable movement toward this end, as unresolved grievances fester, accumulate, and culminate in an act of vengeance and destruction. I would suggest that it is precisely this narrative trajectory that Shakespeare gives to the first tetralogy’s story of civil unrest, civil war, and tyranny. There is an original inciting grievance (1

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<sup>22</sup> *The First Part of Henry the Sixth (1 Henry VI)* appears only in the First Folio of 1623. It was probably staged in 1592, after Parts 2 and 3, although it represents earlier events. *2 Henry VI*, which scholars date as early as 1591, was first printed in quarto in 1594 as *The First Part of the Contention of the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster*. *3 Henry VI* was performed by late 1592 and printed in octavo in 1595 as *The true Tragedie of Richard Duke of York, and the deathe of good King Henrie the Sixt*. *Richard III*, probably written and performed in 1593, was first printed in 1597 as *The Tragedy of King Richard the third*. Most scholars believe that at least one of the *Henry VI* plays was collaboratively authored.

<sup>23</sup> On *Richard III*’s lack of closure and reinterpretation of the *Henry VI* plays, see Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare’s English Chronicles* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) and Linda Woodbridge, *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> See Kastan, “‘A rarity most beloved’: Shakespeare and the Idea of Tragedy,” in *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Works*, Vol. I, eds. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), p. 8. On genre as determined by endings, see Jeremy Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> Critical introductions to editions of *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III* routinely note their characters’ concern with revenge, but neither the tetralogy as a whole nor its individual plays have been read in terms of genre as “revenge tragedies.” An exception is Woodbridge’s reading of the first tetralogy as “revenge plays,” but her interest lies in their thematic and rhetorical concern with balance and with trade, rather than their narrative trajectory or their emplotment of history. See Woodbridge, *English Revenge Drama*, pp. 26–29, and pp. 75–80. On Shakespeare’s construction of dramatic character and morality through representations of vengeance in these plays, see Harry Keyishian, *The Shapes of Revenge: Victimization, Vengeance, and Vindictiveness in Shakespeare* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995), and “The Progress of Revenge in the First Henriad,” *Henry VI: Critical Essays*, ed. Thomas A. Pendleton (Routledge: New York, 2001), pp. 67–77.



*Henry VI*), a set of increasingly urgent grievances unresolved by the sovereign (2 *Henry VI*), the outbreak of civil war, rhetorically framed as a shift from institutional channels for resolving grievance to the free-for-all of revenge (3 *Henry VI*), and in *Richard III*, the final vengeance that overthrows an unjust tyrant and inaugurates a new state.

As critics have long noted, the ending of the tetralogy is particularly significant because the plays dramatize a part of English history that early modern historians saw as culminating in the foundation of the Tudor state. Introducing the same historical events in his verse history *The Civil Wars*, for instance, Shakespeare's contemporary Samuel Daniel professes his intention "to shewe the deformities of Dissension, and the miserable events of Rebellions, Conspiracies, and bloody Revengements, which followed (as in a circle) upon that breach of the due course of Succession, by the Usurpation of Hen. 4 [. . .] unto the glorious Union of Hen. 7, from whence is descended our present Happinesse."<sup>26</sup> Daniel gives voice here to the so-called "Tudor Myth," the historiographical tradition of representing the establishment of the Tudor line as the providential lifting of a curse caused by Henry IV's usurpation of the throne from Richard II.<sup>27</sup>

While Shakespeare's plays contain no such authorial statements of purpose, the concluding events of *Richard III* are represented by the play's characters as long overdue justice, the resolution to grievances that have run their course at last. In the play's last scene, Henry Tudor, now King Henry VII, reminds his audiences of the tragic events they have witnessed and assures them of the "fair conjunction[s]" on the horizon—his marriage to Elizabeth of York, with its literal and symbolic uniting of the Houses of York and Lancaster, and the reconciliation of the divided commonwealth (5.8.20).

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<sup>26</sup> Daniel, *The Civil Wars* (1609), A2v.

<sup>27</sup> In E. M. W. Tillyard's words, "the Tudor myth presented a scheme fundamentally religious, by which events evolve under a law of justice and under the ruling of God's providence, and of which Elizabeth's England was the acknowledged outcome." See Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1944), p. 321.

“England hath long been mad, and scarred herself; / The brother blindly shed the brother’s blood; / The father rashly slaughtered his own son; / The son, compelled, been butcher to the sire,” the king intones, invoking the bloodshed of the *Henry VI* plays only to declare it resolved (5.8.23–26, 40–41). “Now civil wounds are stopped; peace lives again;” where once “poor England [wept] forth streams of blood,” now comes “this fair land’s peace,” its own “fairness” a reflection of “God’s fair ordinance,” a matter of divine decree and justice (5.8.37, 39, 31).

E. M. W. Tillyard’s once standard interpretation of *Richard III* as a straightforward reflection of the Tudor Myth has long been discarded in favor of readings that emphasize this and other history plays’ polyphony, competing philosophies of history, and thematic interest in the dynamics of power. But *Richard III*, with its avenging ghosts and declaration of a divinely ordained end, has always fit uneasily within the new historicist paradigm that positions Shakespeare’s history plays in relation to what Phyllis Rackin describes as the “Machiavellian version of historical causation explaining history in terms of force, fortune, and practical politics,” where the contingency of events is stressed,<sup>28</sup> for the play represents Richard’s death not as an accident of character or circumstance but as a foregone conclusion.

I argue that revenge tragedy offered Shakespeare a template for representing history in terms of what we might call an *immanent* fatalism. If providential theories of history posited a divine will that guides events and shapes all ends, the plots of revenge tragedy suggest that temporal events contain the seed of their own ends, that an action inevitably engenders a reaction, and so on and so forth in a long

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<sup>28</sup> Rackin, *Stages*, p. 43. On the early modern conflict between providential accounts of history such as those found in the chronicles of Hall and Holinshed and the newer “politic” histories modeled on Polybius and Tacitus, see F. J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1967) and D. R. Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). On the coexistence of competing concepts of history in Shakespeare’s history plays, and on those plays’ representation of history as politics, see Michael Hattaway, “The Shakespearean History Play” in the *Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare’s History Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), pp. 3–24.

chain—or cycle—of reciprocity.<sup>29</sup> Revenge tragedy represents unresolved grievance as an immanently fatal force, something bound to effect its own resolution; the first tetralogy, I contend, assigns this force to the *language* of grievance, depicting *Richard III*'s culminating act of vengeance as the effect of the continual iteration and reiteration of grievance. While the aggrieved Vittoria in John Webster's revenge tragedy *The White Devil* (1612) calls complaint "a woman's poor revenge, / Which dwells but in the tongue!" in the tetralogy, a linguistic revenge is also a successful one (3.2.288–89).

In the following sections, I trace the trajectory of complaint in the tetralogy, exploring the way that the plays' articulations of grievance slowly but inevitably accumulate and gain force as they seek answers. Then I turn to consider the significance of the tetralogy's representation of complaint, particularly its representation of the speech act's efficacy as an incantatory force belonging to the words themselves, activated when they are repeated. I argue that the fantastical telos or fatal force that the tetralogy ascribes to the language of grievance is a figure for the determining historical force that the plays ascribe to the speech acts of marginalized and aggrieved subjects. By emplotting this particular story—one that was uniquely important to the mythology of the Tudor state—as a revenge tragedy in which the causal forces are neither divine providence nor the actions of exemplary figures but rather the repeated language of grievance, the tetralogy suggests the articulation of discontent and outrage to be a constitutive component of the English commonwealth and a necessary, generative force in the world.

### Rooted grievance: *1 Henry VI*

The first theorists of early modern revenge tragedy are its characters, who frequently speak of themselves as actors in a "tragedy" that will end in a form of revenge they have wrought. Kyd's seminal

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<sup>29</sup> On revenge tragedy as a genre linked to post-Reformation ideas of providential justice, see Lorna Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), particularly pp. 271–77, and John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

revenge tragedy *The Spanish Tragedy*, likely written in the late 1580s, makes the genre of tragedy, with its predictable narrative trajectory toward ruin, a figure for the fated action of revenge. The play's revenger, Hieronimo, carries a book of Seneca's plays and speaks of the conclusion of his revenge in terms of the conclusion of the dramatic tragedy he plans to stage: "The plot is laid of dire revenge. / On, then, Hieronimo, pursue revenge, / For nothing wants but acting of revenge," he tells himself, arguing that "the conclusion / Shall prove the invention and all was good" (4.3.28–30, 4.1.182–83). When Hieronimo identifies himself, at the end of *The Spanish Tragedy*, as "the author and the actor of this tragedy"—referring not only to the performance that he has staged but to the murders he has committed in its course—he claims agency for his plotting (4.4.147). But the play's frame narrative, in which the ghost of Don Andrea impatiently watches the unfolding action accompanied by the personified figure of Revenge, represents revenge as an impersonal force driving toward its own tragic end (4.4.147).

In the first tetralogy, references to tragedy—and specifically to the role of revenge in tragedy—not only point forward into the narrative future but seem to determine that future. *1 Henry VI*, which focuses on England's military clashes with France, is very different both in content and tone than Parts 2 and 3 of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*. Nevertheless, *1 Henry VI* foreshadows the civil conflict to come: there are rivalries and grudges between the king's lords; Henry is already a visibly ineffective ruler; the play ends with a royal marriage that promises trouble. And the play explicitly sets up the ensuing conflict in terms of revenge through a scene in which Richard Plantagenet (later Richard, Duke of York) and the Duke of Somerset have a dispute on some point of law the truth of which the other lords insist that they are unfit to judge. Richard Plantagenet, plucking a white rose from a nearby briar, suggests that those who agree with him should also take white roses, the badge of the House of York; Somerset plucks a red rose, the badge of the House of Lancaster, and asks those who side with him to

follow his lead in taking the red. Aggrieved that more men have chosen white roses, Somerset makes a jab at Richard Plantagenet's lack of a title due to his father's execution for treason, and Richard, offended and angry, swears that "I'll note you in my book of memory, / To scourge you for this apprehension" (2.4.101–02).<sup>30</sup>

With the phrase that Shakespeare will return to in *Hamlet*, Richard Plantagenet's language proleptically frames the tetralogy's plot as that of a revenge tragedy. The fact that this scene in the garden is completely unhistorical, that the specifics of the dispute between Somerset and York are never explained, and that the judgment is represented as completely arbitrary and baseless, all highlight its primary function as prolepsis.<sup>31</sup> This scene gives York the grievance that he will later "remember," setting him up as a figure of revenge. Thus the play self-consciously anticipates Parts 2 and 3 of *Henry VI*, framing the rest of the story as an echo of this "originary" unanswered grievance. The rest of the tetralogy is linked together by the verbal echoes of articulated grievance seeking resolution<sup>32</sup>—a resolution that, when it comes, will appear to have been inevitable.

### Complaining to no avail: 2 *Henry VI*

In 2 *Henry VI*, when Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, the Lord Protector, refutes before Parliament the accusations of treason made against him, he uses the language of theatrical tragedy to warn King Henry

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<sup>30</sup> On memory and revenge tragedy, see Thomas Rist, *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008).

<sup>31</sup> E.g. the lords' admission that their decision has nothing to do with understanding the points of law on which the case supposedly rest: Suffolk: "Faith, I have been a truant in the law;" Warwick: "in these nice sharp quilllets of the law, / Good faith, I am no wiser than a daw;" a majority vote determines the "truth and plainness of the case" (2.4.7, 17–18, 46).

<sup>32</sup> Ironically, it is their emphasis on the rhetorical dimensions of revenge that Eleanor Prosser cites as the grounds for dismissing the plays of the first tetralogy from the category of revenge tragedy ("the many revenge motives of warring factions, most clearly seen in the tangled threads of the *Henry VI* plays, are also tangential to our discussion[. . .] Remove the rhetoric of revenge and the wars would continue"). See Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967) p. 76.

of a larger “complot” his enemies have planned (3.1.147). “Mine is made the prologue to their play,” he insists, suggesting that “thousands more that yet suspect no peril / Will not conclude their plotted tragedy” (3.1.151, 152–53). The “plotted tragedy” that Gloucester foretells is in the most immediate sense the narrative trajectory of *2 Henry VI*: discontent, dissatisfaction, and bitter rivalries culminating in open rebellion. But *2 Henry VI* is itself only the introduction to a larger “plotted tragedy,” the story of the Wars of the Roses, which will culminate in *Richard III*. In this section, I show that as its prologue, so to speak, *2 Henry VI* defines the tragedy to come in terms of a failure of sovereign justice. As I argue, the play highlights this failure through scenes of unanswered complaint.

In discourses explicitly concerned with matters of collective social concern, “complaint”—in the sense of both formal petition and more diffuse expressions of dissatisfaction—was identified with the voice of the people. Just as bills of complaint served in juridical contexts to express injury and initiate action by asking for redress,<sup>33</sup> printed prose pamphlets such as *A lamentable complaint of the commonalty, by way of supplication to the high court of Parliament, for a learned ministry* (1585), broadside ballads like “The Poor people’s complaint bewailing the death of their famous benefactor the worthy Earle of Bedford” (1600), and poems such as “A Riful complaynt of the publyke weale to England” (1550), adopt the complaint form and rhetoric to petition various authority figures—the sovereign, Parliament, God—for relief of various kinds, often related to such matters as land enclosures, ecclesiastical abuses, hunger, and poverty.<sup>34</sup> Like the medieval and early Tudor “complaint against the

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<sup>33</sup> On the relation between the literary and juridical meanings of complaint, see Wendy Scase, *Literature and Complaint in England, 1272–1553* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Matthew Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Diaz, “Grief as Medicine for Grief.”

<sup>34</sup> On complaint and social protest and petition, see Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*.

times” tradition of vernacular poetry,<sup>35</sup> these complaints often have first-person plural speakers who represent themselves as speaking on behalf of some collective body (e.g. the commons, the public weal, London). Undergirding these complaints of petition and supplication is the assumption that those in power were entrusted by God with a responsibility to their subjects, and that subjects possess the right to complain, a belief that these speakers do not hesitate to point out. *A lamentable complaint of the commonalty*, for instance, begins by suggesting that this “most waighty petition” with which its speakers come “in great bitternesse of our soules” is “not much unlike that petition, that Hester made to the King Assuerus,” and claims that if its concerns go unaddressed England’s “momentary pleasure will shortly be turned into weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth”—but note, of course, that “undoubtedly so godly and religious an assembly, the faire flowers of this land, will never speake so hardly vnto vs.”<sup>36</sup>

The rhetoric of these complaints reflects a sense that good governance entails giving justice to those who have cause to complain. Indeed, *The Interpreter*, John Cowell’s 1607 legal dictionary, defines jurisdiction as “a dignity which a man hath by a power to doe Justice in causes of complaint made before him.”<sup>37</sup> In political writing, the term “complaint” encapsulates and draws together the various articulations of dissatisfaction, unrest, and protest to which a judicious ruler or governing body must respond and manage. The complaint monologues of *A Mirror for Magistrates* (1559), which was framed not only as a collection of tragedies but as a book of counsel for princes and other authority figures, are full of cautionary tales about powerful figures whose corruption elicits enough complaint that they lose their positions (and lives). In “The Two Mortimers,” for example, Roger Mortimer recounts the fall of

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<sup>35</sup> On complaint against the times, see John Peter, *Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1956) and Lawrence Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), particularly Chapter 2, “London and the languages of Tudor complaint.”

<sup>36</sup> *Lamentable complaint*, pp. 55–59.

<sup>37</sup> Cowell, *The Interpreter* (London, 1607), OO4v.

the Earl of March, whose “High clymyng, brybyng, murdring, lust, and pryde” guaranteed that “The Piers, the people, as well as one the other, / Agaynst hym made so haynous a complaynt, / That for a traytour he was taken” (49, 26–28). As Milton would write in *Areopagitica* (1644), “this is not the liberty which wee can hope, that no grievance ever should arise in the Commonwealth, that let no man in this World expect; but when complaints are freely heard, deeply consider’d, and speedily reform’d, then is the utmost bound of civill liberty attain’d, that wise men looke for.”<sup>38</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that unanswered complaints figure prominently in early modern articulations of the shirked responsibilities of those in authority. A commonplace of sixteenth-century historical writing on rebellions and civil unrest is that such revolts, however unlawful and sinful, are the form in which divine justice is visited upon monarchs who abuse their power by not being attentive to the grievances of their subjects. William Baldwin propounds this belief in *A Mirror for Magistrates*, writing in his commentary on Jack Cade, who led a rebellion against Henry VI in 1450, that

Although the deuyll rayse them [rebels], yet God always vseth them to his glory, as a parte of his Iustice. For whan Kynges and chiefe rulers, suffer theyr vnder officers to misuse theyr subiectes, and wil not heare nor remedye theyr peoples wronges when they complayne, than suffreth God the Rebll to rage, and to execute that parte of his Iustice, whiche the parcyall prince woulde not.<sup>39</sup>

Writers frequently use speeches and scenes of complaint to dramatize the good justice, or the injustice, of authorities. Spenser’s *Mother Hubberds Tale* (1591), for instance, satirizes the misuse of political office by way of an allegorical fable in which a Fox and an Ape, poorly managing a kingdom that is not rightfully theirs to run in the first place, are punished by Jove for their sins against their subjects—sins which are crowned by their refusal to hear the other animals’ complaints—when Jove

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<sup>38</sup> *The Riverside Milton*, ed. Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), p. 997.

<sup>39</sup> *The Mirror for Magistrates*, 178.



comes down to earth to “hear each one complaine / Of foule abuses both in realme and raine.”<sup>40</sup> Here, as in *A Mirror for Magistrates*, sovereign failure to hear complaint results in the divine ear being especially attuned to it, and inclined to punish. In Sidney’s *Arcadia*, the allegorical and political “Ister Bank” song that Philisides sings—which explains how animals, having consented to give the power of speech only to humans, became subjected to the cruel reign of those who abused their power and wounded the earth—closes with a warning to “man” to “rage not beyond thy need,” or “swell in tyranny,” or “joy . . . to make things bleed,” for “A plaint of guiltless hurt doth pierce the sky.”<sup>41</sup>

Early modern dramatists also turn to scenes of unheeded, forestalled, or failed complaint to highlight sovereign injustice. In *Measure for Measure*, Angelo, the highest acting authority, agrees to grant Isabella’s supplication and save her brother’s life only if she gives herself sexually to him, prompting her anguished “To whom should I complain?” (2.4.171). In *Richard III*, one of the ways in which Richard demonstrates his tyrannical nature even before he becomes king is his policing and thwarting of what he calls the “lewd complaints” brought to Edward IV against himself (1.3.61). In *Richard II*, Shakespeare uses mirroring scenes of supplicatory complaint—one that shows its impossibility, the other its success—to contrast Richard’s tyranny with Henry IV’s politic display of mercy. At the beginning of the play, when the Duchess of Gloucester demands justice for her husband’s murder, John of Gaunt cautions her that “correction lieth in those hands / Which made the fault that we cannot correct” (1.2.4–5). “Where then, alas, may I complain myself?” she asks rhetorically, dissatisfied with his suggestion that they “Put we our quarrel to the will of heaven” (1.2.42, 6). The end of the play returns to the impossibility of complaining to Richard when Henry IV, in response to the “plaints and prayers” of the Duchess of York, pardons her son Aumerle, who has conspired to

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<sup>40</sup> Spenser, *The Shorter Poems*, p. 268, ll. 1275–76.

<sup>41</sup> *Arcadia*, p. 225.

overthrow him and restore Richard to the throne (5.3.125). Just as John of Gaunt criticizes Richard by noting that both the fault and its correction are in his hands, so the language of the Duchess of York's complaint to Henry IV flatters him by suggesting that the pity and the pardon are in him. At the same time, in a sentence that works similarly to those of *Richard III's* justice-seeking ghosts, her words demonstrate how the words of pardon he speaks are both a response to her complaint and an echo of it. "Speak 'Pardon,'" she begs the king, "Thine eye begins to speak; set thy tongue there; / Or in thy piteous heart plant thou thine ear, / That hearing how our plaints and prayers do pierce, / Pity may move thee 'Pardon' to rehearse" (5.3.121, 123–26). When he answers her by saying "I pardon him with all my heart," he answers her with her own words, for the "pardon" that she says she wishes he might "rehearse" is the word she has told him not only to speak but to listen to: when he hears it in his "piteous heart" it is because she has put it there (5.3.134).

That the sovereign to whom one might complain is complicit in the injustice that motivates the complaint is, in fact, the central problem of revenge tragedy: the problem of what to do when the institutional channels for justice are inaccessible or corrupt.<sup>42</sup> In revenge tragedy, complaining gets one nowhere. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo can find no redress for his son's murder by complaining, for no authority will hear his complaints. "Where shall I run to breathe abroad my woes— / My woes, whose weight hath wearied the earth— / Or mine exclaims, that have surcharged the air / With ceaseless plaints for my deceased son?" he asks (3.7.1–4). Hieronimo represents his complaints, marked by "broken sighs and restless passions," as "hovering in the air, / Beat[ing] at the windows of the highest heavens, / Soliciting for justice and revenge" (3.7.11, 12–14). Yet those complaints linger there without

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<sup>42</sup> On Elizabethan prohibitions against private vengeance, and the institutional corruption represented in revenge tragedies, see Katharine Eisaman Maus's introduction to *Four Revenge Tragedies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

effect: “I find the place impregnable, and they / Resist my woes, and give my words no way,” Hieronimo says of the indifferent gods (3.7.15–16).

If the gods fail Hieronimo, the court does too. Giving up his “unfruitful words” of complaint addressed to heaven, he plans to “go plain me to my Lord the King, / And cry aloud for justice through the court, / Wearing the flints with these my withered feet” (3.7.67, 69–71). He vows to “either purchase justice by entreats, / Or tire them all with my revenging threats” (3.7.72–73). Having had to settle for the latter, when Hieronimo thinks he sees the ghost of his murdered son, he tells him with bitterness to “Go back, my son; complain to Aeacus, / For here’s no justice. Gentle boy, begone, / For justice is exiled from the earth” (3.13.138–40). Hieronimo laments that “unjustly we, / For all our wrongs, can compass no redress;” serving in his own capacity as an official authorized to hear and judge complaints, he says, “This toils my body, this consumeth age, / That only I to all men just must be, / And neither gods nor men be just to me” (3.6.3–4, 8–10). Likewise, in Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* (1589/90), Barabas’ daughter Abigail vows to “learn to leave these fruitless tears, / And, urged thereto with my afflictions, / With fierce exclams run to the senate house,” where she plans to “in the senate reprehend them all, / And rend their hearts with tearing of my hair, / Till they reduce the wrongs done to my father” (1.2.232–34, 235–37). Yet Barabas dissuades her, reminding her that “things past recovery / Are hardly cured with exclamations” (1.2.238–39). In *Titus Andronicus*, the eponymous protagonist laments that “there’s no justice in earth nor hell” and turns to revenge: declaring that “sorrow is an enemy, / And would usurp upon my wat’ry eyes / And make them blind with tributary tears” he hunts instead for “Revenge’s cave” (4.3.50, 3.1.266–68, 269). Hieronimo also determines that only “in revenge my heart would find relief” (2.5.41). As Katharine Maus suggests, “revenge might even be thought of as lament provoked to action.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Four Revenge Tragedies*, xiii.

The prevailing ethos of revenge tragedy is of a world where complaints are bound to go unheard by men and the gods alike, where to complain is only to highlight the impossibility of institutional justice and the necessity of private vengeance. When Gloucester's complaints before the King and Parliament are silenced, despite his insistence that "losers may have leave to speak," *2 Henry VI* signals—just as Gloucester has suggested—the tragedy to come (3.1.185). The silencing of Gloucester's complaints by his enemies ("My liege, his railing is intolerable," Cardinal Beaufort tells Henry; "He'll wrest the sense, and hold us here all day," Buckingham adds) figures the way that all *2 Henry VI*'s complaints will be treated, encapsulating the particular nature of King Henry's failure as a sovereign: his inability to act as a just judge (3.1.172, 186).<sup>44</sup>

*2 Henry VI*'s oft-noted obsession with legal rhetoric, imagery, motifs and settings foregrounds the way that grievances are nurtured and magnified when the very institutional structures that should hear, judge, and resolve them fail to do so. Preferring to outsource judgments to others, refrain from judgment, or let his subjects settle things themselves, Henry functions as an absence of sovereign justice at the center of the play.<sup>45</sup> His stunning failure to hear and answer complaints is the counterpart to the chorus of complaint that reverberates throughout *2 Henry VI*. In the first act alone, the audience witnesses the "passionate discourse" through which Gloucester "unload[s] his grief" at the terms of agreement between France and England, terms which he says will prove "the common grief of all the land" (1.1.100, 72, 73); the supplicatory complaints presented by the petitioners to the Lord Protector and intercepted by Suffolk and Margaret; the Duke of York's anger at the loss of the French lands ("So

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<sup>44</sup> On Henry VI's ineffectiveness, see Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation* (Routledge: New York, 1997), pp. 65–82.

<sup>45</sup> In *3 Henry VI*, Clifford in his dying speech cites Henry's ineffective rule as the cause of the civil war. "And, Henry, hadst thou swayed as kings should do, / Or as thy father and his father did, / Giving no ground unto the house of York, / They never then had sprung like summer flies," he laments, "For what doth cherish weeds, but gentle air? / And what makes robbers bold, but too much lenity?" (2.6.14–17, 21–22).

York must sit and fret and bite his tongue,” he complains, “While his own lands are bargained for and sold”) and his renewed plan “To grapple with the house of Lancaster; / And force perforce I’ll make him yield the crown, / Whose bookish rule hath pulled fair England down” (1.1.229–30, 256–58); and a string of accusations made against Gloucester as an enemy of the commonwealth.<sup>46</sup> To all of these complaints, which point out multiple fracture points in the commonwealth and together gesture toward the pile-up of unresolved grievances and the complete dissolution of civil order that the play will stage, Henry is ignorant or indifferent.<sup>47</sup>

While the play represents Jack Cade as a pawn in the Duke of York’s plot against the House of Lancaster, it also represents the rebellion he leads as an inversion of Henry’s reluctance to hear complaints and make judgments. The mirror image of the unruling king is the unruly Cade, who vows at once to obliterate all law and order and yet commands that his “mouth shall be the Parliament of England” (4.7.13). He directs his anger at the very structures for hearing and judging grievances: the rebels plan to destroy the Inns of Court, his companion the Butcher famously suggests “the first thing we’ll do let’s kill all the lawyers,” and Cade puts Lord Saye, who has himself acted as a judge, “Long sitting to determine poor men’s causes,” on trial (4.2.70, 4.7.79). But Cade also sets himself up as judge in place of those structures, meting out “justice” on the sergeant who complains to him about another man’s rape of his wife (“Justice, justice, I pray you, sir, let me have justice of this fellow here”) by ordering that his tongue be cut out and his legs be crippled so that he can no longer complain nor run

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<sup>46</sup> These accusations include Suffolk’s suggestion that “the commonwealth hath daily run to wrack” under Gloucester’s rule as Protector, Cardinal Beaufort’s charge that “The commons hast thou racked;” Somerset’s claim that “Thy sumptuous buildings and thy wife’s attire / Have cost a mass of public treasury;” Buckingham’s complaint that “Thy cruelty in execution / Upon offenders hath exceeded law;” and Margaret’s suggestion that Gloucester should be executed for his “sale of offices and towns in France” (1.3.128, 132, 134–35, 136–37, 139).

<sup>47</sup> The 1559 *Mirror for Magistrates* articulates the problem in similar terms. There, Jack Cade notes that he spurs the men in Kent to “their grefes vnto the Kyng complayne. / Who being deafe (as men say) on that eare, / For we desired releace of subsidies, / Refused roughly our requestes to heare / And came against vs as his enemies” (ll. 63–67, p. 173).

for justice (4.7.119–20).<sup>48</sup> Thus the passive indifference to complaints appears on a spectrum with the violent obliteration of complaints.

From the abundance of unanswered complaint to the attempt to explicitly punish it, *2 Henry VI* suggests that a multiplicity of complaint, coupled with the lack of a structure to address those grievances, is destined to lead to bloodshed. In the words of *The Spanish Tragedy*'s Lorenzo, "Where words prevail not, violence prevails" (2.1.108). At the end of *2 Henry VI*, revenge takes the stage as the answer to unanswered and unresolved grievance. In the last act of the play, the Duke of York and Clifford, who has vowed his loyalty to the Lancastrians, meet in battle. To York's vow that "Clifford, since we are singled here alone, / Be this the day of doom to one of us. / For know my heart hath sworn immortal hate / To thee and all the house of Lancaster," Clifford responds with an equally fierce promise: "And here I stand and pitch my foot to thine, / Vowing not to stir till thou or I be slain / For never shall my heart be safe at rest / Till I have spoiled the hateful house of York" (5.2.20–23, 24–27). The parallelism of York and Clifford's complementary speeches anticipates the back-and-forth, eye-for-an-eye vengeance of *3 Henry VI*, as does the speech that Young Clifford makes upon his discovery of his dead father. Taking judgment into his own hands ("O let the vile world end, / And the premised flames of the last day / Knit earth and heaven together. / Now let the general trumpet blow his blast"), Young Clifford vows to avenge his father and repay York for his cruelty with "hot coals of vengeance" (5.3.40–43, 36). Spilling over the bounds of the play, the unresolved grievances and unanswered complaints of *2 Henry VI* echo throughout *3 Henry VI*, a play obsessed with "answering."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> This scene is only present in Q.

<sup>49</sup> Woodbridge calls *3 Henry VI* "the apogee of balanced revenges" (*English Revenge Drama*, p. 75).

## Performing revenge: *3 Henry VI*

In *3 Henry VI*, complaint seems to disappear. Describing complaint as without effect and without answer, characters announce that they will no longer express their grievances to figures of authority or lament their losses. Instead, they say, they will seek revenge as the most effective means of redress. When Richard, Duke of Gloucester asks his men, “Shall we go throw away our coats of steel, / And wrap our bodies in black mourning gowns, / Numb’ring our Ave-Maries with our beads? / Or shall we on the helmets of our foes / Tell our devotion with revengeful arms?” he expresses the sentiment common to all of *3 Henry VI*’s characters, save the embattled King himself (2.1.160–64).<sup>50</sup> Clifford promises to remember his father by “mourn[ing] in steel;” Richard vows that “To weep is to make less the depth of grief; / Tears, then, for babes—blows and revenge for me!” (1.1.58; 2.1.85–86). “Think, therefore, on revenge, and cease to weep,” Margaret tells herself after Suffolk’s death; later, she leads the Lancastrian forces with the proverb that “Great lords, wise men ne’er sit and wail their loss, / But cheerly seek how to redress their harms” (2*H6* 4.4.3; 3*H6* 5.4.1–2). In this section, which focuses on how these characters articulate their grief and their grievance in vows of vengeance, I suggest that *3 Henry VI* represents the vow of vengeance as a speech act so effective that to perform it is effectively to perform the act of revenge it promises. I argue that the play, although it ostensibly scorns the agency of words, recuperates that agency by demonstrating the performative efficacy of speech acts of grievance. Thus it links the ostensibly opposed complaint and (vow of) vengeance to each other through the animating affective force and rhetorical construction that they share.

*3 Henry VI* opens with the Yorkists, immediately out of battle, displaying the “bloody sword[s]” with which they have slain several Lancastrians, and holding up the severed head of Somerset, the Duke

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<sup>50</sup> Henry is possibly the only character whose wish is for *no vengeance*: when he sees York’s head in *3 Henry VI*, he says “Withhold revenge, dear God—’tis not my fault, / Nor wittingly have I infringed my vow,” chiding Clifford by asking him “didst thou never hear / That things ill got had ever bad success?” (2.2.7–8, 45–46).

of York's sworn enemy (1.1.14). But if the play foregrounds the vengeance enacted by swords, it also foregrounds the vengeance performed by language. Paradoxically, this imbrication of language and force is most evident in a scene that initially appears to be about the failures of language, particularly of pleas for pity. Recalling Clifford's discovery of his father's body in the last act of *2 Henry VI*, when Clifford captures Rutland, the youngest of the Duke of York's sons, in the first act of *3 Henry VI*, he proclaims that "Whose father slew my father—he shall die," refusing to be swayed by any of the reasons Rutland or his tutor suggest for sparing the boy's life (1.3.5). Bound only to his own vow over his father's dead body to show no mercy to the House of York, Clifford is unmoved by Rutland's appeals to other things to which he might be obligated. Rutland's invocations of concepts of honor ("I am too mean a subject for thy wrath. / Be thou revenged on men, and let me live"), fairness ("He [York] is a man, and, Clifford, cope with him"), and divine retribution ("Thou hast one son—for his sake pity me, / Lest in revenge thereof, sith God is just, / He be as miserably slain as I") are equally meaningless to Clifford (1.3.20–21, 25, 41–43). "In vain thou speak'st, poor boy," Clifford says, "My father's blood / Hath stopped the passage where thy words should enter" (1.3.22–23). To Rutland's protest that Clifford "hast no cause" to kill him, Clifford responds by repeating his initial decision, "No cause? Thy father slew my father, therefore die" (1.3.46, 47).

Yet it is not his father's blood but his own words that "stop" Clifford from hearing Rutland's pleas and that seal his fate. His encounter with Rutland, from the latter's capture to his death, is marked on either end by a judgment ("Whose father slew my father—he shall die;" "Thy father slew my father, therefore die") whose parallelism and reiterative quality is itself an echo and a fulfillment of his vow at the end of *2 Henry VI* to spare no babes of the House of York since York spares no old men ("York not



our old men spares; / No more will I their babes”). In *3 Henry VI*, revenge is fundamentally a matter of language, the language in which the promised end is stored in memory and activated when repeated.<sup>51</sup> This encounter between Clifford and Rutland sets up a pattern that governs the rest of *3 Henry VI*, encapsulating how the play represents revenge as bound up in language, and specifically the speech acts through which grievance is articulated.

The play not only shows how a vow binds its speaker to the action that “answers” it—that echoes and resolves it—but more importantly represents that action as a constitutive part of the vow itself. Here, revenge is structured not simply along blood lines but also according to the “lines” of vowed vengeance (lines whose reiteration blocks words, like Rutland’s, that might suggest different courses of action).<sup>52</sup> For example, Richard, Duke of Gloucester succeeds in spurring Warwick to vengeance only when he reminds him that “Thy brother’s blood the thirsty earth hath drunk, / [. . .] / And in the very pangs of death he cried, / Like to a dismal clangour heard from far, / ‘Warwick, revenge—brother, revenge my death!’” (2.3. 15–19). Chastised, Warwick kneels and swears, “Here, on my knee, I vow to God above / I’ll never pause again, never stand still, / Till either death hath closed these eyes of mine / Or fortune given me measure of revenge” (2.3.29–32). The repetition of Warwick’s brother’s last words, with the repetition of the demand that they make of Warwick to answer, is necessary to actually elicit his answer, which is itself a vow that his brother’s killers will “answer” for their deed. In its depiction of vows of vengeance as speech acts bound up with and bound to answers that they not only anticipate but

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<sup>51</sup> In their introduction to the Arden edition of *3 Henry VI*, John D. Cox and Eric Rasmussen note that the play “is second only to *Titus Andronicus* in the number of words with the root ‘venge.’” *King Henry VI Part Three*, eds. Cox and Rasmussen (London: Arden, 2001), p. 96.

<sup>52</sup> Hence characters are always reminding others of their vows, e.g. Henry reminds the Earl of Northumberland, “he [York] slew thy father—/ And thine, Lord Clifford—and you both have vowed revenge / On him, his sons, his favourites, and his friends” (1.1.54–56).

make happen, *3 Henry VI* conceptualizes language, and particularly the language of grievance, as possessing an immanently fatalistic force.

If vows are represented as efficacious, tearful supplications and laments are an object of such scorn in *3 Henry VI* that the Yorkists and Lancastrians alike treat them as something to be forcibly compelled from their prisoners in order to further humiliate them. When Clifford captures the Duke of York, Margaret delays York's death by suggesting that first "let's hear the orisons he makes" (1.4.111). Waving a handkerchief stained with Rutland's blood before his face, Margaret tries to make York complain. "I prithee, grieve, to make me merry, York," she begs (1.4.87). But York turns her plan against her. "Bidd'st thou me rage? Why, now thou hast thy wish. / Wouldst have me weep? Why, now thou hast thy will," York says, suggesting that "These tears are my sweet Rutland's obsequies, / And every drop cries vengeance for his death" (1.4.144-45, 148-49). Promising that "My ashes, as the phoenix, may bring forth / A bird that will revenge upon you all," York suggests that the tearful words of complaint that Clifford and Margaret force from him will rebound upon them, that his complaint is animated by a grievance that gives it power (1.4.36-37).

As Warwick says, "Measure for measure must be answerèd" (2.6.55). The end of *3 Henry VI* represents the Duke of York's dying complaint as having the same power the play has assigned to the vow. We see this in the way that York's last words, and Margaret's taunting of him for his grief at his young son's death, echo in the revenge that York's surviving sons take on her. At the end of *3 Henry VI*, bereft of all the defenders of the Lancastrians, Margaret witnesses the death of her young son at the hands of the newly crowned King Edward IV, Clarence, and Richard. Margaret now turns to complaint herself. "My heart will burst an if I speak; / And I will speak that so my heart may burst," she laments, "Butchers and villains! Bloody cannibals! / How sweet a plant have you untimely cropped!" (5.5.59-60, 61-62). She vows that "If you ever chance to have a child, / Look in his youth to have him so cut off /

As, deathsmen, you have rid this sweet young Prince!” (5.5.65–67). Although all vengeance appears to be measured out and the House of York triumphant, in the context of a play in which words are bound to reverberate, Margaret’s last complaint dangles like a loose thread beyond the margins of the play, her unanswered grievance suggesting something still unfinished.

### Speaking vengeance: *Richard III*

At the end of 3 *Henry VI*, Richard delivers the news of the final defeat of the Lancastrians and the cruel death of King Henry’s son to the deposed and imprisoned king. Comparing Richard to a tragedian performing a “scene of death,” Henry begs Richard to stop: “Ah, kill me with thy weapon, not with words! / My breast can better brook thy dagger’s point / Than can my ears that tragic history,” he pleads (5.6.10, 26–28). As if in retribution for his refusal in 2 *Henry VI* to hear his subjects’ grievances, Henry here is made a captive audience. Yet Henry manages to inflict reciprocal violence upon Richard, prophesying the latter’s doom in words that upset Richard so much that at last, reaching for his dagger, he orders, “I’ll hear no more. Die, prophet, in thy speech” (5.6.57). But while 3 *Henry VI*’s last lines show King Edward similarly attempting to wrap up the story of the Lancastrians’ woes and put this “tragic history” firmly in the past—“And now what rests but that we spend the time / With stately triumphs, mirthful comic shows, / Such as befits the pleasure of the court?” he exclaims—*Richard III* demonstrates that the revenge plot of 3 *Henry VI* has not yet reached its conclusion, as grievances remain unanswered (5.7.42–44).<sup>53</sup> In this section, I suggest that although Richard, “determinèd to prove a villain,” sets himself up as the protean Vice figure, the one whose elaborate machinations will

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<sup>53</sup> When *Richard III* was printed in quarto in 1597, it was titled as a tragedy (*The Tragedy of King Richard the third*), and even when it was grouped with the newly created category of “Histories” in the 1623 Folio, it was still titled as a “tragedy,” the only English history play to receive such a designation. On *Richard III* as a tragic history, see Nicholas Brooke, “Reflecting Gems and Dead Bones: Tragedy versus History in *Richard III*,” *Critical Quarterly* 7. 2 (1965): 123–34, and Phyllis Rackin, “History into Tragedy: The Case of *Richard III*,” *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender*, eds. Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996) 31–53.

work revenge on his enemies, it is the marginalized Margaret—the tetralogy’s consummate complainant—who works her revenge from the play’s sidelines, simply by “fill[ing] the world with words” (*RIII* 1.1.30, *3H6* 5.5.43).<sup>54</sup>

Margaret’s speech act of choice is the curse, a speech act whose efficacy in *Richard III* is as much a subject of debate amongst the play’s characters as it is amongst critics.<sup>55</sup> In *2 Henry VI*, curses are ridiculed: when Margaret mocks her lover Suffolk for not protesting his banishment, asking him why he lacks the “spirit to curse thine enemies,” he responds by saying “Wherefore should I curse them?” (3.2.310, 311). He suggests that “Could curses kill,” he would “invent as bitter searching terms, / As curst, as harsh, and horrible to hear,” and that “every joint should seem to curse” (3.2.312, 313–14, 121). *Richard III* features a similar exchange, but with the roles reversed. Richard suggests to Margaret that her suffering is the direct result of the words York spoke to her as she taunted him with Rutland’s death before his own, telling her that “His [York’s] curses then, from bitterness of soul / Denounced against thee, are all fall’n upon thee” (1.3.176–77). Margaret, recalling her complaint for her son’s death, suggests that she then will curse too: “Can curses pierce the clouds and enter heaven? / Why then, give way, dull clouds, to my quick curses!” she exclaims (1.3.192–93). “Did York’s dread curse prevail so much with heaven / That Henry’s death, my lovely Edward’s death, / Their kingdom’s loss, my woeful banishment, / Should all but answer for that peevish brat?” she protests (1.3.188–91). *Richard III*

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<sup>54</sup> Shakespeare depicts Margaret as someone who knows how to complain in every register possible. She is a skilled supplicant (note her self-defensive speech to Henry after the death of Gloucester in *2 Henry VI*); a figure who knows when to turn complaint into a vow of vengeance (“my mourning weeds are laid aside, / And I am ready to put armour on,” she announces, spurring the men on to fight—*3H6* 3.3.229–30); and a performer of lament who asks for pity (Henry notes, speaking of her cries to the French king for help, “She’s a woman to be pitied much. / Her sighs will make a batt’ry in his breast, / Her tears will pierce into a marble heart, / The tiger will be mild whiles she doth mourn, / And Nero will be tainted with remorse / To hear and see her complaints, her brinish tears”—*3H6* 3.1.36–41).

<sup>55</sup> On the critical debate about Margaret’s curses, see Hattaway, “The Shakespearean History Play,” and David Bevington, “Why Should Calamity be Full of Words’: The Efficacy of Cursing in *Richard III*,” *Iowa State Journal of Research* 56 (1981): 9–18. Cox and Rasmussen suggest that Margaret’s curses show the cultural influence of models of “magical’ thinking,” i.e. the “belief in the ability of language to affect the material world directly” (*3 Henry VI*, p. 57).

represents Margaret's curses, which operate on the principle that there is still vengeance owed to her, as efficacious complaints that succeed in getting the thing for which they ask.<sup>56</sup> Their efficacy is represented not in terms of a power in the world that the curses invoke and harness, but rather as a property of the words themselves. *Richard III* self-consciously brings back its own language of grievance and positions it as the agent of vengeance by calling attention to the way that Margaret's curses repeat old and unanswered articulations of grievance. Those curses will themselves echo in later speech acts. In doing so the play revises the revenge tragedy trope of remembered grievance acted upon at last, making that action first and foremost one of language. Indeed, when Margaret envisions her vengeance accomplished, what she imagines are the words she will speak: her fantasy about Richard's death is "That I may live and say, 'The dog is dead'" (4.4.78).

The only character that appears in all four of the tetralogy's plays (and does so unhistorically), Margaret is *Richard III*'s voice of theatrical memory, reminding other characters of the unresolved and unanswered grievances of the other plays.<sup>57</sup> From her first appearance in *Richard III*, she is represented as a figure all but forgotten by the other characters. She observes them unseen, offering sharp and bitter commentary in asides, correcting their versions of the story. Hearing Richard protest to Queen Elizabeth, Rivers, and Dorset that nobody has remembered his "pains"—his efforts on behalf of the York family—she mutters, "Out, devil! I remember them too well. / Thou killed'st my husband Henry

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<sup>56</sup> As Marjorie Garber suggests, "Margaret's curse . . . become[s] the true plot of this play, despite the plural 'plots,' inductions, and stratagems so ingeniously devised by Richard." "Richard III," in *Shakespeare After All* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), p. 147.

<sup>57</sup> For discussions of Margaret, see Laurie Ellinghausen, "Shame and Eternal Shame': The Dynamics of Historical Trauma in Shakespeare's First Tetralogy," *Exemplaria* 20.3 (2008): 264–82; Marguerite A. Tassi, "Wounded Maternity, Sharp Revenge: Shakespeare's Representations of Queens in Light of the Hecuba Myth," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 37.1 (2011): 83–99; Besnault and Bitot, "Historical legacy"; Garber, "Richard III"; Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*; and Thorne, "O, lawful let it be." Margaret's resemblance to various dramatic predecessors, classical and contemporary, has been much-noted: the lamenting women and chorus of Greek drama (Thorne, Tassi); a Medea-like figure of Senecan revenge (Besnault and Bitot); a threatening foreign Other in line with *1 Henry VI*'s Joan de Pucelle (Howard and Rackin 43–118, Ellinghausen); a ghost similar to that of *Hamlet* (Garber).

in the Tower, / And Edward, my poor son, at Tewkesbury:” when Richard reminds Queen Elizabeth that “Poor Clarence did forsake his father Warwick—/ Ay, and forswore himself, which Jesu pardon” she interrupts with “Which God revenge!” (1.3.117, 118–201; 1.3. 135–46, 137). When she does at last make herself known to the Yorks, she responds to Richard’s question as to what she “mak’st”—what she is doing—in his sight by telling him that “repetition of what thou hast marred: / That will I make before I let thee go” (1.3.164, 165–66). It is by remembering and reciting those wrongs in language that the play emphasizes *qua* language that Margaret makes her revenge.

Using language that reflects in its parallelism the perfectly measured revenge she wants it to enact, she curses Elizabeth: “Edward thy son, that now is Prince of Wales, / For Edward my son, that was Prince of Wales, / Die in his youth by like untimely violence,” she says, “Thyself, a queen, for me that was a queen, / Outlive thy glory like my wretched self” (1.3.196–98, 199–200). To Rivers, Dorset, Gray, and Hastings, whom she says “were standers-by / [ . . . ] when my son / Was stabbed with bloody daggers” she wishes “That none of you may live his natural age, / But by some unlooked accident cut off” (1.3.207–9, 210–211). When Richard commands that she “Have done thy charm,” she turns on him: “And leave out thee? Stay, dog, for thou shalt hear me,” she commands, “If heaven have any grievous plague in store / Exceeding those that I can wish upon thee, / O let them keep it till thy sins be ripe, / And then hurl down their indignation” (1.3.212, 213–16).

Leaving her enemies by telling Buckingham to “O but remember this another day, / When he [Richard] shall split thy very heart with sorrow, / And say, ‘Poor Margaret was a prophetess,’” Margaret imagines the effect of her curses, their answer, in terms of what her enemies will say when they realize her curse has worked (1.3.297–99). And indeed, the play represents the effects of Margaret’s curses, their answers, precisely in terms of this verbal recollection and repetition. Before they are executed, Rivers and Gray recall her words (“Now Margaret’s curse is fall’n upon our heads, / For standing by

when Richard stabbed her son”); Hastings before his death says “O Margaret, Margaret! Now thy heavy curse / Is lighted on poor Hastings’ wretched head” (3.3.14–15, 3.4.92–93). Immediately before his death, Buckingham even quotes the very words that Margaret had imagined him speaking at exactly that moment: “Thus Margaret’s curse falls heavy on my neck. / ‘When he,’ quoth she, ‘shall split thy heart with sorrow, / Remember Margaret was a prophetess,’” he mourns (5.1.24–27). Buckingham’s citation of the very words that Margaret had imagined for him exemplifies the way that the play positions Margaret’s words as a script that literally “foretells” the future. Just as Richard will do when the ghosts visit him, Buckingham repeats what he has heard and remembered.

Margaret’s “deep exclaims” and “cursing cries,” which inject old and unresolved grievances into the present, echo and repeat throughout the play, suturing together the unresolved grievances of the *Henry VI* plays and of *Richard III* as all belonging to and heading toward a final resolution (1.2.52). After she curses the Yorks, Margaret disappears from the action of the play, but lingers to “make the period to [her] curse” (1.3.236). Stepping back to see what she has accomplished, in Act 4 she reappears, taking the stage as a spectator of tragedy. “Here in these confines slyly have I lurked / To watch the waning of mine enemies,” she says, announcing that “A dire induction am I witness to, / And will to France, hoping the consequence / Will prove as bitter, black, and tragical” (4.4.3–4, 5–7). When Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of York enter, mourning, she withdraws out of sight. Further illustrating how the answer that Margaret envisions for her unanswered grievances is a matter of language, in a series of asides supplementing their chorus she answers their lamenting rhetorical questions by bitterly reciting her own losses, positioning their new griefs as the answer to her old ones. When the Duchess of York asks why Edward is dead, Margaret remarks that “Plantagenet doth quit Plantagenet; / Edward for Edward pays a dying debt” (4.4.20–21). When Queen Elizabeth asks when God slept, as he must have to let her sons die, Margaret answers, “When holy Harry died, and my sweet

son” (4.4.25). At last she comes forward, wanting a witness to her triumph: “Bear with me. I am hungry for revenge, / And now I cloy me with beholding it,” she proclaims (4.4.61–62).

But it is not enough for Margaret to simply “behold” her revenge. She must tell it, and hear it repeated by others in order for it to be truly accomplished. Here again, the play repeats its own language. Recalling the terms in which she cursed Elizabeth (“I called thee then ‘vain flourish of my fortune;’ / I called thee then, poor shadow, ‘painted queen’”), Margaret asks Elizabeth to examine herself and see if she did not tell it right (4.4.82–83). Echoing those words (“Poor painted Queen, vain flourish of my fortune, / [...] / The day will come that thou shalt wish for me / To help thee curse this poisonous bunch-backed toad”), Queen Elizabeth now acknowledges “thou didst prophesy the time would come / That I should wish for thee to help me curse / That bottled spider, that foul bunch-backed toad” (1.3.239–44; 4.4.79–81). Margaret commands Elizabeth to “Decline all this, and see what now thou art,” instructing her as to the answers she would have her recite: “For happy wife, a most distressed widow; / For joyful mother, one that wails the name; / For queen, a very caitiff, crowned with care,” she lists, continuing, “For one being sued to, one that humbly sues; / For she that scorned at me, now scorned of me; / For she being feared of all, now fearing one; / For she commanding all, obeyed of none” (4.4.97, 98–100, 101–4). Mirroring the logic of revenge in its very syntax, the speech’s anaphora and isocolon reflect the parallel structure of Elizabeth’s reversal of fortune, one that answers Margaret’s. In commanding Elizabeth to “decline” this reversal, Margaret asks her to tell the story over, giving it its proper ending, and tying up its loose end: Richard.

When it comes, the final end that these scenes promise and rehearse is, like its proleptic harbingers, both retrospective and anticipatory, looking back to the three *Henry VI* plays and forward to the historical future. Margaret predicts that “at hand, at hand / Ensues [Richard’s] piteous and unpitied end,” but rather than stay to see out the end, she makes the York women, whose woes and



words are already bound up with hers, into the bearers of her own curse (4.4.73–74). The words that the Duchess of York flings at Richard are in fact uncanny continuations of the very words that Richard cuts off when he kills King Henry in *3 Henry VI*. King Henry’s last words, following his prophesying of Richard’s death with references to stories about Richard’s birth, are “And if the rest be true which I have heard / Thou cam’st—”; picking up where he leaves off, the Duchess of York says to Richard, “Thou cam’st on earth to make the earth my hell” (*3H6* 5.6.55–56; *Richard* 4.4.167). Likewise, when the ghosts appear, they are ghosts not only of the persons they used to be, but ghosts of earlier *references* to ghosts,<sup>58</sup> most notably Anne’s invocation of Henry VI in the very first act of *Richard III*, where, following behind the king’s coffin, she declares, “I invoke thy ghost / To hear the lamentations of poor Anne;” later in the speech, she says what she wants: “O God, which this blood mad’st, revenge his death. / O earth, which this blood drink’st, revenge his death” (1.2.8–9, 62–63). Henry VI’s ghost, as she situates it, is a mediator figure, between Anne’s supplication and the powers of the heavens and the earth, while the complaint itself brings together Christian and classical modes of supplicatory complaint.

The ghosts’ words, and *Richard III* more broadly, retroactively remember, repeat, and bind together the tetralogy’s forms of articulated grievance: the curse, the complaint against the tyrant, the lamentation, the supplication to the heavens, the vow of vengeance. Those reiterated grievances become their own answer as the resolution of the revenge plot arrives through and in the form of reiterated complaint. By making its own words come back at the end, by showing how the very things that Richard disdains as useless are eventually turned against him, the play gives agency to the language of grievance that Richard and others have scorned. Complaint returns not only with a vengeance but *as*

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<sup>58</sup> On the ghosts as reminders of how the past determines subjects, see Stephen Marche, “Mocking Dead Bones: Historical Memory and the Theater of the Dead in *Richard III*,” *Comparative Drama* 37.1 (2003): 37–57.

vengeance. In place of the solitary, heroic figure of revenge who strikes a blow against the tyrant, *Richard III* ends with the villain dragged down by the weight of accumulated complaints delivered by shadows.

### Histories of complaint

When they speak, the ghosts of theatrical tragedy, as well as the ghosts of tragic narrative verse such as the *Mirror*, complain: they express grief or anger, they ask for something, they wish that it may be so. These ghosts are tropes for the way things suppressed and repressed linger in memory, haunt the present, and irrupt into consciousness: ghosts bear witness or testify to the vanished past, the lost cause, the injustice unavenged. Haunting is a form of cultural as well as personal memory, all the more so in historical writing.<sup>59</sup> More specifically, I would suggest that in *Richard III* the ghostly troupe is a trope for the way *language* might haunt and remain active, how particular speech acts perform long past their original utterance.

There is a passage in the manuscripts of Walsingham's *Chronicle* (1376–1422) that suggests the same idea. Here the author describes a haunting dream Richard II has following the execution of the Earl of Arundel:

No sooner had he [the king] fallen asleep than the ghost of the earl seemed to flit before his eyes, threatening him, and frightening him terribly, as it spoke the words of the poem which is found in the Ibis:

You will wake and see me, and I in the silent darkness of night  
Will disturb your sleep, seeming to be with you.  
Finally, whatever you do, I will appear before your face and your eyes.  
And I shall lament [*querar*], and you will find no haven of peace at all.  
Then also, I will come as a ghost, remembering your deeds;

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<sup>59</sup> See Francis Barker's suggestive work on the conceptual relationship between (early modern) tragedy and history. "Which dead? *Hamlet* and the ends of history," in *Uses of History: Marxism, Postmodernism, and the Renaissance*, eds. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iverson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), pp. 47–76; "Tragedy and the Ends of History," in *The Culture of Violence: Essays on Tragedy and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 209–34.

And will be ever before your face in bodily form.<sup>60</sup>

A dream in which a ghost complains by threatening—via a complaint quoted from Ovid—to keep coming back to complain and so compel the king to remember his crimes: this is how the author imagines the dead getting the justice they were denied in life.

What might the complaining ghosts of *Richard III* have suggested to early modern theatrical audiences? As I have been suggesting, the tetralogy represents the efficacy of complaint as an immanent property of the speech act itself. In these plays, no one, human or divine, “answers” these articulations of grievance. Rather, the sheer repetition of complaint—regardless of the speaker, regardless of the content—is its own answer.<sup>61</sup> The tetralogy’s turn to and inversion of the conventional revenge tragedy narrative, I argue, dramatizes the historical force of articulated grievance, challenging concepts of history as shaped only by providence or the powerful or those who “act.” By reversing the familiar tragic trope whereby complaint signifies inevitable failure, and assigning to complaint this fantastical teleology, the tetralogy suggests that repetitive social forms of complaining—the expression of grievance, of outrage, of protest—and repeated complaints make things happen.

It is not insignificant that the tetralogy’s complainants are multiple, diverse, and usually in conflict with each other. If Henry VII’s speech in the last scene of *Richard III* is a fantasy of incorporation and imagined unification—of the commonwealth as “one body” with the sovereign as its head—the complaints that have preceded this speech make this body visible as a collectivity of disparate and dissenting parts, an un-self-identical body politic that bears a “face defaced with scars” (*Richard III* 3.7.126). The plays of the first tetralogy construct a story about history that in the very process of

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<sup>60</sup> *The St Albans Chronicle: The Chronica maiora of Thomas Walsingham*, Vol II: 1394–1422, eds. John Taylor et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), p. 95.

<sup>61</sup> On psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theories of repetition and their relevance to revenge tragedy, see Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy*, 267–89.

representing civil strife as destructive of the commonwealth also suggests how such an abundance of grievance is productive and constitutive of it. In framing articulations of grievance as reverberating echoes, repetitions that over time and in their accumulation structure and shape the collective body that Henry Tudor celebrates at the close of *Richard III*, the tetralogy suggests that the commonwealth both emerges from and is continually being remade and renegotiated by the speech acts of its subjects. The tetralogy represents speech acts of grievance as weapons of the weak, the things that losers have leave to speak, and, precisely in that capacity, as crucial political acts. In the tetralogy, complaint is more than political commentary or testimony or critique. It is political force—a force dramatically synchronized in *Richard III*'s scene of haunting, and distributed amongst many different and diverse subjects throughout history.

# CHAPTER THREE

## GHOST STORIES: HAMLET AND TRAGIC COMPLAINT

The complaining Ghost of *Hamlet* (c. 1599) desires not only to speak, but “would be spoke to” (1.1.44).<sup>1</sup> The Ghost invites Hamlet to follow it, enticing him with its silence, appearing, as Hamlet says, “in such a questionable shape / That I will speak to thee” (1.4.43–44). Of the apparition he acknowledges may be “a spirit of health or goblin damned,” he determines “I’ll call thee Hamlet, / King, father, royal Dane” (1.4.40, 44–45). Calling the Ghost, he finds himself called by it. “It beckons you to go away with it / As if it some impartment did desire / To you alone,” Horatio observes (1.4.58–60). When Hamlet at last orders the Ghost to “Speak!” the Ghost commands him to hear, to “Mark me,” and Hamlet’s stichomythic consent to such an exchange—“I will”—binds him not only to hearing, but to revenge:

*Enter GHOST and HAMLET.*

HAMLET Whither wilt thou lead me? Speak! I’ll go no further.

GHOST Mark me.

HAMLET I will.

GHOST My hour is almost come  
When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames  
Must render up myself.

HAMLET Alas, poor ghost.

GHOST Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing  
To what I shall unfold.

HAMLET Speak, I am bound to hear.

GHOST So art thou to revenge when thou shalt hear.

HAMLET What? (1.5.1–8)

Following Žižek’s observation that this moment is “interpellation in its pure form: the ghost of the father-king interpellates Hamlet-individual into subject—that is, Hamlet recognizes himself as the

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<sup>1</sup> All citations of *Hamlet* are from *Hamlet: Arden Third Series*, eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden, 2006).

addressee of the imposed mandate or mission (to revenge his father's murder),<sup>2</sup> I want to suggest that the play demonstrates, by thematizing, the interpellative force of a particular kind of speech act—complaint—to bind or compel those who recognize themselves as its addressees to a set of actions. Revenge is certainly one of those actions, but as I will argue in this chapter, it is not the only one: Hamlet must also tell the story that the Ghost tells him, essentially re-performing its complaint.

While my chapter on Shakespeare's first tetralogy looked at various speech acts that were considered forms of complaint or modes of "complaining," my reading of *Hamlet* puts the play in conversation with a specific genre of complaint popular in the mid-to-late sixteenth century: narrative verse tragedies comprised largely or entirely of monologues, called "complaints," delivered by ghosts. As Judith Butler suggests of interpellative speech acts, "the act 'works' in part because of the citational dimension of the speech act, the historicity of convention that exceeds and enables the moment of its enunciation."<sup>3</sup> The most obvious citational intertext that makes the Ghost's speech recognizable as a complaint and assigns a corresponding action to its addressee is revenge tragedy and its classical antecedents, in which one frequently encounters ghosts come from the underworld to complain for vengeance or justice.<sup>4</sup> (Hence Hieronimo's tragicomic misrecognition, in *The Spanish Tragedy*, of an old man seeking justice for his dead son as the ghost of his own dead son, come "from the depth, / [. . .] / To tell thy father thou art unrevenged," whom he sends away with the advice to "Go back, my son; complain to Aeacus, / For here's no justice" [3.13.133–35, 138–39]).

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<sup>2</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 135.

<sup>3</sup> Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. the ghost of Achilles whose speech Jasper Heywood adds to his translation of Seneca's *Troas* (1559), the ghost of Don Andrea in *The Spanish Tragedy*. On Senecan ghosts and English revenge tragedy, see Catherine Belsey, "Shakespeare's Sad Tale for Winter: *Hamlet* and the Tradition of Fireside Ghost Stories," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61.1 (2010): 1–27, pp. 6–7. See also Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), especially the chapter "Staging Ghosts," 151–204.

I want to suggest that an equally important, if less explored, citational intertext for *Hamlet*'s construction of the Ghost's complaint are the narrative verse tragedies of *A Mirror for Magistrates* (1559) and its ubiquitous imitations in the 1580s and 1590s. As Tanya Pollard's recent work on *Hamlet* and Greek tragedy has reopened critical conversations about the models of tragic writing that inform the play,<sup>5</sup> the time seems ripe for a reconsideration of the relationship between *Hamlet* and this popular tradition of contemporaneous English tragedy—especially given that its primary speakers are complaining ghosts. Although the fact that the *Mirror* and *Hamlet* share an interest in ghosts has certainly not gone unremarked, what has been unexplored is the nature and extent of the resonances between these spectral complainants.<sup>6</sup> In *Hamlet in Purgatory*, for instance, Stephen Greenblatt mentions the *Mirror* tradition only in a footnote—despite his own admission that along with other historical writing it comprises “perhaps” the single other example, along with the stage, of a public site in the late sixteenth century that invites and authorizes its audiences to believe in the reality of ghosts.<sup>7</sup> And although Catherine Belsey has argued in a recent article that “to develop his Ghost Shakespeare drew on a range of existing conventions,” her work on the role of ghosts in popular English folklore, important as it is for complicating what she argues has been “the habitual answer” of accounting for the construction of Shakespeare's Ghost by simply “invok[ing] the plays of Seneca and the English stage ghosts descended from his dramaturgy,” contains no mention of the ghosts of the *Mirror* at all.<sup>8</sup> This may reflect a tendency on the part of drama critics to overlook or discount the narrative verse tragedies

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<sup>5</sup> See Pollard, “Conceiving tragedy.”

<sup>6</sup> Critics have often noted that they both have ghosts, of course, that both tell stories of their speakers' death, etc. And as far back as 1935, Howard Baker argued that the ghosts of English revenge tragedy seem to be amalgams between Senecan ghosts and the ghosts of English narrative verse tragedy. “Ghosts and Guides: Kyd's ‘Spanish Tragedy’ and the Medieval Tragedy,” *Modern Philology* 33.1 (1935): 27–35. My focus, however, will be to move beyond simply identifying and describing the relationship between these ghosts.

<sup>7</sup> *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 296, n. 5.

<sup>8</sup> “Shakespeare's Sad Tale,” p. 2, 6.

of the early modern period as tragedies. But they were indeed considered tragedies and were extremely popular,<sup>9</sup> and as I will argue, the overlap between the complaints of narrative verse and theatrical tragedy offer insight not only into what the Ghost asks of Hamlet—thereby giving us a fuller sense of the play’s concerns—but into the genre of theatrical tragedy as well.

The spectral complainants of narrative verse tragedy make one demand of their interlocutors: they want these addressees to hear their stories (their “cases” and their “causes”) and to deliver them to other audiences who would not otherwise know the truth of their subjects’ lives and deaths. By showing the resonances between these imagined performances of complaint and Hamlet’s encounter with the Ghost, I argue that the action to which the Ghost’s complaint binds Hamlet with its command to “Remember me” is not only revenge but an act of corrective story-telling. Having heard what the Ghost tells him, he must replace the story Claudius has told about the King’s death with the one the Ghost has told him. In addition to addressing the perennial question about *Hamlet*—why does Hamlet delay his revenge?—my reading also accounts for some other facets of the play that have struck readers as puzzling: Hamlet’s chiding of himself not only for failing to act but for “saying nothing” (2.2.504), his use of theatrical performance to represent rather than avenge his father’s murder (in marked contrast to Hieronimo’s metatheatrical revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy*), and the question as to why the ghost haunts him instead of Claudius, the perpetrator of the crime.<sup>10</sup> Hamlet’s delayed revenge, I suggest, is an effect of the Ghost’s demand that he tell his story. What is rotten in the state of Denmark is that its “whole ear” has been “abused.” To set the disjointed time right, Hamlet has to set the story straight.

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<sup>9</sup> On the continued popularity of tragic narrative verse in the late sixteenth century, see Paul Budra, *A Mirror for Magistrates and the de casibus Tradition*.

<sup>10</sup> Amy Cook suggests that this is “Because the ghost is not interested in Claudius dying, he is interested in Hamlet murdering.” *Shakespearean Neuroplay: Reinvigorating the Study of Dramatic Texts and Performance Through Cognitive Science* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 83.



In thinking about Hamlet as both revenger and storyteller, we might say that he is trying to do two things at once, and doing neither particularly well. But the dilatoriness of protagonist and plot that is so central to the play's fascination allows Shakespeare to demonstrate the interpellative force of complaint in two registers. The plot demonstrates the effects of the complaint on Hamlet himself, of course—he is or appears transformed, he meditates on revenge, he tries to reveal what he has been told. And in his attempt to obey the Ghost by telling his story as tragic narrative—most particularly, in his staging of *The Murder of Gonzago* as *The Mousetrap*, designed to “catch the conscience of the king” (2.2.567)—we see Hamlet, and *Hamlet*, exploring the interpellative force of theatrical tragedy as a medium that translates and delivers complaint to audiences. Thus the Ghost's complaint, I argue, becomes a way for *Hamlet* to articulate the social value of tragedy as an instrument to reveal buried truths, counter one version of events with another, or provoke moral self-examination.

### Part 1. Make place for plaints

First, I want to provide a brief description of the print phenomenon that was *A Mirror for Magistrates*. In the 1550s, John Wayland, a London printer who had published the works of Lydgate, asked the writer and translator William Baldwin to create a continuation of John Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*. After an aborted attempt at printing in 1555, Baldwin's text was printed by Thomas Marshe in 1559 as *Myrroure for Magistrates*.<sup>11</sup> The *Mirror* is comprised of nineteen verse monologues of complaint, referred to as “tragedies,” in which the ghosts of English historical figures narrate and lament what they call their “cases, or the misfortunes that befell them, along with the causes of those misfortunes; these monologues are linked together by short prose sections in which Baldwin describes how he and the

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<sup>11</sup> On the complicated bibliographic and editorial history of the *Mirror*, see W. F. Trench, *A Mirror for Magistrates*; Kiefer, “A Mirror for Magistrates,”; and Sherri Geller, “Editing Under the Influence of the Standard Textual Hierarchy: Misrepresenting *A Mirror for Magistrates* in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Editions,” *Textual Cultures: Texts, Contexts, Interpretations* 2.1 (2007): 43–77.

other writers involved with the project composed, performed, and critiqued these tragic complaints for each other. A second edition that added more tragedies to the already existing ones was published in 1563, and another in 1578, while in the mid-1570s, the writers John Higgins and Thomas Blenerhasset each wrote separate complaint collections framed as supplements to the *Mirror*. In 1587 a much-expanded edition of the *Mirror* was published that included in addition to the twenty-nine tragic poems of the 1559, 1563, and 1578 editions four new complaints by various authors, as well as forty by Higgins, who served as its editor.<sup>12</sup> Other *Mirror*-style poems abounded in the 1580s and 1590s, both in complaint compendia like the *Mirror* itself or as individual poems included in miscellanies or appended to the ends of sonnet sequences or other collections of verse.<sup>13</sup> Included in this category are the “female complaint” poems of Thomas Churchyard, Samuel Daniel, Michael Drayton, and Thomas Lodge, which expanded the parameters of the genre to include female and non-aristocratic figures.<sup>14</sup> Spectral complainants were so familiar a convention of tragic literature, in fact, that in a satiric poem on the abuses of tragic verse, Shakespeare’s contemporary Joseph Hall could skewer tragic poets as “Delight[ing] in nought but notes of ruffull plaint,” always conjuring “up some branded whining ghost, / To till how old misfortunes had him tost” in a dull “Rime of some dreerie fates of lucklesse peres.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In 1610 Richard Niccols would author an edition collating the poems from the 1559, 1563, and 1578 *Mirrors* with a selection of verse tragedies by Blenerhasset, Higgins, and himself.

<sup>13</sup> On the “progeny” of the *Mirror*, see Willard Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* and Louis R. Zocca, *Elizabethan Narrative Poetry*. The *Mirror* not only inspired other tragic narratives of English history, but seems to have been influential for accounts in English of Continental history as well—see, for instance, Ann Dowrich’s *The French History* (1589), in which an English (female) narrator encounters a French (male) complainant who narrates a series of stories of recent tragic events in French history.

<sup>14</sup> For a comprehensive overview of “female complaint,” see John Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*; Schmitz, *The Fall of Women in Early English Narrative Verse*; Heather Dubrow, “A Mirror for Complaints”; Anna Swärdh, “From hell: *A Mirror for Magistrates* and the Late Elizabethan Female Complaint”; and Danielle Clarke, “Signifying, but not sounding”. I offer a fuller analysis of female complaint in the following chapter.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Hall, *Virgidemiarum* (1597), I. v. 2, 5–6, 4.

As Hall's words suggest, the basic conceit of these poems is that a ghost has come to complain. The spectral monologues of the 1559, 1563, and 1578 editions of the *Mirror*, framed by Baldwin's prose links, present the speeches as the prosopopoeia of the writers, who "tooke upon themselves every man for his parte to be sundrye personages, and in theyr behalves to bewayle unto me theyr grevous chances, hevy destinies, & wofull misfortune," while other poems, including those of the 1587 *Mirror*, use devices such as dream visions to present the ghosts appearing to the writer as ghosts.<sup>16</sup> All represent the moment at which the ghost appears as a scene of interpellation, as it singles out and makes its address to the figure it has chosen. So Baldwin introduces the *Mirror's* complaint monologues by telling his readers that they must "ymagyne that you see hym newly crept out of his graue, and speakyng to me as followeth," and in the complaints themselves, the ghosts frequently address "good Baldwin" by name, telling him to "marke Baldwin what I saye" or "pause awhile upon my heavy playnt" (267, 143, 220). Doubling this interpellative address, the ghostly titular complainant of Thomas Churchyard's "Earl of Morton's Tragedie" (1593) asks Churchyard to tell his story by telling him that even *before* his death he had called him to tell his story, for in the brief seconds in which his head survived its severing from his body, the Earl had a vision in which "the eyes behelde, before the eyes did close, / A writer there, and Churchyard lo he hight: / Whose pen paints out, men's tragedies aright," and so "my tongue callde on that man" to "take here thy pen in hand / And send my death, to thine own native land."<sup>17</sup> (One can see why these complaints lent themselves so well to caricature: some are already almost parodies of themselves).

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<sup>16</sup> *The Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. Lily B. Campbell, p. 69. All citations from the 1559 and 1563 *Mirror* are from this edition. I refer to the *Mirror's* poems according to the titles Campbell's text gives them, which simply list the speakers' names.

<sup>17</sup> In *Churchyards Challenge*, p. 21. The title of this section of the chapter is from the first line of this poem.

I would argue that the force *Hamlet* attributes to the Ghost's complaint to compel Hamlet's action—to become his “commandment”—comes from the imaginative matrix of these conventional authorizing gestures through which writers, more than merely legitimizing their text, represent it as compulsory, the effect of an interpellative speech act from whose structure the addressee cannot escape. A particularly vivid illustration of the compulsory nature of spectral complaint is John Higgins' “Induction” to the 1587 *Mirror*, which represents the dream vision as a literal speech act that commands its addressee to hear the complaints it brings forth. In the poem, the figure of Morpheus calls the narrator to ‘Come on thy wayes and thou shalt see and here,’ leading him down a dark hall and to a closed door from behind which, at Morpheus' order, issue a parade of bleeding and disfigured ghosts so ghastly that the narrator “wishte my selfe away” (104–5, 114). Yet he must stay and listen: “I could not for my life eschewe / Their presence,” he says, “For Morpheus wyld me byde, and bad them tell / Their names, and lyues: their haps, and haples days: / And by what meanes from Fortunes globe they fel” (132–33, 135–36).<sup>18</sup>

Like the ghosts that torment Higgins' narrator, all of the ghostly speakers of these poems have come from the underworld to have their stories heard and retold by their addressees. (In a variation on the convention, Thomas Sackville's “Induction” to the complaint of Henry, Duke of Buckingham in the 1563 *Mirror* shows Sackville himself in hell surrounded by ghosts that “wayled / with sighes and teares, sobs, shrykes” all asking him to deliver their stories “to Kesar, King, and Pier” [516–17, 532].<sup>19</sup>)

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<sup>18</sup> Citations from the 1587 *Mirror* are from *Parts Added to The Mirror for Magistrates*, ed. Lily B. Campbell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946).

<sup>19</sup> In the 1563 *Mirror*, the prose link preceding the “Induction” explains that the poem was intended to introduce not only a particular complaint, but an entire set of complaints. Baldwin recounts that after the first planned edition of the *Mirror* was withheld from printing, Sackville wanted to collect all the complaints chronologically preceding Buckingham's, which “he would have preserved in one volume. And from that time backward even to the time of William the conqueror, he determined to continue and perfect all the story him selfe . . . . And therefore to make a meete induction into the matter, he devised this poesye” (pp. 297–98).

The first part of the command the complaining ghosts make to their addressees is that they “hear” and “mark” them: Baldwin is asked to “hearken awhile to Thomas of Wudstocke, / Adrest in presence his fate to complayne” (92.9–10) and to “marke Baldwin what I say” (143.15), Albanact tells Higgins to “marke me” and “liste to heare what I resite” (4, 8), of the shrieks and wails and cries of the complaining shades that swarm him, Sackville says, “(oh alas) it was a hel to heare” (518).

The second part of the command that these ghosts make is that those who hear their complaints must tell their stories. The word “mark” is an important part of this command too, for in addition to attentiveness, it also connotes the action of making a mark, of writing. And this, of course, is what the ghosts want: for their complaints to be recorded so that others can hear them. Their motivations for telling these stories differ slightly from each other, but what they all share in common is that they want to be shared. Reflecting the *Mirror*'s purpose to give counsel to rulers and authorities,<sup>20</sup> most of its ghosts argue that their falls are fodder for good cautionary tales: hence Richard II commands Baldwin to “My vicious story in no poynt see thou spare, / But paynt it out” (24–25). Some, like Henry VI, who says “My piteous playnt may preace my mishaps to rehearce, / whereof the least most lightly heard, the hardest hart may pearce,” are seeking pity (3–4). Others, such as Lord Hastings, tell their stories out of concern that their “name / Be wrongd, by partiall brute of flatteryng fame” (3–4). Indeed, they tell their stories not only to avoid oblivion but in the hopes that of correcting already-existing false or incomplete accounts. Hence they insist on the truthfulness of their stories. Lord Hastings, for example, tells Baldwin that he will tell both “my prayse, and my reproofe,” the whole truth: all that “time hath fyned for true, / . . . / Recount I wyll” (9, 12–14).

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<sup>20</sup> “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,” Baldwin writes in the dedicatory epistle (pp. 65–66). Contemporary collections of didactic and moralizing “mirror” complaints include George Cavendish’s *Metricall Visions* (written in the early 1550s and circulating in manuscript, but not published in print until the nineteenth century), Richard Robinson’s *Rewarde of Wickednesse* (1574), Anthony Munday’s *Mirroure of Mutabilitie* (1574), and George Whetstone’s *Rocke of Regard* (1576).

Philip Schwyzer and Michelle O’Callaghan have argued that the ghosts of *A Mirror for Magistrates* and the other spectral complainants of early modern narrative verse tragedy represent anxieties about large-scale cultural change and discontinuities between past and present: the ghost “figur[es] a fundamental rupture between the past and the present, and a sense of history infused by doubt, uncertainty, and fear of radical alteration,” as O’Callaghan writes.<sup>21</sup> Showing the tears in the social fabric, the ghosts are reminders that all is not well. They insist on telling their stories to counter official versions of history with their own. With their identification of himself as a sinner come from his “prison-house” with a story to tell that contradicts the one “given out,” the words *Hamlet’s* Ghost speaks to Hamlet—

GHOST I am thy father’s spirit,  
 Doomed for a certain term to walk the night  
 And for the day confined to fast in fires  
 Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature  
 Are burnt and purged away [.]  
 [. . . .]  
 Now, Hamlet, hear:  
 ’Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,  
 A serpent stung me. So the whole ear of Denmark  
 Is by a forged process of my death  
 Rankly abused. (1.5.9–13)

—resonate not only with these other narrative verse complaints but particularly with the opening stanzas of Churchyard’s “Shore’s Wife” (1563, 1593) and Samuel Daniel’s *Complaint of Rosamond* (1592), poems of “female complaint” whose ghostly speakers suggest they have been abused by fame and hence “needes must come and shewe [their] piteous case” (“Shore’s Wife,” 42). “Out from the horror of infernall deepes, / My poore afflicted ghost comes heere to plaine it, / Attended with my shame that

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<sup>21</sup> Michelle O’Callaghan, “Dreaming the Dead: Ghosts and History in the Early Seventeenth Century,” *Reading the Early Modern Dream: The Terrors of the Night*, eds. Katharine Hodgkin, Michelle O’Callaghan, and S. J. Wiseman (New York: Routledge, 2008), 81–95, p. 83. See also Philip Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

neuer sleepes,” laments Rosamond, who is also in a type of purgatory, her soul having been “denied transport to the sweet Elisean rest” (1–3, 9). While the desire of *Hamlet*’s Ghost for revenge may seem wholly unlike the desires of Shore’s Wife and Rosamond’s ghosts to have their stories told in such a way as to mend their reputations, he too is concerned that the story in circulation about his death is incorrect.

In Daniel’s poem, Rosamond’s ghost asks the narrator to “take this taske, and in thy wofull Song / To forme my case, and register my wrong,” since “Time hath long since worn out the memorie / Both of my life, and liues unjust depriving” (34–35, 18–19). The spectral complainants of the *Mirror* and its imitations all frame the “tragedies” they demand that their addressees write, the transcription of their complaints, as forms of memory. (Roger Mortimer: “Baldwin forget not me;” King James I of Scotland: “I charge thee Baldwin thou forget me not;” Julius Caesar to Higgins: “againne renue to memory my name” [2, 2, 5].) The first of the 1559 *Mirror*’s complainants, Robert Tresilian, Chief Justice under Richard II, asks Baldwin to “print” the words he speaks as “a president to remayne for euer, / Enroll and recorde it in tables made of brasse, / Engraue it in marble that may be razed neuer” (73, ll. 8–10). The ephemeral—the ghost, “making his mone”—must become a more solid presence in the world.<sup>22</sup> In these poems, the complaint that the ghost delivers and the tragedy that the addressee constructs are one and the same, a transcription of their fateful encounter.

Hamlet’s determination to “wipe away all trivial fond records” from “the table of my memory” and fill “the book and volume of my brain” only with the Ghost’s commandment has sparked many critical analyses of the early modern cultural practices and tropes that inflect the play’s concern with and representation of memory: funereal and commemorative practices,<sup>23</sup> the *ars memoria* (the art of

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<sup>22</sup> 1559 *Mirror*, p. 81.

<sup>23</sup> See Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

memory by which one imagines one mind as made up of places in which images were stored by category),<sup>24</sup> the keeping of commonplace books, material technologies of writing,<sup>25</sup> and, of course, the centrality of memory to revenge tragedy (1.5.99, 98, 103).<sup>26</sup> But I would argue that *Hamlet* is primarily concerned with the particular kind of memory that these *Mirror* poems foreground—turning the tragic narrative that the ghostly complainant tells into a tragedy. And this starts, as always, with hearing.

## Part 2. List, list, o list

BARNARDO Who's there?

FRANCISCO Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself. (1.1.1–2)

The first lines of *Hamlet*—the exchange between the sentinels Barnardo and Francisco as they encounter each other in what we are to imagine as the midnight darkness of the castle's battlements—not only establish the atmosphere of fearful uncertainty that will permeate the rest of the scene but also anticipate the two-part question that Horatio, and later Hamlet, will each put to the Ghost: who are you, and what do you want? That the Ghost might indeed stand and unfold itself is the possibility with which it teases its spectators, which include not only the characters on the battlements but the theatrical audience as well—indeed, as readers of the *Mirror for Magistrates*, they would likely *expect* it to do so. Through the increasingly frantic questions that Horatio and Hamlet ask the Ghost, and the Ghost's continuing silence, accompanied only by his beckoning gestures, the play attempts to rouse the

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<sup>24</sup> See Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>25</sup> See Peter Stallybrass, Roger Chartier, J. Franklin Mowery, and Heather Wolfe, "Hamlet's Tables and the Technologies of Writing in Renaissance England," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55 (2004): 379–419.

<sup>26</sup> On memory and revenge, see Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy*; Thomas Rist, *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration*; most recently, Zackariah C. Long, "The Spanish Tragedy and *Hamlet*: Infernal Memory in English Renaissance Revenge Tragedy," *ELR* 44 (2014): 153–92.



theatrical audience's curiosity, to make them desire as much as Horatio and Hamlet to hear what it might say.<sup>27</sup>

As I will show, both aspects of the Ghost's complaint—the Ghost's call to revenge and the story he tells that Hamlet must "remember"—begin, as the complaints of narrative verse tragedy do, with commands to *hear*. The way that Hamlet opens his ear to the beckoning Ghost and so becomes bound to avenge before he even knows what or who he is avenging, I would argue, suggests another of the many and well-documented ways in which the play represents ears as vulnerable in both literal and figurative ways: in *Hamlet*, ears are invaded with poison, struck and wounded and made captive by sounds, assailed with reports and stories and information; they are attentive and foolish and credent and knowing and, at last, senseless.<sup>28</sup> While Gina Bloom, Tanya Pollard, and Allison Deutermann have shown how *Hamlet's* fascination with the ear reflects early modern understandings of audition (ranging from the materiality of sound to the literal potency of theatrical speech to the importance of the trained and discerning ear), I suggest that the play's representation of the ear is linked to its demonstration of the interpellative force of complaint. Many of *Hamlet's* references to ears come in statements in the imperative or subjunctive mood, commands or wishes for ears to be opened, or not, to hearing a story: Barnardo tells Horatio to "Sit down awhile, / And let us once again assail your ears / That are so fortified against our story / What we have two nights seen" (1.1.29–32); Hamlet tells Horatio "Nor shall you do my ear that violence / To make it truster of your own report / Against yourself" (1.2.170–72);

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<sup>27</sup> On early modern audiences' fascination with the Ghost, see Belsey, "Shakespeare's Sad Tale."

<sup>28</sup> On hearing in *Hamlet*, see Allison K. Deutermann, "'Caviare to the general?': Taste, Hearing, and Genre in *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62.2 (2011): 230–55; Philippa Berry, "Hamlet's Ear," *Shakespeare Studies* 50 (1997): 57–64; Gina Bloom, "Fortress of the Ear: Shakespeare's Late Plays, Protestant Sermons, and Audience," in *Voice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 111–59; Tanya Pollard, "Vulnerable Ears: Hamlet and Poisonous Theater," in *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 123–43; and Bruce Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

Horatio, telling Hamlet about the Ghost, asks him to “Season your admiration for a while / With an  
attent ear till I may deliver / Upon the witness of these gentlemen / This marvel to you” (1.2.191–94).

The play will show that the ear open to complaint—at least Hamlet’s ear—will be bound to it.

The Ghost does not speak until it has made everyone want it to speak. When he first  
encounters “this dreaded sight,” “this thing,” “this apparition” that comes “In the same figure like the  
King that’s dead,” Horatio orders it to speak—“Stay, speak, speak, I charge thee speak”—but “it stalks  
away” (1.1.24, 20, 27, 40, 50, 49). “’Tis gone and will not answer” (1.1.51). Returning, the Ghost again  
acts as if it might speak, spreading its arms as if to open itself to Horatio and the sentinels.

*Enter Ghost.*

HORATIO But soft, behold, lo where it comes again;  
I’ll cross it though it blast me. Stay, illusion.

*It spreads his arms.*

If thou hast any sound or use of voice,

Speak to me.

If there be any good thing to be done

That may to thee do ease and grace to me,

Speak to me.

If thou art privy to thy country’s fate

Which happily foreknowing may avoid,

O, speak.

Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life

Extorted treasure in the womb of earth—

For which they say your spirits oft walk in death—

Speak of it, stay and speak.

(1.1.125–38)

As the empty metrical space following Horatio’s staccato commands for the Ghost to “Speak to me”  
emphasize, these commands are met only by the Ghost’s silence, a silence made all the more frustrating  
by the fact (as Horatio will later tell Hamlet) that “once methought / It lifted up it head and did  
address / Itself to motion like as it would speak” (1.2.214–16).

Hamlet’s own encounter with the Ghost is marked by a similar dynamic of beckoning and  
withholding on the Ghost’s part, and questioning and ordering on his. It is precisely through its silence,  
seemingly teeming with significance, that the Ghost appears to Hamlet as doubly “questionable,” open

to question both by virtue of its obscurity and doubtful nature, and by its capacity to be interrogated. Hamlet asks it a series of questions: who are you? why have you come? and “What may this mean / That thou, dead corpse . . . / Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon[?]” (1.4.52–54). At the end of his litany, he repeats his questions again, this time in truncated form, and in words that suggest that the Ghost’s appearance means an *action* of some sort: “Say why is this? Wherefore? What should we *do*?” (1.4.57, italics mine). In response, the Ghost only beckons him with a wave of its hand.

Hamlet’s plea that the Ghost will “Let me not burst in ignorance” hints at a threat to his being that his desire to hear the Ghost represents, not only in its echoing of the notion we have seen in *Lear* of a passion so intense that it bursts the body, but in its echoing of his description of the Ghost, whose “bones hearsed in death / Have burst their cerements” (1.4.46, 47–48). Paired, these lines suggest the dead living and the living dying. Indeed, his friends recognize in the Ghost’s gestures—the “courteous action” with which, as Marcellus says, “It waves you to a more removed ground”—a threat to his safety that Hamlet ignores (1.4.60, 61). The repetitious lines the play assigns to Hamlet as he resists their attempts to stop him from following the Ghost show his eagerness and the Ghost’s waving to be equally frenzied: “It will not speak: then I will follow it;” “It waves me forth again. I’ll follow it;” “It waves me still. Go on, I’ll follow thee;” “Still am I called;” “Go on! I’ll follow thee” (1.4.63, 68, 79, 84, 86). And although the Ghost does not lead Hamlet off a cliff, the play shows how it leads him to an equally fateful position, for when it finally speaks, the Ghost issues a command from whose structure Hamlet, like the addressees of the narrative verse tragic complaints, will not be able to escape.

When the Ghost does at last speak to Hamlet, his first words are a command to “Mark me” (1.5.2). Revealing his identity and his grievance and demanding redress, he speaks a complaint in the vein of the ghosts of classical literature and English revenge tragedy, in which ghosts frequently come from the underworld to complain for justice or vengeance. At the same time, the story that the Ghost

tells of his death, which reveals Claudius as the perpetrator of a crime, is also a fall story very much like those of narrative verse tragedy—the account of a king who lives and dies in his sins (“Thus was I sleeping by a brother’s hand / Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched, / Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin / . . . / O horrible, O horrible, most horrible!” [1.5.74–80]).<sup>29</sup> Notice, in the Ghost’s words, his command that Hamlet “hear” both aspects of this story:

GHOST                      List, list, O list,  
 If thou didst ever thy dear father love—  
 HAMLET O God!  
 GHOST —Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder!  
 HAMLET Murder!  
 GHOST Murder most foul—as in the best it is—  
 But this most foul, strange and unnatural.  
 . . . .  
 Now, Hamlet, hear:  
 ’Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,  
 A serpent stung me. So the whole ear of Denmark  
 Is by a forged process of my death  
 Rankly abused. But know, thou noble youth,  
 The serpent that did sting thy father’s life  
 Now wears his crown. (1.5.22–28, 34–40)

The Ghost’s complaint is about two wounded ears: the “foul and unnatural” poisoning of the King’s corporeal ear and its counterpart, the “forged process” by which the “whole ear of Denmark,” the body politic, has been “rankly abused.” And so I want to suggest that the play positions Hamlet as being not only bound to correct the one, but the other as well.

At the same time, I want to note that the Ghost does not explicitly tell Hamlet to deliver the truth of his death to Denmark, whereas, by contrast, he is very clear about the “revenge” part. There are, however, significant resonances between his complaint and those of the ghosts of narrative verse

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Henry, Duke of Buckingham’s lament for how quickly one’s fortunes turn in the *Mirror*: “So long as Fortune would permyt the same,/ I lyved in rule and ryches wyth the best: / And past my time in honour and in fame. / That of mishap no feare was in my brest:/ But false Fortune whan I suspected least, / Dyd tume the wheele, and wyth a dolefull fall / Hath me bereft of honour life and all.” ll. 743–49, p. 344.

tragedy. These include resonances of appearance, by which I mean the way the Ghost comes onto the scene and both startles and amazes its witnesses, and the way he vanishes, bringing it to an abrupt end by bidding adieu (compare his “Fare thee well at once: / The glow-worm shows the matin to be near/ And ’gins to pale his uneffectual fire,” to Rosamond’s “But here an end, I may no longer stay thee, / I must return t’attend at Stigian flood”). There is also an affective resemblance on the part of the ghosts’ interlocutors, between Hamlet and the narrators of *The Complaint of Rosamond* and Thomas Lodge’s *Tragical Complaint of Elstred* (1593), who are all suffering from melancholy, already complaining, before the ghosts even appear to them.<sup>30</sup> Not only is Hamlet mourning for his father’s death, but he laments that the world is “an unweeded garden / That grows to seed,” its uses all “weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,” its human inhabitants no more than a “quintessence of dust” (1.2.35–36, 2.2.274). There are also resonances of rhythm and meter between the Ghost and the pentameter speeches of the *Mirror*. Their similar structuring with commands to “mark” and to “hear” is another resonance, as is their content: indeed, so many murdered kings appear in the *Mirror* poems that Shakespeare’s Richard II will refer to them as “sad stories of the death of kings” (*RII*, 3.2.152). There are also specific words *Hamlet*’s Ghost speaks that suggest revenge is not the only thing Hamlet might do, particularly his reference to the abused ear of Denmark, and even his comment that he finds Hamlet “apt,” a word used not only to convey suitability but specifically *expressive*, verbal suitability—to put it colloquially, a knack for finding the right words (1.5.32). Above all resonances, perhaps, is the Ghost’s final command: “Adieu, adieu, adieu, remember me,” the fundamental command of every narrative verse spectral complaint (1.5.91). In

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<sup>30</sup> The narrator of *The Complaint of Rosamond* says that “forthwith mou’d with a tender care / And pittie,” he “will’d her boldly tell her minde: / And I more willing tooke this charge assignd, / Because her griefes were worthy to be knowne, / And telling hers, might hap forget mine owne” (78–79, 81–84). In Thomas Lodge’s *Tragical Complaint of Elstred* (1593), a dream vision complaint, the narrator says that he has a “wofull vision” in which Elstred and her daughter Sabrine “landed there where I lamenting was” and “thus their falls successiue complained” (6, 10, 18).<sup>30</sup> The poem closes with his description of himself left alone, still lamenting, to carry out their demand that he tell their story: “And I gotte home and weepingly thus pend it” (605).



HAMLET [. . .] 'twas Aeneas' talk to Dido, and thereabout of it especially when he speaks of Priam's slaughter. If it live in your memory begin at this line—let me see, let me see—  
 (2.2.369–87)

Hamlet's interactions with "the tragedians of the city" newly arrived at Elsinore reveal his investment in remembering his father by telling the true story of his death (2.2.292). The "passionate speech" of Aeneas to Dido that he calls for is not only a story about a son avenging his father, as some critics have read it,<sup>31</sup> but (as others have noted) a story about the cruel slaughter of a father and a king. There are a series of acoustic echoes I want to point out here that all serve to align Pyrrhus with Claudius and the King with Priam, and to suggest the dishonorable nature of Pyrrhus' killing of Priam. These echoes suggest that by ordering this particular speech Hamlet is attempting to find a way of telling the tragic story the Ghost has told him. From this perspective, we can see that the incorrect opening line of the speech that Hamlet recites—"The rugged Pyrrhus like th' Hyrcanian beast . . . / —'Tis not so. It begins with Pyrrhus"—is not a mistake: it correctly aligns Pyrrhus with the Ghost's description of Claudius as "that incestuous, that adulterate beast," even if no one else in Hamlet's onstage audience knows it (2.2.388–89, 1.5.42). Pyrrhus, with his "sable arms, / Black as his purpose," who "lay couched in th'ominous horse," resembles Claudius, whom the Ghost says "stole / With juice of cursed hebona in a vial" toward the sleeping King (2.2.390–91, 392, 1.5.61–62). In its setting of the scene, the buildup to the tragic act itself, the speech also mirrors the Ghost's story: the streets of Troy through which Pyrrhus seeks Priam—the "parching streets / That lend a tyrannous and a damned light / To their lord's murder"—are an acoustic and imagistic echo of the traitorous "porches of my ears" through which Claudius' poison enters Old Hamlet, and of "The natural gates and alleys of the body" through which it

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<sup>31</sup> In "Eclipse of Action: *Hamlet* and the Political Economy of Playing," Richard Halpern ventriloquizes this view: Pyrrhus' murder of Priam is "precisely the kind of act he [Hamlet] finds himself unable to perform, a heroic yardstick with which to measure his own reduced condition" (475). In *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59.4 (2008): 450–82.





The Player's impressive rhetorical performance that Hamlet describes here, the kind of performance to which he aspires but of which he says he has fallen short, is not analogous to his revenge—rather, it is an *example* of the kind of rhetorical performance he wants to do himself, of the kind of story he wants to be able to (re)tell. Hence his rebuke of himself for “say[ing] nothing. No, not for a king / Upon whose property and most dear life / A damned defeat was made” (2.2.504–6). Like his comparison of Pyrrhus to the Hyrcanian beast, this rebuke is another “mistake”—the Arden editors even gloss the line “And can say nothing” with the suggestion that “Hamlet must mean ‘do nothing’”<sup>33</sup>—that is not really a mistake. Just as his encounter with the Players has begun with Hamlet and then the Player giving dramatic speeches, it ends with Hamlet's comparison of his failure to deliver the Ghost's story, and to do so in a moving manner, to the Player's ability to move his audiences. Hence he broods on his failure to speak the “horrid speech” that would madden and appall and confound and amaze his listeners—and “cleave the general ear,” a verb that nicely encapsulates how such a story would both split and suture, re-wound and heal, Denmark's abused ear.

This is the turning point of the play in terms of Hamlet's attempt to remember the Ghost by telling his story, for witnessing the Player's speech—perhaps because it does tell a story that recalls the one the Ghost tells—spurs him to two different acts of story-telling. One of these is his confrontation with Gertrude in her closet. There, he tells her the truth about Claudius by imitating both the opening periodic sentence of the tragic speech of Aeneas to Dido—

The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms,  
 Black as his purpose, did the night resemble  
 When he lay couched in th'ominous horse,  
 Hath now this dread and black complexion smeared  
 With heraldry more dismal, head to foot. (2.2.390–94)

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<sup>33</sup> “Hamlet must mean ‘do nothing,’ since he goes on to chide himself for talking rather than acting, but it is perhaps ironic that he wants to imitate the Player rather than Pyrrhus” (*Hamlet*, p. 276).

—and the passion of the Player whose performance of it has been so passionate. Here is Hamlet to Gertrude, making what she calls “noise so rude” that “roars so loud and thunders” (3.4.38, 50):

HAMLET	A murderer and a villain,	
	A slave that is not twentieth part the kith	
	Of your precedent lord, a vice of kings,	
	A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,	
	That from a shelf the precious diadem stole	
	And put it in his pocket,—	
QUEEN	No more!	(3.4.94–99)

Even the words with which she interrupts him are the same that Polonius has used to cut off the Player’s speech at its height of passion: “Look where he has not turned his colour and has tears in’s eyes!—Prithee no more!” (2.2.457–58). If we think about this scene as an attempt Hamlet makes to reveal the truth of his father’s death in a (melo)dramatic fashion, by imitating the Player’s theatrical speech, then the reappearance of the Ghost right at the moment that Hamlet is building to the rhetorical climax is particularly apt: it is as if he has shown up to play his part.

But of course Hamlet’s most ambitious attempt to correct the official story of the former king’s death with the true story is his staging of a theatrical tragedy of which “one scene of it comes near the circumstance / . . . of my father’s death” (3.2.72–73). The performance is designed not only to mimetically represent his father’s murder, right down to the poison poured in the ear of the sleeping king, but also to elicit Claudius’ confession. I will return to these points, but first I want to suggest the significance of *Hamlet*’s marked departure here from *The Spanish Tragedy*, whose revenger, Hieronimo, also stages a play as a trap. I would argue that even more than Hamlet’s “dull revenge,” it is *Hamlet*’s play-within-a-play that distinguishes the play from its revenge tragedy counterparts (4.4.32).

In *The Spanish Tragedy*’s play-within-a-play, revenge and tragic narrative are one. At the end of the dramatic performance Hieronimo stages, he points to Lorenzo, Balthazar, and Bel-Imperia lying

motionless on the floor and reveals these actors to be truly dead (“Haply you think—but bootless are your thoughts—/ That this is fabulously counterfeit, / And that we do as all tragedians do: / To die today, for fashioning our scene”) even as he pulls back a curtain to add to the horrific scene his son’s dead body (4.4.76–79).<sup>34</sup> His speech pairs visual revelation with the revelation of knowledge, as he identifies Lorenzo and Balthazar to their fathers as murderers, and reveals his case and cause:

[*He draws back the curtain and*] *shows his dead son.*  
HIERONIMO See here my show. Look on this spectacle!  
[. . . .]  
The cause was love, whence grew this mortal hate:  
The hate, Lorenzo and young Balthazar,  
The love, my son to Bel-imperia.  
But night, the coverer of accursèd crimes.  
With pitchy silence hushed these traitors’ harms,  
And lent them leave, for they had sorted leisure,  
To take advantage in my garden plot  
Upon my son, my dear Horatio.  
There, merciless, they butchered up my boy,  
In black dark night, to pale, dim, cruel death.  
He shrieks; I heard—and yet methinks I hear—  
His dismal outcry echo in the air.  
With soonest speed I hasted to the noise,  
Where, hanging on a tree, I found my son,  
Through-girt with wounds, and slaughtered as you see.  
And grieved I, think you, at this spectacle? (4.4.89–114)

Like an Epilogue, his speech concludes and sums up the performance, explaining its players and its actions—and his actions too. Every character, he explains, was “Solely appointed to that tragic part” for the sole reason of vengeance (4.4.138). Hieronimo, “author and actor in this tragedy,” gets his revenge by literally playing a part in a tragedy he has scripted and cast specifically for this purpose, having, as he says “to this end” become the Bashaw, “That might revenge me on Lorenzo’s life, / Who therefore was appointed to the part, / And was to represent the Knight of Rhodes, / That I might kill him more

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<sup>34</sup> *The Spanish Tragedy*, in *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*.

conveniently” (4.4.147, 130, 131–34). The speech highlights the intertwining, and the inseparability, of revenge and tragic narrative.

Similarly, although there is no play-within-a-play in *Titus Andronicus*, Titus’ performance of revenge, like Hieronimo’s, coincides exactly with his explanation of the cause of his action.<sup>35</sup> He reveals Chiron and Demetrius to be the “ravishers” of Lavinia only seconds before he reveals them to be the ingredients of the pie Tamora is eating:

SATURNINUS What, was she ravished? Tell who did the deed.  
TITUS Will’t please you eat? Will’t please your highness feed?  
TAMORA Why hast thou slain thine only daughter thus?  
TITUS Not I, ’twas Chiron and Demetrius.  
They ravished her, and cut away her tongue,  
And they, ’twas they, that did her all this wrong.  
SATURNINUS Go, fetch them hither to us presently.  
TITUS [*revealing the heads*] Why, there they are, both bakèd in this pie,  
Whereof their mother daintily hath fed,  
Eating the flesh that she herself hath bred.  
’Tis true, ’tis true, witness my knife’s sharp point.  
*He stabs the Empress.* (5.3.47–62)

This exchange of dialogue makes us experience the moment of revelation—the unveiling of the truth of the crime, the revealing of the act of vengeance—as swift and stunning. It seems less swift in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo’s speech being long and rhetorically denser and monologic, but there too we see the grieved fathers surge forward, just as he runs to hang himself.

Whereas revenge figures like Hieronimo and Titus carry out their vengeance and reveal hitherto undisclosed truth in one fell swoop, *Hamlet* sunders the two, for *The Murder of Gonzago* is not a form of Hamlet’s revenge but a counterpart to it, a means by which Hamlet remembers his father’s death by having it reenacted, and a means for him to trap Claudius. Indeed, I would suggest that he imagines Claudius becoming a participant of sorts in the play: his suggestion to Horatio that the King’s

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<sup>35</sup> *Titus Andronicus*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*.

“occulted guilt” might “itself unkennel in one speech” points to two possibilities: that a single speech from the actors might move Claudius to a reaction suggestive of his guilt, and/or that Claudius might burst into a speech of confession himself (3.2.76, 77). Perhaps the mysterious and unidentifiable “speech of some dozen lines, or sixteen lines” that Hamlet tells the players he “would set down and insert” in the play even refers to this confession he imagines Claudius speaking (2.2.477, 478). After all, it is the anecdote Hamlet recalls—the story he has heard “That guilty creatures sitting at a play / Have by the very cunning of the scene / Been struck so to the soul that presently / They have proclaimed their malefactions”—that suggests to him the performance (2.2.524–27). Just as in the closet he tries to make Gertrude acknowledge and account for her role in the story (“Have you eyes? / Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed / And batten on this moor? Ha, have you eyes?”) here he tries to make Claudius see himself in the mirror of the play (3.4.63–65). If the tragic recognition the spectators of Hieronimo’s play in *The Spanish Tragedy* are made to experience is their recognition of their sons as both murdered and murderers, *The Murder of Gonzago* is designed to make Claudius recognize and identify himself.

The story that sparks the performance of *The Murder of Gonzago*, the story Hamlet recalls about “guilty creatures sitting at a play,” can be found in at least two other early modern texts, the anonymous domestic tragedy *A Warning for Fair Women* (pr. 1599) and Thomas Heywood’s prose treatise *An Apology for Actors* (1612). In both of these accounts, the anecdote appears as proof of the amazing ways in which hidden truths come to light. In *A Warning for Fair Women*, the Mayor of Rochester and various citizens, marveling at how the wounds of a man nearly dead begin to bleed in the sight of his murderer, discuss ways in which “Gods justice hath bin stil miraculous” (2021). The Mayor tells a story about a nail found in the scalp of a man dead and buried for twenty years that led to the murderer, Master Barnes tells of a fern present at a murder that seven years later was “borne by the

wind, / Into the roome where as the murtherer was,” frightening him into revealing the murder (2033–34), and Master James, who promises to tell “one more to quite your tale” (2036), tells the story that

Hamlet repeats:

A woman that had made away her husband,  
And sitting to behold a tragedy  
At Linne a town in Norffolke,  
Acted by Players travelling that way,  
Wherein a woman that had murtherd hers  
Was ever haunted with her husbands ghost:  
The passion written by a feeling pen,  
And acted by a good Tragedian,  
She was so mooved with the sight thereof,  
As she cryed out, the Play was made by her,  
And openly confest her husbands murder. (2037–48)

In addition to demonstrating the mysterious ways in which providence works, the anecdote testifies to the interpellative power of tragic performance, the “passion written by a feeling pen” and “acted by a good Tragedian” so convincingly that it moves its guilty spectator. The anecdote also ascribes a certain force to the complaining ghost who haunts the guilty character. On a larger level, it suggests how social traumas might be healed by the interpellative force of theatrical tragedy to work on individuals’ consciences. The scene of confession is the theater, the other audience members the witnesses.<sup>36</sup>

Heywood’s account of the story, given in the context of a defense of the theater, is even more explicitly presented as proof of the value of theatrical tragedy. In the context of an argument about the moral force of stage plays, Heywood suggests that tragedy can move people to virtuous action by showing them the seriousness of their sins:

At Lin in Norfolke, the then Earle of Sussex players acting the old History of Fryer Francis, & presenting a woman, who insatiately doting on a yong gentleman, had (the more securely to enioy his affection) mischieuously and seceretly murdered her husband, whose ghost haunted her, and at diuers times in her most solitary and priuate

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<sup>36</sup> On Hamlet, theater, and confession see Matthew J. Smith, “Describing the Sense of Confession in *Hamlet*,” in *The Return of Theory in Early Modern English Studies*, vol. 2, pp. 165–83.

contemplations, in most horrid and fearefull shapes, appeared, and stood before her. As this was acted, a townes-woman (till then of good estimation and report) finding her conscience (at this presentment) extremely troubled, suddenly skritch'd and cryd out Oh my husband, my husband! I see the ghost of my husband fiercely threatning and menacing me. At which shrill and vexed out-cry, the people about her, moou'd to a strange amazement, inquired the reason of her clamour, when presently vn-urged, she told them, that seuen yeares ago, she, to be possesst of such a Gentleman (meaning him) had poysoned her husband, whose fearefull image personated it selfe in the shape of that ghost: whereupon the murdresse was apprehended, before the Iustices further examined, & by her voluntary confession after condemned.<sup>37</sup>

In each of these accounts, the ghost is on-stage, fictive, but speaks and appears so convincingly that it virtually haunts and interpellates the guilty spectator, who recognizes in its shape not only her murdered husband but herself as a murderer—indeed, in Heywood's account, this works so well that the woman describes the stage "ghost" as being effectively *possessed by* the dead man's image, which "personate[s] itself" through it. To the extent that they represent theatrical ghosts as figures through which buried truths become manifest, these anecdotes demonstrate how, as the cultural theorist Avery Gordon argues, the trope of haunting can be mobilized for "a politics of accounting," as I have suggested in my reading of *Richard III*.<sup>38</sup> Although Gordon is referring to the kind of accounting that takes place at national and societal levels, the kind of individual accounting that these early modern texts are concerned with can also work toward this larger-scale, collective accounting.

I would argue that by situating its play-within-a-play as a medium for revelation and recognition but not revenge, *Hamlet* chooses one tragic genealogy with its complaining ghosts over another: it aligns itself with the didactic narrative verse tragedies of the *Mirror* tradition rather than with Anglo-Senecan tragedy and the revenge tragedies of the late 1580s and early 1590s. It imagines the theatrical stage as a site where justice might be done through tragic narrative and performance. We

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<sup>37</sup> *An Apology for Actors* (1612), G1v–G2r.

<sup>38</sup> Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 18.

might even read Hamlet's theatrical criticism, his instruction to the players to act according to "the modesty of nature," not overacting, in this context, seeing it as advice to perform in a manner most convincing and compelling so as to hold "the mirror up to Nature to show Virtue her feature, Scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (3.2.19, 22–24). Hamlet's attempt to tell the story the Ghost has told him and the anecdotes that this attempt call up represent tragic narrative as a vehicle for transformation—which is exactly what the complaining ghosts of the *Mirror* suggest as well, that their stories serve the purpose of making readers recognize themselves in their stories. All of these texts imagine tragedy to have a corrective potential rooted in the interpellative force of complaint, with its ability to call out injustices and wrongs.

*Hamlet's* play-within-a-play at once supports and complicates this idea. The theatrical audience sees that it strikes Claudius, and we learn that he is guilty, but Hamlet himself is not allowed the knowledge that we are given. The performance that the royal household attends stages a version of the Ghost's story in two different registers, first as dumb-show and then as argument.

*Enter [Players as] a king and a queen, the queen embracing him and he her. He takes her up and declines his head upon her neck. He lies him down upon a bank of flowers. She seeing him asleep leaves him. Anon come in [a Player as] another man, takes off his crown, kisses it, pours poison in the sleeper's ears and leaves him. The queen returns, finds the king dead, makes passionate action. The poisoner with some three or four [Players] come in again, seem to condole with her. The dead body is carried away. The poisoner woos the queen with gifts. She seems harsh awhile but in the end accepts love. (3.2.128.1–11)*

As Ophelia suggests, "this show imports the argument of the play," but it is not until Hamlet verbalizes the argument, following the villain Lucianus' speech and his pouring of poison in the Player King's ear, that Claudius understands its meaning: "A poisons him i'th' garden for his estate. His name's Gonzago. The story is extant and written in very choice Italian. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife" (3.2.131, 254–57). Hamlet speaks, and "The King rises," but all he says is, "Give me some light, away" (3.2.258, 261). He leaves without performing the confessional speech that Hamlet



wants him to perform. Unlike the guilty woman in Hamlet's anecdote, he does not cry that the play was made by him. When he does attempt to confess, it is out of Hamlet's hearing.

In its representation of the play as both a success *and* a failure, *Hamlet* recalls the passage in Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* in which he retells an anecdote from Plutarch about a tyrant moved to tears by a tragic play (Euripides' *Trojan Women*). To illustrate "how much it [tragedy] can move," Sidney points to "the abominable tyrant Alexander Pheraus, from whose eyes a tragedy well-made and represented drew abundance of tears, who without all pity had murdered infinite numbers, and some of his own blood," whom, he says, though "not ashamed to make matter for tragedies, yet could not resist the sweet violence of a tragedy."<sup>39</sup> And yet Sidney's retelling of Plutarch's anecdote does not wholly support his claim that tragedy "maketh kings fear to be tyrants," for the tyrant gets up and leaves the performance, "withdr[awing] himself from harkening to that which might mollify his hardened heart." We might see Claudius' response in the same way, and the play's representation of his reception of the performance, his response to its attempted interpellation of him, as being rhetorically similar to Sidney's, in that it makes an assertion from which it also steps back.

When Claudius jumps up, he interrupts and puts to an end the play Hamlet has been staging. With his hasty exit, Hamlet's attempts to tell his father's story in such a way as to make Claudius recognize and admit his role in it come to a close. Indeed, he never fully succeeds at delivering the story. Only Horatio knows it, and this conversation has happened offstage. In the last act of *Hamlet*, as Hamlet lays dying, we get the sense that he wants to speak, but here too he is interrupted: he addresses "you that look pale and tremble at this chance, / That are but mutes or audience to this act," telling this unspecified addressee that "Had I but time (as this fell sergeant Death / Is strict in his arrest)—O, I could tell you— / But let it be" (5.2.318–19, 320–22). He starts and then withholds, just as the Ghost

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<sup>39</sup> *Apology* 90.

long before him has, with its suggestion that “I could a tale unfold whose lightest word / Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, / [ . . . ] / But this eternal blazon must not be / To ears of flesh and blood” (1.5.13–22). The thing not said makes the address that follows it all the more compelling, and what Hamlet asks for is the same request to remember and to report that he has heard in the Ghost’s commandment:

HAMLET    I am dead.  
Thou livest: report me and my cause aright  
To the unsatisfied.  
[ . . . ]  
O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,  
Things standing thus unknown, shall I leave behind me!  
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart  
Absent thee from felicity awhile  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain  
To tell my story.    (5.2.322–33)

Like the Ghost’s, Hamlet’s address—not a complaint, simply a request—is powerful, for against Horatio’s wishes, he is left at the end of the play to heal both Denmark’s abused ear and Hamlet’s wounded name with a story that he tells Fortinbras he can “Truly deliver” (5.2.369). Hamlet has never even attempted to make his knowledge public, to actually heal the ear of the body politic. But although Horatio promises that “So shall you hear / Of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts, / Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters, / Of deaths put on by cunning, and for no cause,” and although Fortinbras says, “Let us haste to hear it,” Horatio never says what he says he will (5.2.364–67, 370). It is only “soldiers’ music and the rite of war” that “Speak loudly for” Hamlet, and the play ends—“Take up the bodies. Such a sight as this / Becomes the field but here shows much amiss. / Go, bid the soldiers shoot”—with an incomplete couplet as if at any moment someone who “would be spoke to” might appear upon the scene (5.2.384, 385–87). The play ends abruptly, the bodies carried away, just as the Ghost has had to flee as the morning light approaches.

We are a long way from the Ghost's complaint. Part of what I want to show here is that the highly conventional form that spectral complaint takes in narrative verse tragedy, where it is a specific speech act with well-established and easily identified boundaries—it is what the ghost says, which is then repeated as the poet-narrator's translation of the ghost's speech—is adapted when it moves to theatrical tragedy. *Hamlet* demonstrates one form that this adaptation can take: the Ghost makes his complaint, and although it vanishes as a specific speech act, the rest of the tragedy reveals its effects. This chapter has offered one way of thinking about how theatrical tragedy reconfigures the formal and structural relationships between complaint and tragedy that it inherits from, and develops alongside, the narrative verse tragedies of the *Mirror* and its offshoots. If in those texts complaint and tragedy are conflated with each other, as I have been suggesting, theatrical tragedy might be seen as an expansion or extension—a thinning—of the complaint into the “cases” and “causes” that tragic plots delineate and to which they give voice. At the same time, the anecdotes of the stage ghosts who haunt and call out the guilty both on their own stages and in the audience suggest that there was still a place onstage for speech acts of complaint. In the next chapter, I will look at the opposite phenomenon—the way that female complaint poems were adapted into set-scenes of theatrical tragedy that directed audience eyes not into their own hearts, but onto the stage.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### TRAGEDY'S OBJECTS: SYMPATHY AND THE ART OF COMPLAINT

Unseene, unknowne, I here alone complaine  
To Rocks, to Hills, to Meadows, and to Springs,  
Which can no helpe returne to ease my paine,  
But back my sorrowes the sad Eccho brings.  
Thus still encreasing are my woes to me,  
Doubly resounded by that monefull voice,  
Which seemes to second me in miserie,  
And answere giues like friend of mine owne choice.  
—Lady Mary Wroth, *The Countesse of Montgomeries Urania*

In the narrative poem that tells her story, Shakespeare's Lucrece, "frantic with grief," responds to her rape by "breath[ing] out her spite" in "Poor wasting monuments of lasting moans" (762, 798).<sup>1</sup>

Although Lucrece bewails the uselessness of complaining—"In vain I rail at opportunity, / At time, at Tarquin, and uncheerful night"—the poem's narrator suggests that her performance of grief is not entirely without effect, for the mere sight of Lucrece weeping compels her maid to weep as well (1023–24, 797–98). In an elaborate simile that likens the exchange of tears between the weeping women to the falling dew that settles on flowers when the sun sets, the narrator describes how Lucrece's tears elicit the maid's tears:

But as the earth doth weep, the sun being set,  
Each flower moistened like a melting eye,  
Even so the maid with swelling drops gan wet  
Her circled eyne, enforced by sympathy  
Of those fair suns set in her mistress' sky,  
Who in a salt-waved ocean quench their light;  
Which makes the maid weep like the dewy night. (1226–32)

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<sup>1</sup> All citations of Shakespeare's plays and narrative poems are from *The Norton Shakespeare*.

The simile is recursive, doubling back on itself: Lucrece's weeping eyes are like the sun setting in the ocean and bedewing the earth, and the maid's weeping eyes are like the earth's flowers so bedewed—which are themselves like weeping (“melting”) eyes. Thus the simile mirrors the phenomenon it describes, the uncanny potential of tears to self-replicate.<sup>2</sup>

The poem represents the maid's weeping as both a direct effect of Lucrece's tears and as involuntary, “enforced by sympathy,” a term that in the sixteenth century referred not only to the state of being affected by another's suffering, but also to an inherent affinity, correspondence, or likeness between things which accounts for their capacity to be similarly affected by the same thing or by each other.<sup>3</sup> The narrator cites this “natural” responsiveness as explanation for the fact that Lucrece's maid cries without even knowing why her mistress cries. Echoing the commonplace that women are particularly prone to tears, and hence to being affected by the tears of others, he notes that “Their gentle sex to weep are often willing, / Grieving themselves to guess at others' smarts” (1237–38).<sup>4</sup> Compelled by Lucrece's tearful complaint, her maid becomes the “poor counterfeit of her complaining” (1269). And as she does so, what the narrator will elsewhere describe as the self-indulgent and tedious repetitiousness of Lucrece's complaint (“time doth weary time with her complaining”) morphs into a sight which he seems to find pleasing, and on which he lingers, inviting readers to do the same: “A

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<sup>2</sup> Studies of metaphysical and baroque poetry frequently explore this phenomenon. On the tear-saturated literature of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, see Marjory E. Lange, *Telling Tears in the English Renaissance* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996) and Gary Kuchar, *The Poetry of Religious Sorrow in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> *OED sympathy*, n: 1.a. A (real or supposed) affinity between certain things, by virtue of which they are similarly or correspondingly affected by the same influence, affect or influence one another (esp. in some occult way), or attract or tend towards each other. As Heather James explains, “sympathy,” “pity,” and “compassion”—words that now have slightly different valences—are in the sixteenth century largely synonymous and interchangeable. “Dido's Ear: Tragedy and the Politics of Response,” pp. 371–72.

<sup>4</sup> On the assumed openness and fluidity of the female body, see Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*.

pretty while these pretty creatures stand, / Like ivory conduits coral cisterns filling, / One justly weeps,  
the other takes in hand / No cause but company of her drops' spilling" (1570, 1233–36).

The notion that one person's tears might elicit those of another, that one complaint might generate another complainant, is a trope of early modern literature. Reflecting the contemporaneous belief in what critics call affective contagion, the material transference of passion from one body to another,<sup>5</sup> the encounter between the affecting performer and the affected spectator of complaint is a familiar image, a recurring scene, across genres of poetry, prose, and drama. Departing methodologically from humoral-materialist readings of sympathetic spectatorship, in this chapter I consider the relationship between theatrical performances of complaint and audience sympathy in a manner more resonant with recent critical work on the role that generic conventions, formal features, and other aesthetic components of texts and performances play in eliciting and shaping audiences' affective responses.<sup>6</sup> In doing so I enter an ongoing critical conversation about what one recent monograph calls "passionate playgoing"—the ways in which embodied performances of passion engaged audience emotion, and the effects of such passionate displays.<sup>7</sup> In particular, I explore the nature of theatrical sympathy: how responsiveness to the grief of another was imagined and represented onstage, how these performances addressed and appealed to their theatrical audiences, and what this sympathetic

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<sup>5</sup> A great deal of critical work has explored the importance of ancient Greek humoral theory and its model of the porous body for early modern thought about the passions. On humoral theory and affective contagion, see Paster, *Humoring the Body* and *Reading the Early Modern Passions*, eds. Paster et al.

<sup>6</sup> For recent critical work on the relation between affective and aesthetic experience that unites humoral-materialist understandings of subjectivity, passion, and affective contagion with the attention to form characteristic of historical formalism, see *Shakespearean Sensations*, eds. Craik and Pollard. See also Rory Gregory Lukins, "The Ethics of Form: Politics, the Passions, and Genre Formation in the English Renaissance" (PhD dissertation, University of Southern California, 2012), and Adam Rzepka, "The Production of Experience: Early English Theater and the Sensible Soul" (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> The phrase is from Allison P. Hobgood's *Passionate Playgoing in Early Modern England*. See also James, "Dido's Ear"; Pollard, "Conceiving tragedy."

relationship between figures of lament on stage and their affected spectators can tell us about early modern understandings of theatrical tragedy and theatrical experience.

As mine will also do, critical discussions of theatrical sympathy typically focus on dramatic performances of grief and the representations within those plays of sympathetic responsiveness between mourners and their witnesses. If these moments do not offer proof of how audiences responded to tragic spectacles, they do at least reveal what writers seem to have *imagined* tragedy could do to its audiences (as do descriptions of the effects of tragedy from treatises composed by the theater's detractors or apologists). Jonas Barish and Heather James, for example, have shown that concerns about the potentially radical social implications of theatrical sympathy—ideas formerly believed to originate in eighteenth-century moral philosophy—were actually articulated both on the early modern stage and in the antitheatrical writing of the period.<sup>8</sup> But while these studies are concerned with how what happens in the theater translates to what happens outside it, I want to linger a little longer in the theater. Taking discussions of theatrical sympathy in a new direction, I want to suggest that the trope of the affected spectator, and more specifically tragic scenes of what I will call sympathetic responsiveness, gesture toward an unexplored facet of early modern aesthetic practice and theatrical experience.<sup>9</sup> More specifically, I argue that the image of the weeper and her affected witness—an image we see in the

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<sup>8</sup> See Jonas A. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), and James, "Dido's Ear."

<sup>9</sup> I am not using *aesthetic* in the Kantian sense, to refer to domains of experience and judgment categorically distinct from others, nor am I using it to imply the necessary beauty or unity of artful objects, or universal and disinterested judgments of such objects, but in the more general sense of the term, to signal my focus on the construction of those objects—including the way that they are presented as artfully/skillfully constructed, pleasing objects—and on the way that they invite audiences to engage with them through the senses and the imagination. For an example and discussion of the recent critical return to aesthetics in this sense of the word, see Craik and Pollard's introduction to *Shakespearean Sensations*, pp. 1–25. See also Mark Robson, *The Sense of Early Modern Writing: Rhetoric, Poetics, Aesthetics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006). Robson suggests that early modern rhetoric and poetics occupy the cultural space to which the term "aesthetic" in its general sense will later refer. Hugh Grady's work, engaging with ideas of art developed by theorists of the Frankfurt School, represents a different strand of aesthetically oriented criticism; he argues for emergent concepts of aesthetic judgment and aesthetic experience in the early modern period that anticipate but offer an alternative to Kantian ones. See Grady, *Shakespeare and Impure Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

description of the complaining Lucrece and her maid, and in many scenes of early modern tragedies—emblemizes, in its representation of the sympathetic spectator who cannot help but weep with a complainant, one of the primary aesthetic ideals and objectives of theatrical tragedy. As I will suggest, these scenes are integral to tragedy’s affective technology not only because they perform passion that audiences might “catch” through its material circulation, but because they are constructed in such a way as to instruct audiences that they *should* be sympathetic to them.

I have begun my discussion of theatrical tragedy with *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), a narrative poem, because I want to show that the model of sympathetic responsiveness I will be exploring is delineated in nontheatrical scenes of complaint as well. In the first part of this chapter, I suggest that early modern writers drew upon the strategies of “female complaint” poetry to craft emotionally moving scenes of complaint that (I argue) script the emotional responses they hope to elicit by building their ideal reception into the scene itself, as *Lucrece* does through the description of the weeping maid. “Female complaint” is a term critics have given to a specific subgenre of narrative poetry that flourished in the early 1590s as an outgrowth of the *Mirror* poems<sup>10</sup>—a pathos-suffused subgenre to which *Lucrece* belongs—but is also used to describe lamentation more generally. The term is usually but not exclusively applied to female characters; I would suggest that its analytical value consists in its foregrounding of a set of performative conventions characteristic of this particular kind of complaint—tears, rhetorically ornate structures and figures of speech, recursive language, self-reflexivity, images of mirroring and other kinds of reflection, an emphasis on viscosity, and a concern with sympathy. As I will show, because female grief was considered to be particularly appealing to the senses, female

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<sup>10</sup> On female complaint, see John Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*; Hallett Smith, *Elizabethan Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952); Louis R. Zocca, *Elizabethan Narrative Poetry*; Götz Schmitz, *The Fall of Women in Early English Narrative Verse*; Heather Dubrow, “A Mirror for Complaints; and Anna Swärdh, “From hell.” On the complexities of the term “female complaint” and the texts it names, which are frequently narrated by masculine personae and/or authored by men, see Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe*, and Danielle R. Clarke, “‘Signifying, but not sounding.’”



complaint poetry was a model for staging affectively compelling tragic scenes. While these scenes of complaint may or may not have actually moved spectators to tears, I argue that they functioned as sites of moral and theatrical instruction, illustrating an ideal sympathetic responsiveness—one that I suggest is linked to the aesthetics of “female” complaint.<sup>11</sup>

In the second part of this chapter, I focus in more detail on the aesthetics of these scenes, moving between the poetry of complaint and tragic plays such as *Titus Andronicus* and *Richard II*, with particular attention to what I describe as an aesthetics of reflection, comprised of grammatical parallelism, linguistic repetitions and echoes, mirroring images and images of mirrors, water, and other reflective surfaces. In my third section I argue that this formal concern with reflection not only suggests to theatrical audiences what they should do in response to performances of grief, but also limns the pleasures and limitations of theatrical experience—mourning one’s own sorrows through those of another, escape from one’s own griefs, grieving with others, all forms of what these texts represent as transport, estrangement from the self, however temporary and illusory. (Here I draw upon Michael Schoenfeldt’s argument that in *The Rape of Lucrece* and elsewhere Shakespeare shows grieving characters to be “temporarily transported beyond [their] own suffering through intense aesthetic identification with another’s suffering,” attributing to art an effect Schoenfeldt describes as “analgesic”.<sup>12</sup>) Closing with a reading of Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The Maid’s Tragedy*, I argue that scenes of complaint helped to frame theatrical tragedy as an interface for these kinds of experience. In overarching terms, what I hope to show in this chapter is that the aesthetic features that make complainants seem most pathetic—namely, the insistent self-reflexivity and circularity of female

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<sup>11</sup> On the relationship between this model of spectatorship and Catholic devotional practices and iconography, which encouraged the devout to mourn with the Virgin Mary and feel sympathy with Christ in his Passion, see Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy* and Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen, *Pain and Compassion in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*.

<sup>12</sup> Schoenfeldt, “Shakespearean pain,” in *Shakespearean Sensations*, pp. 191–207, p. 197.

complaint in particular—were important in the context of theatrical tragedy both for figuring, and actualizing, the social value of the genre, or at least one form that value could take.

Before I shift into discussing these scenes, however, I want to return briefly to *The Rape of Lucrece*, whose famous moment of *ekphrasis* provides a particularly striking example of how scenes of complaint simultaneously instruct their audiences in the ideal of sympathetic responsiveness and situate certain kinds of artful, lamentable objects as interfaces through which audiences can be transported from themselves.<sup>13</sup> Lucrece, “Pausing for means to mourn some newer way,” recalls “a piece / Of skilful painting” representing the destruction of Troy (1365, 1366–67). In language that represents her approach to the painting as at once passive and purposeful, as if she is led away to it and seeks it out, the narrator tells us that “To this well painted piece is Lucrece come, / To find a face where all distress is stelled” (1443–44). The face she finds is one that, like her own, is riveted on one of the painting’s “thousand lamentable objects”: it is when “she despairing Hecuba beheld / Staring on Priam’s wounds with her old eyes” that Lucrece finds what she is looking for (1373, 1447–48).

The narrator describes Hecuba as Lucrece’s double—he says of the Trojan queen that she “nothing wants to answer her but cries / And bitter words to ban her cruel foes”—and Lucrece as Hecuba’s double, giving her the language she lacks: “‘Poor instrument,’ quoth she, ‘without a sound / I’ll tune thy woes with my lamenting tongue’” (1459–60, 1464–65). Her address to Hecuba ironically heightens the sense of their likeness to each other, for the very descriptor she uses to distinguish herself from the Trojan queen—“without a sound”—is grammatically placed such that there is no strictly syntactic way to determine whether it is describing Hecuba or Lucrece herself. (And indeed, although in the poem’s narrative Lucrece certainly does make the sounds of complaint that the painted Hecuba

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<sup>13</sup> On the relation between poetry and visual art see Claire Preston, “Ekphrasis: Painting in Words,” in *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, eds. Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander, and Katrin Ettenhuber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 115–29.

cannot, the poem is technically guilty of the same injury that Lucrece charges the painter with: it gives its complainant “so much grief, and not a tongue” —1463).

Lucrece is the very image of ideal sympathetic responsiveness as, standing before the painting, “feelingly she weeps Troy’s painted woes” and “shapes her sorrow to the beldame’s woes” (1492, 1458). Her weeping for Hecuba, I would suggest, is a model of what the poem’s reader should do for Lucrece.<sup>14</sup> It also suggests something about the experience of grieving with and for a lamentable object, for the narrator describes the time “that she with painted images hath spent” as a period in which Lucrece is “from feeling of her own grief brought / By deep surmise of others’ detriment” (1577, 1578–79). Just as she “is come” to the painting in the midst of her own grief, as she “her plaints a little while doth stay,” here she “is brought” away from that grief to “los[e] her woes in shows of discontent” (1364, 1580). She is taken away from herself; one kind of grieving, one set of complaints, is replaced with another.<sup>15</sup>

But of course it is not actually as simple as that, nor does the poem even represent it as being as simple as that. In the conclusion of this chapter, I will come back to the complications concerning theatrical experience that are folded into—and sometimes even foregrounded—in these scenes of complaint.

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<sup>14</sup> That Shakespeare’s poem gives a fourth of its stanzas to Lucrece’s complaining (sixty-seven out of 265 stanzas) suggests that the poem is meant to elicit tears. Indeed, although Lucrece’s story is repeatedly cited in the early modern period both as an exemplar of feminine chastity and a source of republican thought, Shakespeare’s telling of the story revolves largely around Lucrece’s complaint—the events that follow from her rape are described in the poem’s prose Argument, but do not occur in the narrative of the poem itself. On the more common intellectual and political uses of the story, see Stephanie Jed, *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucretia and the Birth of Humanism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) and Warren Chernaik, *The Myth of Rome in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Schoenfeldt reads this scene as one that “utilizes various early modern modes of grief management.” Schoenfeldt, “Shakespearean pain,” p. 199.

## Part 1. Tragic sympathy

Moving audiences to tears was one of the primary objectives of early modern tragedy.<sup>16</sup> One theatrical expression of this objective comes from the Induction to the anonymous *A Warning for Fair Women* (1599), in which the allegorical figure of Tragedie declares that she

must have passions that must move the soule,  
Make the heart heave, and throb within the bosome,  
Extorting teares out of the strictest eyes,  
To racke a thought and straine it to his forme,  
Untill I rap the sences from their course. (44–48)

In figuring tragedy as a torturer whose representations of passion coerce tears from the unwilling, the play echoes the oft-cited dictum of classical rhetorical theory that displays of emotion would evoke that same emotion in others.<sup>17</sup> Tragic characters frequently voice this commonplace as well: Titus Andronicus, pleading for his sons' lives, imagines that his "tears are now prevailing orators!" (3.1.26), while his brother Marcus suggests that "floods of tears will drown my oratory / [. . .] / And force you to commiseration" (5.3.89–92). Tears were imagined to sway even the most hardened of audiences, "rais[ing] drops in a Tartar's eye / And mak[ing] a flint-heart Scythian pitiful" (*Edward III* 2.1.69–72).<sup>18</sup> In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Bottom boasts that "I will move stones" when "I will condole" (1.2.20, 21). The wishes these characters express so hyperbolically nevertheless reflect a truth about early modern theatrical practice, for, as Matthew Steggle argues, one of the strategies by which early modern

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<sup>16</sup> On early modern tragedy's concern with the evocation of pity, see Timothy J. Reiss, "Renaissance theatre and the theory of tragedy," and David Scott Kastan, "A rarity most beloved': Shakespeare and the Idea of Tragedy."

<sup>17</sup> See Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.8, and Horace, *Ars Poetica*.

<sup>18</sup> Citations are from *King Edward III*, ed. Giorgio Melchiori (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

dramatists attempted to evoke tears from their audiences was to depict characters weeping onstage.<sup>19</sup> These lamentations, as I have been suggesting, were forms of complaint.<sup>20</sup>

As Tanya Pollard's work has shown, in the early modern period grieving female figures were considered the epitome of tragic pathos.<sup>21</sup> The idea that female grief was particularly captivating to the senses underlies scenes of female complaint in poetry, prose, and drama alike, all of which represent complaining female figures as lamentable objects that ineluctably attract, and hold in thrall, the sympathetic gaze of their spectators, in part through their beauty.<sup>22</sup> The narrator of Thomas Lodge's narrative poem *The Tragickall Complaint of Elstred* (1593) describes the tears of Elstred and her daughter Sabine as "liquid christall" (14).<sup>23</sup> Samuel Daniel's Rosamond describes her beauty as a "Sweet silent rhetorique of perswading eyes" more moving than the most beautiful language, a form of "Dombeloquence, whose powre doth moue the blood, / More then the words, or wisdom of the wise" (121, 122–23).<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the narrator of Sidney's *Arcadia* (1590), describing the laments of Pamela and Philoclea, tells readers that such suffering beauty cannot fail to be persuasive: "The hardest hearts which have at any time thought woman's tears to be a matter of slight compassion [. . .] would now have been

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<sup>19</sup> Matthew Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping in Early Modern Theatres* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007). On the acting of passion and the prescribed forms into which passion was shaped, see J. R. Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> On early modern English dramatic lament, see Wolfgang Clemen, *English Tragedy Before Shakespeare* and Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy*.

<sup>21</sup> See Pollard, "Conceiving tragedy." On female lamentation and classical tragedy, see Helene P. Foley, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). Phyllis Rackin has argued that as a genre, tragedy itself was gendered female. See "Engendering the Tragic Audience: The Case of *Richard III*."

<sup>22</sup> Female complainants are represented as possessing a beauty that captivates the observer even when it is present only as an absence: *The Rape of Lucrece* lingers, along with Lucrece, on the spectral beauty of the painted Hecuba, in whose face is "anatomized / Time's ruin, beauty's wreck, and grim care's reign" (1451), and the narrator of Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint* notes that in the face of the lamenting woman he encounters, his imagination "might think sometime it saw / The carcass of a beauty spent and done" (9, 10–11).

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Lodge, *Phyllis: Honoured with Pastorall Sonnets, Elegies, and amorous delights. Whereunto is annexed, the tragickall complaynt of Elstred* (1593).

<sup>24</sup> Samuel Daniel, *The Complaint of Rosamond*, in *Delia, containing certaine sonnets: with the complaynt of Rosamond* (1592).

mollified, and been compelled to confess that, the fairer a diamond is, the more pity it should receive a blemish,” he contends.<sup>25</sup> Like *A Warning for Fair Women’s Tragedie*, the narrator’s words at once suggest that this hypothetical spectator is so human(e) that he cannot help but be moved, and yet so hardened that he must be coerced by the sight, “compelled to confess.” This is the work that the artful rhetoric<sup>26</sup> of complaint—of language and of lively image—was thought to do: to assist where the plain, the unornamented, and the modest would fail to move. What we might see as excessive displays of passion are required to “rap the sences from their course.”<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, while critics of female complaint poetry such as John Kerrigan have elaborated the way that these poems represent their complainants’ experience, I would suggest that their writers are more oriented toward facilitating certain kinds of *audience* experience—and that they do so by including within the poems’ narratives scenes of sympathetic responsiveness that mirror the responses audiences “must” have, naturally or by coercion. The narrator of *Rosamond* describes himself as “mou’d with a tender care / And pittie” for Rosamond (57–58), while *Elstred’s* narrator describes himself as “weepingly thus pen[ning]” the poem (605). In Spenser’s female complaint poem *The Ruines of Time* (1591), the narrator finds himself so “moued at [the] piteous plaint” of Verlame, the beautiful spirit of the city of Verulamium, that, “shedding tears awhile,” he “felt my heart nigh riuen in my breast” and finds himself “Renewing her complaint with passion strong” (29, 32, 31, 479).<sup>28</sup> In short, female

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<sup>25</sup> *Arcadia*, ed. Duncan-Jones, p. 318.

<sup>26</sup> *OED artful*, adj: 1. a. displaying or characterized by technical skill. 2. a. skillfully adapted for the accomplishment of a purpose; ingenious, clever. 4. produced artificially, as opposed to naturally; artificial, imitative, unreal.

<sup>27</sup> Thus scenes of complaint represent the skillfulness with which complaint is performed as crucial to an audience’s sympathetic responsiveness, e.g. in the *Arcadia*, the narrator, describing one character’s performance of another’s complaint, notes that “So well did Histor’s voice express the passion of Plangus that all the princely beholders were stricken into a silent consideration of it” (134); describing the reaction to another complaint, he notes that its listener “was yet more moved to pity by the manner of Cleophila’s singing than with anything he had ever seen—so lively an action doth the mind, truly touched, bring forth” (26).

<sup>28</sup> In *The Shorter Poems*, ed. McCabe, pp. 166–87.

complaint, with its representations of striking performances of feminine grief and inevitably affected witnesses, was an important model for constructing theatrical tragedy's lamentable objects—objects that were full of lament, and that compelled lament in response.

In early modern tragic drama, I argue, scenes where female or feminized characters complain illustrate the ideal response to such lamentable objects through the responses of onstage witnesses: Titus mourning for Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*, the queens mourning for each other in *Richard III*. And, like female complaint poetry, the language—and the staging—of these scenes represent the complainant as a riveting, compelling object by having other characters comment upon the effect of her complaint. On the stage, the rhetoric of this complaint, as I have suggested, was not only verbal but visual as well. In *Titus Andronicus*, for example, when Lavinia appears on the stage with her hands and tongue cut out, Marcus describes just how affecting this sight is by turning to the language of eroticism, observing the “crimson river of warm blood, / Like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind,” that “Doth rise and fall between thy rosèd lips, / Coming and going with thy honey breath” (2.4.22–23, 24–25). Her cheeks, blushing with shame, are, he says (like those of the idealized lady of Petrarchan discourse) “red as Titan's face” (2.4.31). His response to her truncated arms is to describe her once “pretty fingers” and reminisce about “those lily hands / Trembl[ing] like aspen leaves upon a lute” (2.4.42, 44–45). (Little wonder, if we are to read as a stage direction Marcus' closing command that she “not draw back, for we will mourn with thee,” that Lavinia is withdrawing from him [2.4.56]). Indeed, after Marcus' speech it is hard not to hear in Titus' horrified response to Lavinia's mutilated figure—“Had I but seen thy picture in this plight / It would have madded me. What shall I do / Now I see thy lively body so?”—the slightness of the difference between “lively” and “lovely” (3.1. 103–5).

The indecorous incongruity between Marcus' sensuous, even sensual, description of Lavinia and the horror of what has happened to her emphasizes how involuntarily compelling the sight of this

silently complaining figure is, as does Lucius' response (he falls to his knees, crying "this object kills me" [3.1.64]). Titus' response, on the other hand, makes the same point through the language of physiological and humoral discourse, describing his sympathy for Lavinia in terms of the reciprocal processes of the natural world.

I am the sea. Hark how her sighs doth blow.  
 She is the weeping welkin, I the earth.  
 Then must my sea be movèd with her sighs,  
 Then must my earth with her continual tears  
 Become a deluge overflowed and drowned,  
 Forwhy my bowels cannot hide her woes,  
 But like a drunkard must I vomit them. (3.1.224–30)

Like *Lucrece's* comparison of the tears of mistress and maid to the relationship between the sun and the flowers, Titus' description of the relationship between the complainant and her affected witness as analogous to that between the sky and the sea represents this "sympathy of woe" as compulsory in an involuntary sense, ambiguously "natural" and coerced (3.1.148). And yet his suggestion that he *must* do this also hints at (to quote Heather James) the "collusion of sympathy and consent" that becomes visible in theatrical scenes of responsiveness.<sup>29</sup> I would argue that Titus' words exemplify a larger phenomenon in early modern tragedy of representing a particular aesthetic response as a natural—and, more subtly, a morally correct—one. "Who can cease to weep and look on this?" Queen Margaret, she of the tiger's heart, laments in *2 Henry VI*, holding Suffolk's decapitated head to her body (2*HVI* 4.4.4). "What Thracian dog, what barbarous Myrmidon, / Would not relent at such a ruthless case? / What fierce Achilles, what hard stony flint, / Would not bemoan this mournful tragedy?" Sabren cries over the dead body of her mother at the end of *The Lamentable Tragedy of Lochrine* (V.vi.65, 69–72). These rhetorical questions explicitly dare their addressees to dissent, to be "barbarous," to be men of stones. Indeed, as Huw Griffiths and Martha A. Kurtz have each argued, to

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<sup>29</sup> "Dido's Ear," p. 363.



the extent that tragic scenes of suffering in early modern tragedy frequently depict the absence of sympathy as a sign of cruelty, they anticipate eighteenth-century debates about the relationship between theatrical sympathy, sentiment, and moral virtue in the moral philosophies of Hume and Smith.<sup>30</sup> In early modern moral philosophy, as I have earlier suggested, “complaining” was represented as a shameful response to grief and injury, but at the same time, even Stoic moral philosophy taught the virtue of a certain degree of expressed sympathy for those who suffer.<sup>31</sup> When and where and how much one should lament, however, was a matter of some uncertainty. Sidney’s commentary on the “lamenting elegiac” in the *Apology for Poetry* (1595) perfectly encapsulates this ambiguity: he notes that such representations of grief are “to be praised either for compassionate accompanying just causes of lamentations or for rightly painting out how weak be the passions of woefulness.”<sup>32</sup>

Tragedies, however, presented *theatrical* sympathy—weeping for complainants in the setting of the theater—as a virtue. If female grief was an important model for the construction of tragic objects, female grieving was the paradigm for tragedy’s objectives, for the readiness to weep that early modern writers attribute to female bodies they also represent as the ideal model of the sympathetic responsiveness that the theater attempted to inculcate. The words Warwick uses in *3 Henry VI* to

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<sup>30</sup> See Huw Griffiths, “Shakespeare, Pathos and Sovereign Violence: *3 Henry VI* and *King Lear*,” in *Rapt in Secret Studies: Emerging Shakespeares*, eds. Darryl Chalk and Laurie Johnson (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010) pp. 91–111; and Martha A. Kurtz, “Tears and Masculinity in the History Play: Shakespeare’s *Henry VI*,” in *Grief and Gender 700–1700*, ed. Jennifer C. Vaught with Lynne Dickson Bruckner (New York: Palgrave, 2003) pp. 163–76. On eighteenth-century moral philosophy and sympathy, see David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). On eighteenth-century tragedy and assumptions of sympathetic response, see Jean Marsden, “Shakespeare and Sympathy,” *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Peter Sabor and Paul Yachnin (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008) 29–41. On eighteenth-century theories of spectatorship, affective response, and moral sentiment, see John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988); on affect, aesthetics, and ethics see Michael Bell, *Sentimentalism, Ethics, and the Culture of Feeling* (New York: Palgrave, 2000). See also Jonathan Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century* (London: Piekering and Chatto, 2009). On the continuities between female complaint and eighteenth-century genres of melodrama, see Schmitz.

<sup>31</sup> On complaining in Stoic and Calvinist moral philosophy and dramatic tragedy, see my first chapter.

<sup>32</sup> *Apology*, ed. Herman, p. 88.

shame his men into action—“Why stand we like soft-hearted women here, / Wailing our losses whiles the foe doth rage, / And look upon, as if the tragedy / Were played in jest by counterfeiting actors?”—reveals (as Dympna Callaghan argues) the gendering of sympathetic early modern tragic audiences (2.3.25–28).<sup>33</sup> I want to suggest that the tearful spectators that Warwick invokes here, ready to cry at fictive representations of suffering, are precisely the kind of spectators that early modern tragedies aimed to produce.

Part 2 of Thomas Heywood’s *Edward IV* (pr. 1599) demonstrates how scenes of sympathetic responsiveness to “female” complaint not only modeled ideal spectatorship for theatrical audiences but also offered them the opportunity to be better—that is, more sympathetic—audiences than the ones within the world of the play. The character that Heywood names Jane Shore, a London goldsmith’s wife who became Edward IV’s mistress and was later publicly punished by Richard III, was a well-known figure in the literature of late sixteenth-century England, having been described in Thomas More’s *History of King Richard the Third* (pr. 1557) and popularized by Thomas Churchyard’s narrative verse complaint “Shore’s Wife,” which was printed in the 1563 *Mirror for Magistrates*, revised and reprinted in 1593, and cited by Daniel’s *Rosamond* and several other narrative verse female complaints of the 1590s. (The subject of other poems, plays, ballads, and prose texts throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, she may well be the most iconic English figure of female complaint.<sup>34</sup>) While Part 2 of *Edward IV* positions Jane Shore as an object lesson of the results of sexual sin, the play also represents her as a lamentable object for whom audiences should feel sympathy.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> On the gendering of these audiences, see Dympna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 139–65.

<sup>34</sup> For a comprehensive listing of texts that mention Jane Shore, see S. M. Pratt, “Jane Shore and the Elizabethans: Some Facts and Speculations,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 11 (1969): 1293–306; D. F. Rowan, “Shore’s Wife,” *Studies in English Literature* 6 (1966): 447–64; and James L. Harner, “Jane Shore in Literature: A Checklist,” *Notes and Queries*, new ser. 28 (1981): 496–507. For more detailed analysis of these representations, see Esther Yael Beith-Halahmi, *Angell*

The visual and verbal dynamics of Jane Shore's complaint invite sympathetic response. In the closing scenes of the play, after Edward IV has died and she has been arrested at Richard's orders, we see her destitute and grieving, clothed only "in a white sheet," and "bare-footed, / [Her] hair about [her] ears, and in [her] hand / A burning taper" (18.194, 195–97).<sup>36</sup> Left alone on the stage, where she is meant to be sitting forlorn outside the city gates after having been paraded "from Temple Bar / Until [. . .] Aldgate" (18.194–95), she complains in language that at once suggests the appropriateness of her punishment and calls attention to her grieving body, with its pleading tongue, weeping eyes, and bleeding feet:

My tongue, that gave consent, enjoined to beg;  
 Mine eyes adjudged to hourly laments;  
 Mine arms, for their embracings, catch the air,  
 And these quick, nimble feet, that were so ready  
 To step into a king's forbidden bed?  
 London, thy flints have punished for their pride,  
 And thou hast drunk their blood for thy revenge. (20.27–33)

In a variation on the bootlessness trope, she suggests that tears and words of lamentation, confession, and supplication are so bootless that she will not even attempt to complain:

If grief to speech free passage could afford,  
 Or for each woe I had a fitting word,  
 I might complain. Or if my flood of tears  
 Could move remorse of minds, or pierce dull ears,  
 Or wash away my cares, or cleanse my crime,  
 With words and tears I would bewail the time.  
 But it is bootless. (20.306–12)

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*Fayre or Strumpet Lewd: Jane Shore as an Example of Erring Beauty in 16th Century Literature*, 2 vols. (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1974) and Maria M. Scott, *Re-Presenting 'Jane' Shore: Harlot and Heroine* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005).

<sup>35</sup> On Heywood's didactic representations of female grief see Michael McClintock, "Grief, Theater and Society in Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," in *Speaking Grief in English Literary Culture: Shakespeare to Milton*, eds. Margo Swiss and David A. Kent (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2002) pp. 98–118.

<sup>36</sup> All citations of *Edward IV* are from Thomas Heywood, *The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV*, ed. Richard Rowland (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2005).

But while Jane Shore's complaints do not erase her cares or cleanse her crime, the play suggests that they do in fact pierce and move those who witness her. From the minute that she becomes a target of Richard's abuses, "the world laments [her] case" (18.88). When Brackenbury brings the news of her impending arrest, he also describes how everywhere the official proclamation against her been posted, it has drawn sympathetic audiences of whom "Some murmur, and some sigh, but most of them / Have their relenting eyes e'en big with tears" (18.112–13). Indeed, the play represents one character after another who is so moved by the figure of this complainant that they offer her aid where they can and tears where they can do nothing else: Brackenbury, Aire (whose kindness to Jane merits a death sentence from Richard), and, above all, Matthew Shore, the wronged husband who nevertheless determines to "compassionate [her] woeful case" all the way to their shared grave (20.207).<sup>37</sup>

By inventing the Matthew Shore character, who appears in no previous versions of the story, Heywood offers his audiences a figure whose sympathetic perspective toward Jane Shore authorizes theirs, not least because—in a very different kind of complaint—Matthew Shore puts the blame for her fall more squarely on Edward IV, arguing that "All ages of my kingly woes shall tell" (22.111–13). In focalizing Jane through Matthew's eyes, the play represents Jane Shore as a character whose suffering must compel sympathy from all "good" onlookers: the only characters who do not cry for her are Richard and his followers. Its closing tableau is one of sorrow that also idealizes sympathetic responsiveness, as, arranging themselves for their death, Matthew Shore instructs Jane to give him her hand as he sits beside her, their mutual "embrace [of] our grave" a metonymic embrace of each other ("Jane, sit thou there, here I my place will have. / Give me thy hand. Thus we embrace our grave. / Ah, Jane, he that the depth of woe will see, / Let him but now behold our misery" [22.90–91]). This moving

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<sup>37</sup> On the play's gender politics, see Jean E. Howard, "Other Englands: The View from the Non-Shakespearean History Play," in *Other Voices, Other Views: Expanding the Canon in English Renaissance Studies*, eds. Helen Ostovich et al. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), pp. 135–53.

(and very historically inaccurate<sup>38</sup>) ending also allows Heywood to represent the virtue of London's citizens, who—taking very literally Matthew's suggestion that he and Jane emblemize “the depth of woe”—“for the love they bear to her / And her kind husband,” bury them in a trench and name the site Shores' Ditch after them (23.71–72).<sup>39</sup> The message to London playgoers about where their sympathies should lie is clear.

As Matthew Shore's words about his “kingly woe” suggest, Heywood's sympathetic representation of Jane Shore is inextricable from the play's critique of sovereign tyranny, and its praise of the values of the shopkeepers and other citizens of London's middle class.<sup>40</sup> And yet the play also links the sympathy that she compels to her feminine *appearance*—as does Thomas More's *History of King Richard the Third* (pr. 1557), Heywood's primary source for the story. Describing the spectacle that ensues after Richard III has stripped Mistress Shore of her possessions and imprisoned her, More explains:

[the King] caused the Bishop of London to put her to open penance, going before the cross in procession upon a Sunday, with a taper in her hand; in which she went in countenance and pace demure so womanly, and albeit she were out of all array save her kirtle only, yet went she so fair and lovely, namely while the wondering of the people cast a comely rud in her cheeks (of which she before had most miss), that her great shame won her much praise among those that were more amorous of her body than curious of her soul. And many good folk also, that hated her living and glad were to see sin corrected, yet pitied they more her penance than rejoiced therein, when they

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<sup>38</sup> More's account makes clear that Mistress Shore's public shaming preceded her death by many years.

<sup>39</sup> On the construction of an unofficial, local cultural memory in opposition to official historical narratives (and one that pits the home and its affective resonances against the state) see Wendy Wall, “Forgetting and Keeping: Jane Shore and the English Domestication of History,” *Renaissance Drama* 27 (1996): 123–56.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Helgerson argues that the play uses complaint to uphold the values of “the middling sort” against sovereign corruption and abuse of power. See “Weeping for Jane Shore.” On this subject also see Richard Danson Brown, “A Talkatiue Wench (Whose Words a World Hath Delighted in): Mistress Shore and Elizabethan Complaint,” *The Review of English Studies* 49 (1998): 395–415.

considered that the protector procured it more of a corrupt intent than any virtuous affection.<sup>41</sup>

More himself, despite his scorn of those whose pity arises from their “amorous” desires, is unable to refrain from envisioning her former beauty: “for now is she old, lean, withered, and dried up, nothing left but rivelled skin and hard bone. And yet, being even such, whoso well advise her visage, might guess and devise which parts, how filled, would make it a fair face,” he writes.<sup>42</sup> For Heywood and other writers of tragedy, and for More before them, it is the *surface* of female complaint—the way the complainant looks, the way she sounds—that makes it so compelling.

## Part 2. Tragic interfaces

Titus suggests that as a response to Lavinia’s suffering, he and Marcus and Lucius and Lavinia might form a tableau of sorrow in which each figure mirrors the grief of the others. He proposes that they “sit round about some fountain, / Looking all downwards to behold our cheeks / How they are stained” until it is “made a brine pit with our bitter tears,” or that they “cut away our hands,” or “bite our tongues, and in dumb shows / Pass the remainder of our hateful days” (3.1.123–25, 129, 130, 131–32).<sup>43</sup> This fanciful proposal, I would suggest, is informed by an early modern commonplace about grief—that, as Thomas Wilson writes in the *Art of Rhetorique* (1560), “all extreme heavinesse, and vehement sorowes [. . .] seeke a mourner that woulde take part with them” in “a felowshippe of sorowe.”<sup>44</sup> Titus

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas More, *History of King Richard the Third*, ed. Richard S. Sylvester (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 55–56.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56–57.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. the “piteous spectacle” King Henry imagines in 3 *Henry VI*, when he suggests that he and a bereft man who has unknowingly killed his father cry together: “Weep, wretched man, I’ll aid thee tear for tear; / And let our hearts and eyes, like civil war, / Be blind with tears, and break, o’ercharged with grief,” the King says, their weeping imitating the “blindness” of civil war, which blinds men to their own kin (2.5.76–78, 73).

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1560), sig. 14r.

imagines this fellowship in terms of literal reflection: fountains that reflect—and whose surfaces are changed by—the watery faces that stare into them, body parts whose absence reflects the absence of another's. These doubled images, Titus suggests, would transform the Andronici into a “device of further misery, / To make us wondered at in time to come” (3.1.134–35).

In this section, I explore a phenomenon that I will describe as an aesthetics of reflection in scenes of sympathetic responsiveness in female complaint poetry and theatrical tragedy. As I will show, such scenes both describe or imagine objects and actions of reflection and mirroring, as Titus' proposal does, and rhetorically mimic the dynamics of reflection in their language, which is full of repetitions and parallelisms. To give a very brief example: Lodge's *Elstred*, describing how she and her daughter Sabine complain together, exchanging “For every sigh, a sigh, for every tear, / A teare” (439–40). Scenes of sympathetic responsiveness in female complaint poetry demonstrate this aesthetics of reflection at a very structural level as well, since in addition to the narrator's sympathetic imitation of the complainant's complaint there are often nested performances of complaint within these poems that illustrate how one should respond to tragic sights. For instance, in Daniel's *Complaint of Rosamond*, the complaining ghost of Rosamond describes how her lover, Henry II, stands complaining before her dead body, “Wayl[ing]out a sound that sorrowes doe bewray: / With armes a crosse and eyes to heaven bended, / Vaupor[ing] out sighes that to the skyes ascended” (654–56).

But there is no better example, or index, of female complaint poetry's obsession with reflection than the scene in Michael Drayton's poem *The Tragical Legend of Robert, Duke of Normandy* (1596) where Robert, whose eyes have been gouged out by his brother, holds his eyes in his hands and with “a piteous lamentable grone” laments for twenty stanzas that *by losing his eyes he has lost the capacity to see his own tears* (181.6).<sup>45</sup> In lines that it is hard not to read as parodic, he complains to his displaced

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<sup>45</sup> *The Tragical Legend of Robert, Duke of Normandy* (1596), sigs. E8r–F3v.

eyeballs, crying, “Teares get you eyes and help to pittie mee, / And water them which timelesse sorrow dryes, / Teares give me teares, lend eyes vnto my eyes” (188.3–5).<sup>46</sup> These poems bear out the truth of what the narrator of *The Rape of Lucrece* says about grief—that “Grief best is pleased with grief’s society. / True sorrow then is feelingly sufficed / When with like semblance it is sympathized” (1111–13).

The pleasures and consolations of “like semblance” appear in scenes of complaint in tragedy too, such as when Titus, having failed to persuade the Tribunes to spare his sons’ lives, addresses his laments to the stones at his feet, defending himself to Lucius by noting that because “When I do weep they humbly at my feet / Receive my tears and seem to weep with me.” On the tear-drenched “faces” of the stones to whom he has poured out his grief, in this literal reflection of his tears, Titus sees the recognition of his sorrow denied him by the Tribunes “more hard than stones” (3.1.40–41, 44). Similarly, his claim that he will “wrest an alphabet” from Lavinia, his “speechless complainer,” to “learn to know thy meaning,” reveals a meaning that is purely and literally surface-level (3.2.44, 39, 45). Boasting that “I can interpret all her martyred signs,” he translates, “She says she drinks no other drink but tears, / Brewed with her sorrow, mashed upon her cheeks” (3.2. 36, 37–38).<sup>47</sup>

This reveals a tragic aesthetics that I would suggest is particularly visible in the early modern tragedy most obsessed with reflecting images of grief: *Richard II*. Written and performed in the mid-1590s when the poetry of female complaint was at its most popular, *Richard II* (pr. 1597) revolves

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<sup>46</sup> Lending weight to the sense that this is a parody is the fact that in Drayton’s *England’s Heroicall Epistles* (1597), the virginal Matilda (who is also the subject of one of Drayton’s earlier narrative verse female complaints), criticizing “unchast” female figures of complaint for whom “Lascivious poets” have written sympathetic poems, is particularly incensed by poems written for incestuous figures, whose ability to perpetually weep for themselves mirrors their sins. (“Cinyras daughter, whose incestuous minde, / Made her wrong nature, and dishonour kinde: / Long since by them is turnd into a Mirrh, / whose dropping liquor ever weepes for her: / And in a fountaine, Biblis doth deplore / Her fault so vile, and monstrous before.”)

<sup>47</sup> On the tear as a rhetorical figure that (speciously) signifies depth of feeling in lyric poetry, see Lange, *Telling Tears*.



around Richard's self-conscious construction of himself as a figure of complaint, and hence a lamentable object.<sup>48</sup> I argue that it is through his complaints that, even in advance of being stripped of his crown and his title, the former king reconfigures his identity around the notion that his grief is his only inalienable possession ("You may my glories and my state depose, / But not my griefs; still am I king of those" [4.1.182–83]).<sup>49</sup> He represents his fall using figures of speech that not only show him moving literally downwards but that are also tropes of complaint: the "night-owls [that] shriek where mounting larks should sing," the bucket "full of tears" that descends "down, unseen, and full of water" (3.4.182, 4.1.179, 177). By representing Richard as using the rhetoric of complaint to fashion himself as a lamentable object, Shakespeare may have been inspired not only by the strategies of other theatrical tragedies, including his own, but by something in one of his most important sources for the play, Holinshed's *Chronicles*. The expanded 1587 edition includes an extended account of Richard II's deposition and its aftermath in which the writer quotes several lines from *Amyntas*, Thomas Watson's collection of pastoral lament, suggesting this lament to be exemplary of what "in his heaviness," Richard "might verie well have said with a grēved plaintife."<sup>50</sup>

In contrast to interpretations of Richard's grief as highlighting his effeminacy and unfitness to rule,<sup>51</sup> several critics argue that his performances of sorrow are performances of power: Jennifer C.

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<sup>48</sup> On Richard's eloquence, and the play's interest in poetic language, see Robyn Bolam, "Richard II: Shakespeare and the languages of the stage," in the *Cambridge Companion to the Shakespearean History Play*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), pp. 141–57.

<sup>49</sup> "Grief" and its cognates appear more frequently in *Richard II* than any other Shakespeare text, followed by *The Rape of Lucrece*. On its plethora of laments, see Stanley Wells, "The Lamentable Tale of 'Richard II'" *Shakespeare Studies* (Tokyo) 17 (1978): 1–23, and Richard Halpern, "The King's Two Buckets: Kantorowicz, *Richard II*, and Fiscal *Trauerspiel*," *Representations* 106 (2009): 67–76.

<sup>50</sup> Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles*, 3 vols. (1587). The author of this section is probably Abraham Fleming. The lament is from querela 5 of Thomas Watson's *Amyntas* (1585): "Heu quantae sortes miseris mortalibus instant! / Ah chari quoties obliuia nominis opto! / O qui me fluctus, quis me telluris hiatus / Pertaesum tetricae vitae deglutiat ore / Chasmatico?"

<sup>51</sup> On the discrepancy between mournful self-expressivity and self-reflexivity on the one hand and effective political rule on the other see Scott McMillin, "Richard II: Eyes of Sorrow, Eyes of Desire," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35 (1984): 40–52.

Vaught, for instance, argues that the king's lamentations attempt to manipulate the political legacy of his reign by garnering sympathy for himself, and Paul Budra suggests that Richard represents himself, and wants others to see him, through the lens of the *de casibus* tradition, in which his fall and death reflect and reconcile him to the mysterious will of Providence.<sup>52</sup> John J. Joughin, considering the effects of Richard's sorrowful self-representations, argues that the play positions Richard as a sacrificial figure of mourning in whose ultimately unknowable grief theatrical audiences might see their own collective alterity to themselves and mourn the traumas of the national past.<sup>53</sup> Like Joughin, I see Richard as a figure for and through whose grieving the play invites spectators to grieve, but while his argument centers on Richard's "gestural interiority," which generates even as it deflects the desire for the unseen and unknowable truth,<sup>54</sup> I argue that if we look closely at the complaints of Richard—whose interiority has been the subject of much critical debate—we will see that they actually insistently focus attention on the *external*, on surfaces and images and objects of grief, objects amongst which he himself is the foremost.

In the play's famous mirror scene, which critics typically read as gesturing to Richard's inward sorrow, the grief that swells in his heart, Richard is concerned entirely with the "external manner of laments" and particularly with creating images, reflections, "shadows," of his grief (4.1.286).<sup>55</sup> When he asks for a mirror so that he can "see the very book indeed / Where all my sins are writ, and that's myself," he puns on the trope of texts as "mirrors" that show readers their sin, but introspection is

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<sup>52</sup> Jennifer C. Vaught, *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008) and "'Sad Stories of the Deaths of Kings': Lyric and Narrative Release from Confining Spaces in Shakespeare's *Richard II*," *Quidditas: Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 20 (1999): 173–92. Budra, *A Mirror for Magistrates and the de casibus Tradition*, p. 90.

<sup>53</sup> John J. Joughin, "Shakespeare's Memorial Aesthetics," in *Shakespeare, Memory, and Performance*, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 43–62.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>55</sup> Prior to the 1608 Quarto, the mirror scene was not printed.

decidedly not his intention here (4.I.264–65).<sup>56</sup> Rather than using the mirror to contemplate the dark sins and hidden secrets of his soul, he uses it so “that it may show me what a face I have” (4.I.256).

Indeed, his complaint to his face is *about* his face:

No deeper wrinkles yet? Hath sorrow struck  
So many blows upon this face of mine  
And made no deeper wounds? O flatt’ring glass,  
Like to my followers in prosperity,  
Thou dost beguile me! Was this face the face  
That every day under his household roof  
Did keep ten thousand men? Was this the face  
That like the sun did make beholders wink?  
Is this the face which faced so many follies,  
That was at last outfaced by Bolingbroke? (4.I.267–76)

When Richard breaks the mirror—“As brittle as the glory is the face,” he says, shattering the glass, “For there it is, cracked in an hundred shivers”—he at once melodramatically acts out his rage at the mirror’s failure to show him a “deeply wounded” face and corrects this failure, its “hundred shivers” becoming so many mirror images of the same broken face that its shattering creates (4.I.278, 79). The mirror, whole and then broken, first doubles—and then multiplies—the image of Richard complaining his grief.

Ironically, it is Bolingbroke, precisely in being a stickler for the literal, who attributes an inward sorrow to Richard’s performance. Correcting Richard’s assertion that he take note of “How soon my sorrow hath destroyed my face,” Bolingbroke suggests that “The *shadow* of your sorrow hath destroyed / The *shadow* of your face,” pointing out the distinctions among the things that Richard has conflated: sorrow, the face (sorrow’s “shadow,” or image), and the mirror, the face’s shadow (4.I.281, 282–83, italics mine). But of course in the period “shadow” could also refer to an actor,<sup>57</sup> and so in the very words he uses to distinguish between the appearance or image and the substance itself, Bolingbroke

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<sup>56</sup> On the trope of the mirror see Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-Imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle Ages and English Renaissance*, trans. Gordon Collier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Budra; and Swärdh.

<sup>57</sup> *OED*, *shadow*, n.: 6b. Applied rhetorically to a portrait as contrasted with the original; also to an actor or a play in contrast with the reality represented.

undermines that distinction. I would suggest that we read as sarcasm Richard's response, from his repetition of Bolingbroke's phrase to his thanking of him for "teaching" him "how to lament."

Say that again:  
'The shadow of my sorrow'—ha, let's see,  
'Tis very true: my grief lies all within  
And these external manner of laments  
Are merely shadows to the unseen grief  
That swells with silence in the tortured soul.  
There lies the substance, and I thank thee, King,  
For thy great bounty that not only giv'st  
Me cause to wail, but teachest me the way  
How to lament the cause. (4.1.283–92)

The point is that it is all about the performance of grief, which makes grief visible.

This point is supported by the fact that all throughout the play when Richard speaks of his grief he imagines it as something visible to others. And when there is (in the world of the play) no one to see him and his grief, he imagines himself as *his own* sympathetic spectator. Complaining in his solitary prison cell, without a mirror in sight, he constructs an elaborate metaphor that represents his face as the face of a clock, with "mine eyes, the outward watch / Whereto my finger, like a dial's point, / Is pointing still in cleansing them from tears" (5.5.52–53). Imagining that he can hear and see this clock, whose sounds ("sighs [that] jar") and tear-stained face reveal how "time doth waste me," he imagines himself being so struck by this tragic object that he cannot help but burst into "clamorous groans" that strike his heart and cause him to sigh and weep, starting the whole process over again ("the sounds that tell what hour it is / Are clamorous groans that strike upon my heart, / Which is the bell. So sighs, and tears, and groans / Show minutes, hours, and times" [5.5.51, 49, 55–58]).

From his complaints to the mirror to his image of himself as a clock to his suggestion that his companions "sit upon the ground, / And tell sad stories of the death of kings," Richard is always seeking a sympathetic audience, always constructing himself as a lamentable object that should elicit their gaze and their tears (3.2.151–52). In the play's last act, bidding his final farewell to the Queen, he conjures up

a scene of storytelling—a room in France, a winter’s night, a fire, and a group of sad story-tellers, each with a tale “Of woeful ages long ago betid”—and asks that if she should find herself in this setting, “to quit their griefs,” she should “Tell thou the lamentable fall of me, / And send the hearers weeping to their beds” (5.1.42, 43, 43–45). He imagines his story, “the deposing of a rightful king,” and her delivery of it, would move even the insensate, that “the senseless brands will sympathize / The heavy accent of thy moving tongue, / And in compassion weep the fire out” (5.1.49, 46–48). It is a fantasy of sympathetic responsiveness in stark contrast to what York has described as the markedly indifferent response elicited by Richard’s defeated entry into London behind the triumphant Bolingbroke: although the Queen has imagined that the crowds will “in pity [. . .] dissolve to dew, / And wash him fresh again with true-love tears,” York likens their actual reception of the deposed king to the way that “in a theatre the eyes of men, / After a well-graced actor leaves the stage, / Are idly bent on him that enters next” (5.1.9–10, 5.2.23–25), invoking the figure of a theatrical audience to describe responses of passivity and disinterest.

In contrast, the play as a whole ends with Bolingbroke, now Henry IV, issuing to his onstage audiences an invitation to actively lament for Richard’s death, to “Come mourn with me for what I do lament,” and “Grace my mournings here / In weeping after this untimely bier” (5.6.47, 51–52). In other words, the last lines of *Richard II* invite its spectators to be more sympathetic audiences of lamentable objects, of tragedy, than the one described by York. Henry IV invites the audience, like the “hundred shivers” of the shattered glass, to mirror and multiply Richard’s grief, sending them “weeping to their beds” and realizing his predecessor’s wish for a tearful and compassionate audience.

### Part 3. Theatrical experience

*Richard II* ends with an invitation to its spectators to become a more compassionate tragic audience, encouraging them to become weeping mirrors of grief, tearful reflections of lament—the ideal audience of complaint. But what are we to make of such spectatorship? What are its benefits, its costs, its limitations? Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy* (1610–11, pr. 1619) takes up these questions, staging scenes of complaint that attempt to both create and exemplify the theatrical experience of transport, of being taken outside the self into the performed grief of another, as part of a metatheatrical reflection on tragic spectatorship. Like Shakespeare's Lucrece, Aspatia—the play's central complaining character, abandoned by her betrothed who has been forced by royal decree to marry another woman—turns to classical representations of grief and scenes of complaint as a means of expressing and reflecting on her own grief. But where Beaumont and Fletcher differ from Shakespeare is in the introduction of a certain critical distance between themselves and their complaining subject. From the outset, she has somewhat of a reputation as an *affected* figure of complaint. As the king's brother Lysippus describes her, she “Walks discontented, with her wat'ry eyes / Bent on the earth,” she “carries with her an infectious grief / That strikes all her beholders” (1.1.90–91, 97–98),<sup>58</sup> and constantly inflicts her grief on anyone in earshot:

she will sing  
The mournful'st things that ever ear hath heard,  
And sigh, and sing again; and when the rest  
Of our young ladies, in their wanton blood,  
Tell mirthful tales in course that fill the room  
With laughter, she will with so sad a look  
Bring forth a story of the silent death  
Of some forsaken virgin, which her grief  
Will put in such a phrase that, ere she end,  
She'll send them weeping one by one away. (1.1.98–107)

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<sup>58</sup> *The Maid's Tragedy*, in *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*.

From the very beginning, then, we see that as Aspatia reflects on her grief, so the play reflects on her grieving, and not always in a positive light.

Like *The Rape of Lucrece*, *The Maid's Tragedy* raises the question of what it means to seek out reflections of one's own griefs. But where Lucrece has a painting, Aspatia experiments with live models. She fashions her maid Olympias into a figure of complaint that she and the others can gaze upon. "Come, let's be sad, my girls" (2.2.27), she says as she asks them—and thus the theatrical audience—to imagine Olympias as one after another icon of grief from Ovid's *Heroides*, the collection of female complaints so popular in early modern England.<sup>59</sup> Aspatia speaks the language of instruction, telling Olympias what to do and the other maids what to see: "That downcast of thine eye, Olympias, / Shows a fine sorrow," she notes, "—Mark, Antiphila, / Just such another was the nymph's Oenone's / When Paris brought home Helen" (2.2.28–29, 29–31). "Now a tear, / And then thou art a piece expressing fully / The Carthage queen," she tells Olympias, remarking approvingly on the resemblance to Dido, on whose face "Just as thine does, down stole a tear" (2.2.31–33, 36). She is instructing the audience how to be tragic spectators. In place of Lucrece's ekphrastic painting, the play gives us a piece of metatheater, the object in which Aspatia sees her griefs reflected reflecting the theatrical form itself.

Not only does this allow Beaumont and Fletcher to actively explore the role of spectatorship in complaint as in *Richard II* and *Edward IV*, it also allows for a pointed consideration of the problematic solipsism of the complaining subject and her demands for mirrored grief. Turning to the other maids, Aspatia asks them to imagine Olympias not as one of Ovid's wretched heroines, but as Aspatia herself: "—Antiphila, / What would this wench do if she were Aspatia?" she asks (2.2.37–38). Answering her own question about how she would react in this situation, Aspatia injects herself into the mythological

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<sup>59</sup> On the reception of Ovid's *Heroides* in early modern England, see the essays in *The Rhetoric of Complaint*, eds. Wiseman and Thorne.

landscape of metamorphoses: “Here she would stand till some more pitying god / Turned her to marble” (2.2.38–39).<sup>60</sup> Here, the mirroring of grief collapses in on itself, the overwhelming desire of the complaining subject to see herself reflected in all representations of grief undoing those representations, substituting her own complaints for the complaints of the classical characters.

But the most solipsistic moment in the play—Aspatia’s decision, following the question she puts to Antiphila, to actually pose as an iconic figure of Ovidian complaint herself—is also, from another perspective, the most generous. Dissatisfied with Antiphila’s needlework rendering of yet another representation of classical grief and complaint, the story of Ariadne and Theseus, Aspatia orders her maid to redo her work, using her own face as the model for Ariadne’s: “These colors are not dull and pale enough / To show a soul so full of misery / As this sad lady’s was. Do it by me; / Do it again by me, the lost Aspatia,” she orders (2.2.63–66).<sup>61</sup> Notice how her instructions to Antiphila about how to do her needlework Ariadne in Aspatia’s likeness become instructions about how to make her, Aspatia, into a living Ariadne:

And think I stand upon the sea breach now,  
Mine arms thus, and mine hair blown with the wind,  
Wild as that desert, and let all about me  
Tell that I am forsaken. Do my face  
(If thou hadst ever feeling of a sorrow)  
Thus, thus, Antiphila. Strive to make me look  
Like Sorrow’s monument; and the trees about me,  
Let them be dry and leafless; let the rocks  
Groan with continual surges, and behind me  
Make all a desolation; look, look, wench,  
A miserable life of this poor picture! (2.2.68–78)

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<sup>60</sup> On the Ovidian intertextuality that informs and mediates early modern constructions of emotion, see Fox, *Ovid and the Politics of Emotion in Elizabethan England*.

<sup>61</sup> Barthes suggests in the entry for “Identification” in *A Lover’s Discourse* that audiences identify with structural similarity: “The subject painfully identifies himself with some person (or character) who occupies the same position as himself in the amorous structure.” *A Lover’s Discourse*, p. 129. See also Desdemona’s willow song in *Othello*.



This scene of complaint illustrates an ideal of sympathetic responsiveness that it does not just show to the audience. In fact, it might not “show” it to them at all: from her lines, it seems that this scene must have been staged with Aspatia standing with her back partially to the audience, facing Antiphila, who would be looking at both her and the audience. Rather, it explicitly invites the audience to be a part of the scene. Indeed, its success depends entirely upon their participation, for *they* are the trees and the rocks and the desolation that Aspatia says are behind her. Aspatia is asking them to mirror her sorrow and act as the sympathetic background to her complaining figure. “Let all about me / Tell that I am forsaken,” she says. The words are both an imperative and a wish, both addressed to the theatrical audience, who must—if they choose—collaborate with Antiphila in making Aspatia “look / Like Sorrow’s monument.” The theatrical audience and the theatrical setting, mirrors for her grief, become the Ovidian setting for the performance of complaint. When Aspatia tells her maids to “look, look, wenches,” I would suggest that she is pointing to the audience, who form, behind her, “A miserable life” better than a “poor picture.” Here, in the very performance of complaint in which Aspatia calls all eyes directly to her own complaining figure, she turns her theatrical audience’s sympathetic gaze back on itself, instructing the audience members to see themselves as reflections of her grief. The actors stare out at the audience staring back at them. One can imagine a pause here following Aspatia’s declaration, as they look.

The dialogue implies that Aspatia is ecstatic, carried away from herself, since Olympias has to interject with a “Dear madam—” (2.2.79). But even when she responds “I have done” and seems to return to herself the play suggests that Aspatia is not actually done (2.2.79). In the lines that follow, she invites her maids to participate in one more experience of gazing at a sad sight: “Sit down, and let us / Upon that point fix all our eyes, that point there. / Make a dumb silence, till you feel a sudden sadness / Give us new souls,” she says (2.2.79–82). Nothing in the dialogue or plot specifies what it is that they are

looking at, or where “that point there” is, but it seems quite likely that Aspatia has turned around to face the theatrical audience, and that she and her maids, sitting down, are all gazing silently at their spectators, waiting for that mysterious “sudden sadness” that will “give us new souls.” This is the language of the experience that Schoenfeldt calls transport, the temporary movement out of one’s own grief through aesthetic engagement with the represented grief of someone else. Here, that experience is shattered when Aspatia’s father, Calianax, enters and interrupts this reverie and accuses them of laziness: “Well, how now, huswives? / What, at your ease? Is this a time to sit still?”—a moment of gendered shaming that would extend to the theatrical audience as well, if the characters and audience are indeed staring at each other (2.2.84–85). Antiphila’s response—“My lord, we do no more than we are charged. / It is the lady’s pleasure we be thus in grief; / She is forsaken”—speaks aptly to the way that these scenes of sympathetic responsiveness, constructed through female complaint, are both scenes of instruction and experiences of pleasure, at least potentially, and at least for someone (2.2.91–93).

As I have been arguing, the kind of theatrical sympathy we see in scenes like these is not simply reflective of early modern beliefs about affective contagion. Rather, I would suggest that they tell us something about how early modern writers thought about aesthetic experience—encounters with artful objects—and specifically theatrical experience, where one is not just seeing one, but potentially many, images of passion, and where one might find pleasure in these lamentable objects. Hence Stephen Gosson, the notorious scourge of the early modern English theater, imagines that “The beholding of troubles and miserable slaughters that are in Tragedies, drive us to immoderate sorrow, heavines, womanish weeping and mourning, whereby we become lovers of dumpes, and lamentations.”<sup>62</sup> Theatrical scenes of complaint are focal points for experiences of sympathetic responsiveness and its

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<sup>62</sup> Gosson, *Playes confuted in fiue actions prouing that they are not to be suffred in a Christian common weale* (1582), p. 215.

associated transport because they explicitly stage, model, and invite it. They cultivate this “love of lamentations.”

Why might spectators have accepted these invitations? The narrator of Sidney’s *Arcadia*, describing how one character’s complaints remind another character of hers, offers one possible answer: “certainly all persons that find themselves afflicted easily fall to compassion of them who taste of like misery, partly led by the common course of humanity, but principally because, under the image of them, they lament their own mishaps; and so the complaints that others make seem to touch the right tune of their own woes.”<sup>63</sup> The passage is ambiguous, as is Spenser’s similar suggestion (in “The Dolefull Lay of Clorinda”) that “Thus do we weep and waile, and wear our eies, / Mourning in others, our own miseries” (95–96).<sup>64</sup> Do we do this consciously—secretly—or unconsciously? Does it matter? As Lynn Enterline says of the ventriloquism of the Ovidian complaint, “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.’”<sup>65</sup>

Early modern writers frequently turned to the language of visual art in order to describe how one figure might recognize themselves in the grieving face of another. These scenes of identification through encounters with complainants are also ones of misrecognition. In both *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet*, the passionate grief of the complaining other “portraiture” the grief of the spectator who encounters him. When the old man Bazulto complains to Hieronimo for justice of his murdered son, Hieronimo can only see him as a reflection of his own sorrows: “wretched I in thy mishaps may see / The lively portrait of my dying self,” he tells him, ultimately telling him that “Thou art the lively image

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<sup>63</sup> *Arcadia*, p. 39.

<sup>64</sup> *Shorter Poems*, p. 380–84.

<sup>65</sup> Enterline, *Rhetoric of the Body*, p. 11.

of my grief. / Within thy face, my sorrows I may see” (3.13.84–85, 162–63). Expressing regret that “to Laertes I forgot myself” at Ophelia’s grave—where Laertes and Hamlet engage in competitive complaining—Hamlet tells Horatio that he simply lost control, that “the bravery of his [Laertes’] grief did put me / Into a tow’ring passion.” Returned to himself by this image—“ This is I, / Hamlet the Dane”—he has new understanding for Laertes, “For by the image of my cause I see / The portraiture of his,” but he gets the order of causality wrong: it is through Laertes’ cause that he has seen his own (5.2.80–85). In both cases, the encounters with other grieving characters are rendered in aesthetic terms, as “portraits” and “images”—visual artworks. And the misrecognitions are almost comically evident as such, which suggests that at the same time that they show how aesthetic encounters might effect positive changes on the complaining or grieving subject—allowing Hamlet to recover some sense of himself, for example—early modern texts are also alive to the potential problems and limitations of the very kinds of sympathetic responsiveness that they promote through scenes of complaint.

Scenes of complaint and sympathetic responsiveness helped to frame theatrical tragedy as an interface for these kinds of experiences, for encounters between lamentable objects and sympathetic subjects, and in so doing, they helped to articulate the theater’s social value as a site of affective community where very different people, positioned very differently in the social structure, were invited to grieve together for the same things—for figures who complain. Writers of theatrical tragedy used scenes of female complaint to facilitate new kinds of relationships between the genre and its audiences, rebranding tragedy in terms of the affective and aesthetic experiences it offered, rather than the didactic moralizing with which it—and complaint in particular—was traditionally associated. It might be that speeches and scenes of complaint are not only an overlooked part of the history of tragedy’s aesthetics, but of aesthetic ideology relative to tragedy as well, for these scenes of female complaint, by invoking early modern beliefs about affective contagion and the moral rightness of weeping with those who

weep, naturalize those responses.<sup>66</sup> In scenes of complaint we might see a precursor to the theories of aesthetic judgments and experience that late seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century writers and thinkers would develop: a device that, by heavy-handedly telling readers when they should cry, lays the groundwork for ostensibly natural, spontaneous sympathetic response. It is also possible that these scenes of complaint, to the extent that they frame theatrical tragedy as an interface for experiences of intersubjective grief and transport, may position affective and aesthetic community as compensation for other forms of community—ones that might take shape around other, less pleasing, kinds of complaint.

Yet the paradox of the performative is that whatever the intended effect of these scenes of complaint, they may well have worked—and still work—to other ends. And here I want to return to Shakespeare's *Lucrece*. Finding sorrow in everything on which she casts her eye, and casting her eye everywhere precisely to see these reflections, Lucrece, "deep drenchèd in a sea of care / . . . / to herself all sorrow doth compare" (1100–2). When she looks at the "mild image" of Sinon, Troy's betrayer, she "chid[es] the painter for his wondrous skill, / Saying some shape in Sinon's was abused," because she finds it impossible to believe that "So fair a form" could belong to such a traitor (1520, 1528–29, 1530). But just as she "concludes the picture was belied" (1533) and begins to vocalize her judgment, she is stopped short by the memory of Tarquin, which intrudes upon her spectatorship and her sentence:

'It cannot be,' quoth she, 'that so much guile'—  
She would have said 'can lurk in such a look',  
But Tarquin's shape came in her mind the while,  
And from her tongue 'can lurk' from 'cannot' took.  
'It cannot be' she in that sense forsook,  
And turned it thus: 'It cannot be, I find,  
But such a face should bear a wicked mind.' (1534–40)

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<sup>66</sup> On the notion of aesthetic response as a "purely affective response to the work of art that places art in the service of the political status quo" while masquerading as nothing more than a pleasurable response to the artwork's formal qualities, see Victoria Kahn, "Aesthetics as critique: Tragedy and *Trauerspiel* in *Samson Agonistes*," in *Reading Renaissance Ethics*, ed. Marshall Grossman (New York: Routledge, 2007): 104–27, p. 104. Kahn argues that this concept of purely aesthetic response develops in the mid-to-late seventeenth century, rather than the eighteenth (as most intellectual historians suggest).

Lucrece loses all distance from the painting, it seems, seeing in Sinon “Tarquin’s shape.” In a series of analogies—“even as subtle Sinon here is painted, / So sober-sad, so weary, and so mild. / As if with grief or travail he had fainted. / To me came Tarquin armed”—she “Compar[es] him to that unhappy guest / Whose deed hath made herself herself detest” (1541–44, 1565). And with these similarities in mind, she does violence to the painting, tearing Sinon with her fingernails.

Lucrece’s response seems at first an index of her passionate grief, a loss of perspective. But the poem reveals that what we are actually witnessing is her active participation in the aesthetic object. Her comparison of Sinon to Tarquin leads her back into the painting, to Priam, to whom Sinon is complaining, appearing “So sober-sad, so weary, and so mild, / As if with grief or travail he had fainted,” telling Priam the “enchanted story” by means of which he will bring about Troy’s downfall (1542–43, 1521). Lucrece sees that Priam is falling for Sinon’s tears, and she cries out against the trick: “Look, look, how list’ning Priam wets his eyes / To see those borrowed tears that Sinon sheds,” she laments (1548–49). Impossibly, she tries to warn Priam that “Those round clear pearls of his that move thy pity / Are balls of quenchless fire to burn thy city” (1553–54), but of course her words can change nothing. It is then that she “tears the senseless Sinon with her nails,” and this done, she “smilingly” calls herself a fool (1566–7). In Lucrece’s smile, we see her rejection—a very literal, tactile one—of the very aesthetics of the surface, of reflection, that I have been describing. She refuses the notion that one must weep for those who weep, that tears must elicit tears, that complaints must compel sympathy.

Early modern theatrical audiences may have seen themselves in scenes of complaint, or heard themselves addressed by it. They may have cried for the complaining figures that populated the stage. They also may have laughed—and that too would have been, in its own way, a recuperation of complaint.

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