The Hidden Chorus

Echoes of Genre in Tragic Lyric

L. A. SWIFT

7

Thrēnos and Ritual Lament

Of all the ritual moments in Greek life, the funeral is probably the one for which we have most evidence. Many artefacts survive which give us an insight into funerary customs, from depictions on painted pottery to grave *stelai* and the monuments and inscriptions which adorned archaic tombs. Death and lamentation are major literary themes, and descriptions of funerals are important both in Homer and in tragedy. Yet despite this relative wealth of evidence, investigating the lyric *thrēnos* is a challenging task. A funeral (like a wedding) contained various forms of ritual song, and we have little reliable evidence which we can use to subdivide and categorize them. Whilst literary representations of lamentation are common, we possess few pieces of poetry which were actually used in historical funerals, and we must therefore attempt to separate literary convention from real-life practice. In addition, the picture is complicated by the changing nature of the Greek funeral over the archaic and classical period, and by the banning of certain traditional mourning practices. Whereas with other lyric genres we can usually proceed on the basis that a fifth-century audience would recognize cultural triggers we know of from earlier sources, tragedy's use of funerary material would have been considerably more politicized (for reasons which are discussed below). Looking for tragic allusions to the lyric *thrēnos* is therefore particularly difficult. Firstly, as we shall see, the conventions of tragic lamentation are very different from those that applied in the real world. Secondly, the paucity of evidence makes it hard to isolate features or motifs as specifically 'threnodic'. To get meaningful results, then, we need to broaden our approach from choral *thrēnos* to the range of media which deal with lamentation and to look more

generally for ways in which tragedy engages with and responds to real-life mourning practices.

THE GENRE

There are many Greek words denoting ritual lamentation, but it is the term *thrēnos* which is used as a genre-name. The concept of *thrēnos* as a formal genre certainly dates back to the classical period. The opening of Pindar's third *thrēnos* (fr. 128c 5–M) establishes the song as a formal category, comparing it to *paian* and *dithyrambos*:

> Ἔν⌊τι μὲν χρυσαλακάτου τεκέων Λατοῦς ἀοιδαί
> ὤ⌊[ρ]ιαι παιάνιδες· ἐντὶ [δὲ] καί
> θ⌊άλλοντος ἐκ κισσοῦ στεφάνων {ἐκ} Διο[νύ]σου
> β⌊ρομι<ο>παιόμεναι· τὸ δὲ κοίμισαν τρεῖς
> τ⌊[έκεα] Καλλιόπας ὥς οἱ ταθὲν μνᾶμ' ἀποφθιμένων·
> ἁ μὲν εὐχέταν Λίνον αἴλινον ὕμνει,
> ἁ δ' Ὑμέναιον, <ὃν> ἐν γάμοισι χροϊζόμενον
> . . . κτον σύμπρωτον λάβεν,
> ἐσχάτοις ὕμνοισιν· ἁ δ' Ἰάλεμον ὠμοβόλῳ
> νούσῳ {ὅτι} πεδαθέντα σθένος·[1]   (1–10)

There are *paian*-songs in their season for the children of Leto of the golden spindle, and there are Bromios-stricken songs from Dionysus' crown of flourishing ivy. But other songs put to sleep the three children of Calliope, as a memorial set out for the dead. The first sang a song of sorrow to prayerful Linos; the next sang to Hymenaios, whom . . . took with the last songs of all when he was first touched by marriage; the next sang to Ialemos, whose strength was fettered by a disease which attacks flesh.

The opening of the poem is a priamel, first listing the two other genres by the deities these songs honour before going on to contrast them with songs which commemorate a death. Thus *paian* is named as ἀοιδαί . . . παιάνιδες (1–2) and identified as the songs of 'the children of Leto of the golden spindle' (χρυσαλακάτου τεκέων Λατοῦς, 1), while *dithyrambos* is not given its genre-term but is

---

[1] I give here the text of Cannatà Fera (1990).

identified as belonging to Dionysus (3–4). The *thrēnos* is introduced in contrast to these two religious and civic songs, and given its own aetiology as the songs sung to mourn the deaths of the sons of Calliope: Linos, Hymenaios, and Ialemos (6–9). Thus the poem sets out the reason the genre came into existence, as well as explaining how it came to be divided into further subcategories. Moreover, this poem self-consciously presents itself as belonging to a particular genre, and proceeds to establish its position by recalling the genre's pedigree and by locating it with reference to other types of song.[2] Plato also names *thrēnos* as a lyric genre, including it alongside *hymnos*, *paian*, and *dithyrambos* in a discussion of how categories of song once considered distinct have now become mixed (*Laws* 3.700a–b3). In the post-classical period *thrēnos* retained its status as a formal genre, and formed one of the categories into which Pindar's poetry was organized, as well as featuring in the lists of grammarians (cf. Proclus, *Chrest. ap.* Phot. *Bibl.* 239.320a2).

We therefore have evidence that *thrēnos* was considered a genre as early as the fifth century. Our next step must be to establish what a fifth-century Greek would have understood by the term. Modern scholars agree that *thrēnos* represents the most formal category of funeral song, and refers to a professionally composed song rather than a personal or spontaneous expression of grief.[3] On one level this is unsurprising, for any type of song formalized enough to be incorporated into lists of lyric genres must have involved crafted literary pieces composed by famous poets. On the other hand, this definition of the *thrēnos* suggests a fairly rigid distinction of a kind we do not see elsewhere in Greek lyric poetry. We know that Sappho composed *hymenaioi*, and we can assume that these were sophisticated literary constructions, but we also know that a much less organized form of singing could count as performing a *hymenaios*, and in the previous chapter I argued that the various forms of singing at a wedding fall under the broad category of 'hymenaeal song'.

---

[2] Cf. Cannatà Fera (1990) 137–44.

[3] Cf. e.g. Reiner (1938) 8–9; Campbell (1982) xxii; Harvey (1955) 169; Alexiou (1974) 102–8; Nagy (1979) 112; Garland (1985) 30; Richardson (1985) 349–50; Cannatà Fera (1990) 11–13; Murnaghan (1999) 205; Derderian (2001) 31; Tsagalis (2004) 2–8.

Similarly, Pindar's *paianes* are complex pieces of poetry commissioned by entire *poleis*, but their existence does not prevent us from including simpler songs in the same category.

In the case of *thrēnos*, however, scholars have argued that in the archaic period there existed a real distinction in types of lament which reflected the different categories of mourners at a funeral. Thus the female relatives of the deceased performed *gooi*, which expressed personalized sentiments about the loss of the dead man and its effect on the bereaved; and these (it is argued) were distinct from the professionally performed *thrēnoi* both in content and in details of performance. In fact, however, the evidence for this sharp distinction is rather less clear-cut than is sometimes acknowledged. The supposed distinction is based on two main observations, concerning firstly the use of the word θρῆνος in the Homeric poems, and secondly the surviving *thrēnoi* of Pindar and Simonides.

While the Homeric poems contain numerous words for grief and lamentation, the word θρῆνος (or its verb θρηνέω) is rare, occurring only once in each poem.[4] The funeral of Hector at the end of the *Iliad* begins with a *thrēnos* performed by the bards (παρὰ δ' εἷσαν ἀοιδοὺς / θρήνων ἐξάρχους, οἵ τε στονόεσσαν ἀοιδὴν / οἳ μὲν ἄρ' ἐθρήνεον, 24.720–2), while the description of Achilles' funeral in the *Odyssey* includes the *thrēnos* sung in his honour by the Muses (Μοῦσαι δ' ἐννέα πᾶσαι ἀμειβόμεναι ὀπὶ καλῇ / θρήνεον, 24.60).[5] In both these instances the performers of the *thrēnos* are not the only mourners and they form a chorus of professional singers, in contrast with the laments performed by the friends and relatives of the dead man. In the case of Hector, the bards' song is joined by the cries of the women (ἐπὶ δὲ στενάχοντο γυναῖκες, 722), and the main laments are those offered by Hector's female relatives, an act described as 'leading the *goos*' (ἦρχε γόοιο, 723, ἐξῆρχε γόοιο, 747, 761). In the case of Achilles, Thetis and the other sea-nymphs lament the dead man as they prepare his body for burial (οἴκτρ' ὀλοφυρόμεναι, 59). The word

---

[4] Derderian (2001) 17–40 provides a detailed analysis of the different Homeric words for grief, though, as I argue below, this kind of terminological distinction needs to be regarded with caution.

[5] This scene (and the use of a *thrēnos*) is echoed in Pind. *Isth.* 8.58, where the Muses sing a θρῆνον πολύφαμον for the dead Achilles.

θρῆνος, then, is only used by Homer in contexts of formal funeral song; when people express their grief in a more personal or spontaneous manner, different vocabulary is appropriate.[6] The surviving fragments of *thrēnoi* also seem to confirm its association with formal and professional song, as they avoid expressing personal emotion and instead focus on general or philosophical themes. The tone set is one of restraint rather than passionate grief, as would be appropriate for a professionally composed piece.

While I concur that the basic identification of *thrēnoi* with professionally performed song is correct, we should not overstate the case. The Homeric examples are not entirely clear-cut, for while *thrēnos* is used of a more organized form of lament than the much more general *goos*, limiting its remit to professional singers is problematic. The bards (*aoidoi*) are not described as the only singers of the *thrēnos* for Hector: rather they are its 'leaders' (θρήνων ἐξάρχους, 721). This mirrors the description of Andromache, Hecuba, and Helen as 'leaders' of the *goos*, and in both cases the phrasing suggests that the lament is perceived as something in which the wider group also participate. Indeed, the fact that the *thrēnos* is joined by the lamentation of the women (ἐπὶ δὲ στενάχοντο γυναῖκες, 722) suggests that the distinction between the two forms of lament is not viewed as absolute. Similarly, *thrēnoi* composed by Pindar and Simonides are, by definition, formal poetic pieces, but it does not follow from this that being a professional piece was a necessary or defining feature of the genre. Another piece of evidence sometimes adduced is Plutarch's statement that Solon's funerary legislation included the banning of 'set-piece *thrēnoi*' (τὸ θρηνεῖν πεποιημένα, *Sol.* 21.6.1). However, there are two problems with taking this phrase as evidence that θρῆνος itself means a professional lament. Firstly, while Solon's legislation was indeed archaic, Plutarch was writing many centuries later, and we would need to be sure that Plutarch was quoting rather than

---

[6] Of course the *goos* in Greek lament was not spontaneous or random but a carefully controlled performance governed by its own conventions (cf. Derderian (2001) 35–40). This is elided in literary texts, where characters frequently lament in what appears to be a spontaneous manner, yet do so in a way which evokes the ritual *goos* (e.g. Briseis' lament at *Il.* 19.287–300).

simply paraphrasing Solon to read subtle overtones into the choice of verb.[7] Secondly, the verb θρηνεῖν here needs to be qualified by πεποιημένα, suggesting that the verb itself can simply mean 'to lament' (or at least that its associations with professional song is not firm enough to stand alone). Indeed, we do have a surviving piece of archaic literature where θρῆνος is used in exactly this sense. In Sappho fr. 150 V, the singer warns her audience that 'it is not right that there should be a *thrēnos* in a house that serves the Muses—it would not be fitting for us' (οὐ γὰρ θέμις ἐν μοισοπόλων †οἰκίᾳ / θρῆνον ἔμμεν'· οὔ κ' ἄμμι τάδε πρέποι). If the word θρῆνος can only mean a funeral song performed by a professional bard, Sappho's choice of vocabulary would seem strange: presumably the thought behind the fragment is that lamentation *in general* is inauspicious in this context.[8] Thus, while *thrēnos* does indicate a formal mourning song, rather than simply an outpouring of grief, we should be careful as to how rigidly we subdivide among types of funerary performance. Speakers of a language are inevitably less rigorous than scholars in how they use terminology, and we should not allow ourselves to form excessively specific definitions, especially for genres where we have little evidence (see pp. 18–22 above for a fuller discussion of this issue).

Whatever the use of the term θρῆνος in the archaic period, it is certainly the case that by the fifth century it was used to mean simply a lament.[9] The use of *thrēnos* as a genre-term suggests that it may have retained an association with formal performance—there is certainly no other term which can be used to denote a formal dirge. In tragedy, however, we find θρῆνος used interchangeably with other words of lamentation, without any discernible subtleties in the way they are deployed. Thus, for example, in *Andromache*, the

---

[7] Ruschenbusch (1966) 46 describes the text as providing 'eine Reihe wörtlicher Anklänge an den Originaltext der Gesetze' ('a series of verbal reminiscences of the original text of the laws'). On this basis, it would be dangerous to read too much into Plutarch's use of a particular term; even if he is reflecting original Solonian language, he might have understood its meaning differently to its original connotations, and so expressed it accordingly.

[8] Hardie (2005) sees Sappho's rejection of threnodic song as reflecting a new attitude to the role of poets in the afterlife.

[9] Cf. Alexiou (1974) 102–8.

eponymous heroine announces that she will 'fill the sky with her *thrēnoi, gooi,* and tears' (θρήνοισι καὶ γόοισι καὶ δακρύμασιν, 92), a phrase which implies that all three words can be used synonymously to mean 'lamentation'. In *Choephoroi*, Electra refers to the song sung by herself and Orestes as a *thrēnos* (335), using the term of a personal expression of grief rather than a restrained professional song. Sophocles uses the word in this manner in *Oedipus at Colonus*, where Theseus responds to Antigone and Ismene's cries of grief by telling them to 'cease your *thrēnos*' (παύετε θρῆνον, 1751), a phrase echoed by the Chorus a little later (1778). This flexibility suggests that the conflation of mourning terms cannot have been perceived as problematic by a fifth-century audience, and hence that the terminology did not reflect important subdivisions in a fifth-century understanding of funerary practice.[10]

In a study whose aim is to explore tragedy's use of ritual song, the audience's contemporary experience is of central importance. There must have been a range of conventions which could evoke ritual lamentation to a fifth-century Greek, and tragedy appears uninterested in distinguishing between them. Similarly, we saw in the previous chapter that tragedy conflates different aspects of marriage ritual in order to evoke hymenaeal song, and that attempts to subdivide are not productive. Hence in discussing the conventions of mourning song, I will not limit myself to the *thrēnoi* of Pindar and Simonides, but will look for continuities and distinctive features across the range of funerary poetry and song.

CONVENTIONS OF LAMENTATION

Female ritual lament

Literary and iconographic evidence allows us to come to some general conclusions as to the conventions of ritual lament and its various

---

[10] For *thrēnos* used to mean any kind of lament cf. also Aesch. *Cho.* 926, *Seven* 863, 1064; Soph. *Aj.* 582, 632, 852, *El.* 88, 104, 232, 255, 530, 1469, *Phil.* 209; Eur. *Hec.* 212, 298, 434, 675, *Hel.* 166, 604, 1054, 1112, *IT* 144, 490, 1095, *Med.* 626, 1211, 1249, 1396, 1409, *Or.* 132, 985, *Phoen.* 1635, 1762, *Tro.* 111, 684; [Aesch.] *PV* 43, 388, 615.

forms. Vase-painting frequently depicts scenes of lamentation, particularly representations of the *prothesis*: the laying out of the corpse and the occasion for mourning.[11] Images of the *prothesis* frequently show female mourners standing around the body and engaged in ritual activities such as holding the dead man's head, beating their own breast and head, and tearing their hair: all gestures which are mentioned in literary sources.[12] Males are also depicted as present at the *prothesis*, but in contrast to the emotional displays of the women they are portrayed as forming an orderly procession and are located further from the body.[13] From our earliest visual representations, then, mourning is depicted as an activity segregated along gender-lines, with different roles allotted for women and for men. Women were expected to behave in a distraught manner, in conformity with the stereotype that they were uncontrolled and emotional, while men were expected to demonstrate more self-restraint.[14] The later restrictions on female mourning in Athens (discussed below) further suggest an association between women and passionate lamentation.[15] Our earliest literary sources confirm this portrayal, for the images of mourning women on vases are evocative of the funeral of Hector and

[11] For the ritual of the Greek funeral and the role of the *prothesis* see Reiner (1938) 35–42; Alexiou (1974) 4–7; Garland (1985) 23–31.

[12] Metcalf and Huntington (1991) analyse patterns of funerary behaviour across a wide range of cultures and note (63–4) that rituals surrounding the mourners' hair are one of the few features which are virtually universal.

[13] Cf. Alexiou (1974) 6; Stears (2008) 141. For a detailed discussion of gendered displays of mourning in archaic art see van Wees (1998) 22–41.

[14] As Metcalf and Huntington (1991) 43–61 note, the emotions expressed in ritual displays of grief are determined by cultural factors as much as by personal feeling. We should therefore not be surprised that the normative mourning patterns in ancient Greece affirmed the dominant ideology of the differences between the genders.

[15] The association between women and wild lament is made clear by Plutarch's statement that women who offended against funeral laws could be punished for 'unmanly and feminine mourning behaviour' (ὡς ἀνάνδροις καὶ γυναικώδεσι τοῖς περὶ τὰ πένθη πάθεσι, *Sol.* 21.5). As Holst-Warhaft (1992) 99 notes, this is, on the face of it, an odd statement as it implies women were punished for failing to behave like men. The explanation is presumably that excessive lamentation was considered by definition feminine, but also considered inappropriate and therefore culpable, since after the ban it was forbidden even for women to behave in this way. Plutarch's statement thus conflates these two separate attitudes towards mourning in a way that appears superficially confused but in fact reveals a great deal about attitudes towards women and lamentation.

the group mourning of the Trojan women, while the restrictions on female mourning in funerary legislation suggest a particular association between women and undesirably wild lament.[16]

Homeric and tragic depictions of female lament often involve antiphony between mourners and a wider group. In Hector's case, the general cries of grief are interspersed with the individual laments of Hector's nearest kinswomen: his wife, mother, and sister-in-law (*Il.* 24.723–76). Even in less formal displays of grief we see a tendency towards antiphony: for example, Andromache sets the servants in her house to join her in mourning (*Il.* 6.498–9), while Thetis mourns Achilles' future death among the other Nereids (*Il.* 18.50–1). This, combined with the frequency of antiphonal lament in tragedy, has led scholars to posit that antiphonal singing was a particular feature of the ritual lament.[17] Tragedy also falls into antiphonal song in order to lament: hence Aristotle's definition of the *kommos* as a *thrēnos* (*Poetics* 12.1452[b]), and it is tempting to believe that this reflects ritual practice.[18] Tragic set-piece laments frequently take the form of antiphonal song, which may be between an actor and the Chorus or between two characters or two choral groupings. Particularly striking is the end of *Seven Against Thebes* where Antigone and Ismene (or two semi-choruses) pass the lament between themselves, picking up and repeating each other's phrases (961–1004).[19] The lines are short and simple, yet rely on heavy verbal echoing and wordplay:

Ἀντ. παιθεὶς ἔπαισας.
Ἴσμ.   σὺ δ' ἔθανες κατακτανών.
Ἀντ. δορὶ δ' ἔκανες.
Ἴσμ.   δορὶ δ' ἔθανες.
Ἀντ. μελεοπόνος
Ἴσμ.   μελεοπαθὴς   (961–3)

---

[16] Tsagalis (2004) sees the *goos* as a non-gendered activity on the grounds that men as well as women speak personal laments in Homer. But while men may express their grief, when it comes to the ritual lament it is women who dominate: cf. van Wees (1998) 14–15; Derderian (2001) 24–5.
[17] Alexiou (1974) 134: 'there is no example in Greek antiquity of a lament which has lost all traces of refrain'; Tsagalis (2004) 48–52.
[18] See Taplin (1977) 474 on *kommos* and 475–6 on the question of authenticity.
[19] For the similarities to ritual lament, and Aeschylus' manipulation of convention, see Hutchinson (1985) 178–81.

ANTIGONE. You were struck as you struck.

ISMENE.   You died as you killed.

A. You killed with the spear.

I.   You died by the spear.

A. Terrible toil.

I.   Terrible suffering.

Another example is the subsidiary chorus of Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, where the arrival of the bones of the Argives is greeted by an antiphonal song shared between the mothers and the children of the deceased (1123–64). Again we see ritualistic phraseology such as the anaphora which begins the first two pairs of response, the childrens' φέρω φέρω (1123) and ἄπαις ἄπαις (1131) echoed by the mothers' ἰὼ ἰώ (1127 = 1133). We even find instances in tragedy where the antiphony of lament is self-consciously evoked as a convention: for example when Neoptolemus' death is reported in *Andromache*, Peleus and the Chorus sing an antiphonal lament, where the Chorus describe themselves as 'beginning the lament' (ὀττοτοτοτοῖ, θανόντα δεσπόταν γόοις / νόμῳ τῷ νερτέρων κατάρξω, 1197–9) and Peleus responds by saying he will 'take it up in succession' (ὀττοτοτοτοῖ, διάδοχά <σοι> τάλας ἐγὼ / γέρων καὶ δυστυχὴς δακρύω, 1200–1). Similarly, when Admetus asks the Chorus to sing a lament for Alcestis, the verb he uses is to 'sing in response' (ἀντηχήσατε, 423).

Homeric mourning may also give us insight into the content of women's lamentation, though again we need to tread with caution for the laments are designed to achieve a poetic purpose rather than to accurately reflect mourning custom. In Hector's case, while each woman expresses different concerns and ideas, there are overall similarities in the structure and themes of their laments.[20] Each lament begins by establishing the speaker's relationship to the dead man (ἆνερ, 725; πάντων πολὺ φίλτατε παίδων, 748; δαέρων πολὺ φίλτατε πάντων, 762), and goes on to explain what the death means to her and how it will affect her life.[21] Thus Andromache

---

[20] See Tsagalis (2004) 27–32 for the typology of Homeric *goos*.

[21] Because of the focus on the women's own suffering, some scholars have taken these laments as subversive of the poem's heroic values: cf. Holst-Warhaft (1992) 112–13; Derderian (2001) 10; Foley (2001) 19–56; Perkell (2008). Reading the

begins by explaining her status as a young widow whose husband has died an untimely death (ἆνερ ἀπ' αἰῶνος νέος ὤλεο, κὰδ δέ με χήρην / λείπεις ἐν μεγάροισι (24.725–6), before going on to contemplate her position as a mother and the future fate of her child (726–38). Andromache also articulates the effect that Hector's death will have on the wider community, imagining her own enslavement and by implication that of the other Trojan women (732–4). Hecuba's speech is much shorter, but she compares Hector's fate to that of her other sons (751–6), thus establishing her position as a bereaved mother. Similarly, Helen's description of the protection that Hector offered her highlights her own position within the house, and anticipates the difficulties she will now face (767–72).[22] Both Hecuba and Helen begin their speeches with declarations of affection for Hector which suggest their own feelings of loss (748, 762).[23]

While the laments for Hector are the only ones in the poem couched as ritual laments rather than spontaneous expressions of grief, we see similar themes in other Iliadic laments and it seems likely that the poet is drawing on motifs from ritual lament in order to give these speeches power.[24] Thus, when Briseis mourns Patroclus' death she recalls her relationship with him and mourns his loss as a guardian who had promised to protect her status within Achilles'

---

speeches in this light, however, overlooks that this focus on suffering may be a conventional feature of lament. Moreover, it does not follow that focusing on the negative consequences of the hero's death is a way of challenging heroic values; it is equally possible to argue that the women's pain and suffering is a way of expressing how important the hero was in life, and hence a mechanism for elevating him: see Murnaghan (1999); Sultan (1999) 80–1; Dué (2006) 40–3.

[22] Helen's statement of her own future suffering is striking in that it reflects that of Andromache yet obviously pales beside it, and scholars have differed on how to interpret this. Thus Perkell (2008) sees it as a sign of Helen's self-absorption, while Roisman (2006) (in my view rightly) sees it as a device for highlighting Hector's familial side and his kindness.

[23] Perkell (2008) 96–101 suggests that the absence of a term of endearment from the opening of Andromache's speech highlights her criticism of Hector's value-system. Again, this seems to me to be tendentious: Andromache makes explicit her love for Hector (742–5), and the simple ἆνερ with which she begins her lament (725) could be interpreted as more powerful in its simplicity than any formulaic expression of affection: cf. Tatum (2003) 4.

[24] See Martin (2008) 122, who argues that Helen's language throughout the poem is designed to evoke ritual lament.

household (*Il.* 19.295–300). Indeed, Briseis uses the loss of Patroclus' kindness in order to justify her desire to lament him (<u>τώ</u> σ' ἄμοτον κλαίω τεθνηότα ('*therefore* I weep for your death without ceasing', 300). Similarly when Thetis mourns Achilles in front of the Nereids, she laments her own pain in anticipating his future death and her position as a mother (ὤ μοι ἐγὼ δειλή, ὤ μοι δυσαριστοτόκεια, 'alas, wretched me, alas for the pain in giving birth to the best of men', 18.54). It seems conventional, then, that the dead man is mourned for his loss as a social figure, and for the role he played in the lives of his female relatives. In order to express the importance of the loss, the women focus on the consequences of the death, and the suffering they experience as a result. Whether or not it is safe to assume that this reflects real-life practice, it does seem to be established as a literary convention of mourning, and thus something a fifth-century audience would recognize. It is certainly a common feature of tragic lament: for example, as Medea contemplates her children's death, she grieves for the loss of her normal expectations as a mother (*Med.* 1023–39); similarly, when Hecuba mourns Astyanax, she recalls the promises the boy made to her as his grandmother, and laments her status as an old woman without family (*Tro.* 1180–8). The idea that lamenting one's own situation was integral to ritual mourning is embedded in the women's lament over Patroclus in the *Iliad*, where we are told that each woman uses her wailing for Patroclus as a pretext for mourning her own sorrows (ἐπὶ δὲ στενάχοντο γυναῖκες / Πάτροκλον πρόφασιν, σφῶν δ' αὐτῶν κήδε' ἑκάστη, 19.301–2).

Literary and artistic depictions of female lament have tantalized scholars by raising the prospect of an authentic female voice. Nevertheless, our accounts of women's lament are in fact drawn from male sources, whether in literature or in art. As such these representations have their own artistic agenda, and while they may draw on real-life ritual practice, they are not intended to be straightforward replicas of historical laments. Despite the frequency of lament in poetry, it is therefore difficult to judge how close a relationship it bears to the real laments of Greek women. We must, then, be cautious when we use these as sources, for repeated *topoi* could be attributed to poetic or artistic convention, rather than to ritual detail. In contrast, while we

have few poetic descriptions of public (and male) forms of lamentation, we do have surviving examples, both in *thrēnoi* and in funerary epigrams, which (as we shall see) present a different facet of Greek mourning.

Thrēnoi

We know of only two poets who composed *thrēnoi* (Pindar and Simonides) and a small number of fragments survive from each. Moreover, the fragments that survive are not a random selection, but are often quoted by authors interested in philosophical poetry. We should therefore be cautious about assuming that the extant fragments are representative of the genre as a whole.[25] These caveats aside, however, when we examine the surviving *thrēnoi* it is possible to draw certain conclusions about the genre's style and preoccupations. First, as we have already seen, the *thrēnos*, as a public and poetic genre, avoids expressions of personal grief and sets a restrained and philosophical tone. Simonides' surviving *thrēnoi* stress the inevitability of death and suffering in human life. Thus, frr. 520, 523, and 524 *PMG* stress that death comes to all men, while 520 and 523 also describe the danger and toil inherent to the human condition. Similarly, several fragments emphasize the instability of human life: fr. 521 compares the changes in human fortune with the quick movements of a fly (ὠκεῖα γὰρ οὐδὲ τανυπτερύγου μυίας / οὕτως ἁ μετάστασις, 3–4) while fr. 527 describes the gods' role in altering human fate. Thus the bereaved are comforted by reflecting on the universal nature of mortality and suffering: a common theme in Greek consolation, and one which we can trace back to Achilles' speech to Priam at the end of the *Iliad* (24.601–20).[26] We find similar themes and motifs in Pindaric *thrēnoi*. Like other forms of poetry, the surviving fragments of *thrēnoi* use myth as a foil for the situation at hand, and to extract broader truths and morals. So, for example, the inevitability of death is demonstrated by telling the stories of the deaths of heroes such as the sons of Calliope (fr. 128c S–M), or

---

[25] Cf. Derderian (2001) 117.

[26] For the literary sources for ancient consolation, see Kassel (1958).

Caeneus, traditionally known to be invulnerable (fr. 128f).[27] More explicit moralizing may be indicated by the phrase ἄλλο[τε δ' ἀλ]λοῖαι[28] which follows the myth of Ino in fr. 128d.8 S–M, an expression which, as Cannatà Fera notes, is typically used by Pindar to express the changeability of human fortune.

Despite its restrained and moralizing tone, the *thrēnos* was still a response to death, and it is unsurprising that we are told that lament was a characteristic part of Pindaric *thrēnoi* (Horace, *Odes* 4.2.21–4). As well as words and themes connected with death and mourning, the *thrēnos* involved a ritual refrain like *paian* or *hymenaios*: we find traces of this refrain in the repeated phrase ὄ]ρθιο]ν ἰά⌊λεμ[ον / κελα⌋δήσα⌊τε which acts as an invitation to the wider audience to participate in the lament (fr. 128ea.2–3, 128eb.6–7 S–M).[29]

Nevertheless, we also find a more optimistic note in Pindaric *thrēnoi*, as the poet presents the prospect that the dead man has gone on to a better existence. In the *thrēnoi*, Pindar deviates from the Homeric portrayal of the underworld and instead presents the idea that existence after death can be a joyful one, and that good behaviour in this life can lead to rewards.[30] For example, fr. 129 S–M, quoted by Plutarch (*Consol. ad Apoll.* 35 120c), describes the idyllic existence which the souls of pious men enjoy in Hades. The dead are imagined as living in an idealized *locus amoenus*, complete with roses, shady incense trees, incense, and fruit (3–5). The land is infused with a 'lovely smell' (ὀδμὰ δ' ἐρατόν, 8): while the scent is a natural

---

[27] See Cannatà Fera (1990) 143 on the consolatory function of the myth in fr. 56; 157–9 on the Caeneus myth.

[28] The phrase (literally 'different ones at different times') is used elsewhere by Pindar to indicate the shifting of mortal fortune: cf. *Ol.* 7.95 (ἐν δὲ μιᾷ μοίρᾳ χρόνου / ἄλλοτ' ἀλλοῖαι διαιθύσσοισιν αὖραι, 'in a single portion of time the winds shift now one way, now another'); *Pyth.* 3.104 (ἄλλοτε δ' ἀλλοῖαι πνοαί / ὑψιπετᾶν ἀνέμων, 'the blasts of the high-flying winds blow in different ways at different times').

[29] Cannatà Fera (1990) 124.

[30] Cannatà Fera (1990) 31 stresses the contrast between Pindar's threnodic and his epinician outlook, and argues that the *epinikia* (other than *Ol.* 2) followed Homer in presenting the contrast between life and death as a bleak one. As Currie (2005) 34–5 points out, however, this reasoning is in danger of circularity, as scholars tend to attribute fragments according to their expectations, and attempt to explain away inconsistencies (cf. Impellizzeri (1939) on *Ol.* 2). Nevertheless, the focus on the afterlife in the *thrēnoi* does seem to be a characteristic feature of that genre, even if optimistic elements may also be found in *epinikia*.

corollary of the roses and incense, sweet smells are also associated with divinity, and so the description characterizes the place as a holy one.[31] The souls themselves are envisaged as anthropomorphized, enjoying the same activities that formed the leisure pursuits of the aristocratic male in life: athletics, board-games, and music (6–7), while their continual sacrificing (9–10) indicates not only piety but also perpetual feasting. Thus, Pindar is able to console his listeners by portraying the happiness that the dead man now enjoys, while also reminding them of their own mortality and the future that awaits them. Conversely, fr. 130 S–M warns of the dangers of bad behaviour by describing the wretched existence of the souls of the wicked (Plut. *de Lat. Vid.* 7.1130c). A similar theme of judgement is found in fr. 131b S–M, where Pindar describes dreams as the soul's attempt to reveal the future judgement it will undergo.[32] The poet achieves a still more optimistic tone in fr. 133 S–M, quoted by Plato to support his doctrine of *anamnesis* and the immortality of the soul (*Men.* 81b).[33] This poem describes the return of souls to earth after nine years in the underworld, and anticipates the heroization of those who are exceptional: kings, athletes, and wise men. Similarly, the myth of Ino in fr. 128d S–M acts as a paradigm for this moral system, reminding the audience that great suffering can lead to eventual happiness.[34]

We thus see underlying continuities across the surviving threnodic fragments. As we might expect from a genre of formal lamentation rather than private grief, *thrēnos* does not express personal emotion, but seeks to draw general morals from the situation at hand. The subject matter is used to establish a philosophical stance, whether the importance of accepting death or the abiding importance of good moral character. The poems are directed from an outside group to the mourners, who are the target of the advice. This should not be surprising: in *hymenaios* and *epinikion*, after all, the poetry is

---

[31] Cf. *LfgrE* s.v. ἀμβρόσιος II.2, and see also Janko (1992) on Hom. *Il.* 14.170–1; West (1988) on Hom. *Od.* 4.445; Richardson (1974) 252; Barrett (1964) on Eur. *Hipp.* 1391–3, where Hippolytus recognizes Artemis by her fragrance.

[32] See Brillante (1987).

[33] For a discussion of Pindar's philosophy, see McGibbon (1964); Lloyd-Jones (1984).

[34] Cf. Cannatà Fera (1990) 118.

focalized from the point of view of the wider community, not the individuals who lie at the centre of its function.

Pindar's emphasis on the virtue of the dead evokes another element of *thrēnoi* attested by later writers: the expectation that they should contain a eulogy of the deceased.[35] In Pindar's *Isthmian* 8.56a–60, the poet describes the *thrēnos* sung by the Muses at Achilles' funeral, and gives it the epithet πολύφαμος (58), suggesting the role of funerary poetry in confirming the reputation of the deceased. The theme of praising the virtuous dead is also picked up by Simonides in a fragment of disputed genre (fr. 531 *PMG*), which praises those who died at Thermopylae. Like Pindar fr. 133 S–M, the poem explicitly looks forward to the immortalizing power of hero cult. It goes as far as to suggest that power of memory can blur the boundary between mortals and gods, describing the dead men's tomb as an altar (βωμὸς δ᾽ ὁ τάφος, 3). While this poem may not be a *thrēnos* (as it might have been composed for performance at a cult setting rather than to honour a dead human), the tradition of encomiastic *thrēnoi* makes the boundary between *thrēnoi* and praise of heroes a blurred one.[36] The encomiastic elements in funeral ritual lie behind the development of the *epitaphios logos*, with its generalized praise of the war dead.[37] We see similar themes in other aspects of the female ritual lament, for while praise and grief appear to be opposed, praising the deceased is also integrally connected with lamenting his loss.[38] By expressing the impact of the death, the mourner confirms the dead man's importance and notes particular admirable qualities now lost to them. Thus, Andromache recalls Hector's role as bastion of Troy in order to anticipate the city's fall (Hom. *Il.* 24.728–30); Hecuba notes the gods' special care for

[35] Cf. Hor. *Odes* 4.2.21–4; Aristocles *ap.* Ammon. περὶ διαφόρ. λέξ. 178.4 Nickau; Didymus *ap.* Orion ε 58.7: see Harvey (1955) 170.

[36] For a discussion of the genre of this poem, see Cannatà Fera (1990) 24–5; Steiner (1999). See also Seaford (1994) 139–43 for a discussion of how hero cult could fulfil some of the needs of the ritual lament, and Currie (2005) 47–59 for a discussion of how hero cult can permeate poetry whose primary function is not cultic.

[37] See Loraux (1986) 44; Herrman (2003) 4.

[38] Cf. Murnaghan (1999) 204: 'lamentation is an urgent expression of that person's value, and so is a form of praise'. For the connection between *kleos* and *penthos* see Nagy (1979) 94–117; Dué (2006) 40. Tsagalis (2004) 32–6 identifies praise as a structural element of the Homeric lament.

Hector's corpse because of his piety (24.749–50); Helen praises Hector's gentle character before describing how the loss of such gentleness will affect her own life (24.767–72).[39] While all these ideas are expressed in a context of sorrow, they nevertheless commemorate positive qualities and establish them as a fact to be remembered about the dead man.[40] Thus, while the ritual lament is in a sense antithetical to praise, these sentiments of grief also play an important role in commemorating and praising the dead.[41]

Epigrams

When we turn to funerary epigrams we again see continuities in the conventions and techniques of lament. Unlike *thrēnoi*, we have substantial numbers of surviving epigrams, mostly found in Attica and usually in elegiac metre. In one sense, epigrams lie at the opposite end of the scale to *thrēnoi*: rather than being elite, poetically crafted songs, they are brief inscriptions, which are formulaic in nature and offer little opportunity to demonstrate literary flair. Nevertheless, the epigram, like the *thrēnos*, is a public and commemorative element of mourning ritual rather than a personal expression of grief. The public nature and longevity of the epigram must have made it influential in determining general attitudes towards mourning, for whether or not a fifth-century Athenian was familiar with formal *thrēnoi* or women's lamentation, he must have regularly seen grave *stelai* from an earlier period encouraging the passer-by to notice and lament the dead.[42]

Like the *thrēnos*, the epigram sets a tone of restraint, yet this is used to create a sense of pathos. Thus, the famous Phrasicleia inscription (*CEG* 24) does not use emotional language, yet encourages us to see

[39] Pantelia (2002) also suggests that Helen alone of the women understands the importance of *kleos* and commemoration through poetry, and as such is an appropriate character to conclude the laments.

[40] Cf. Reiner (1938) 62–7, 116–20; Richardson (1985) 350; Dué (2006) 43.

[41] For the connection between lament and commemoration cf. also Martin (1989) 86–8; Easterling (1991). Sultan (1991) traces the role of female lament in guaranteeing male *kleos* from the *Odyssey* to modern Greek lament.

[42] See Derderian (2001) 76 on the epigram's role in communicating with a wider spectrum of participants.

the poignancy of Phrasicleia's fate by its simple description of her premature death (κόρε κεκλέσομαι αἰεί | ἀντὶ γάμο παρὰ θεον τοῦτο λαχοσ' ὄνομα, 'I shall always be called a maiden, having received this name from the gods in place of a marriage'). Similarly, *CEG* 13, an epigram for a young man called Tetichos, evokes the sadness of a young warrior's death by reminding us that he 'lost his fresh youth' (νεαρὰν hέβεν ὀλέσαν|τα, 3), a phraseology which recalls the pathos of Homeric battle descriptions.[43] Indeed, the epigrams frequently make explicit the emotional response required from the reader, with their exhortation that the passer-by should pity or lament the deceased.[44] The reader is sometimes described as passing by or stopping to read the monument, implicitly creating a poignant contrast between his everyday activities and the dead man, frozen at a particular point in time.[45] In the Tetichos inscription, for example, the passer-by is asked to continue his journey only after taking time to pity the dead youth (Τέτιχον οἰκτίρα|ς ἄνδρ' ἀγαθὸν παρίτο, 2). The passer-by is advised to 'go on to a good deed' after mourning Tetichos' fate (ταῦτ' ἀποδύραμενοι νέσθε ἐπὶ πρᾶγμ' ἀγαθόν, 4), suggesting Tetichos' heroic death in battle, but also reminding the reader of his own vitality.[46] The contrast between the passer-by and the dead man whose memorial he is reading is related to the motif of the fragility of human life. The reader is implicitly reminded that even those who deserve praise for their great deeds must die, and in pitying the dead he also anticipates his own eventual fate. Indeed this motif is made explicit in *CEG* 34, where the reader is asked to pour out tears 'since death awaits you too' (ἐπεὶ καὶ | σὲ μένει θάνατος). So although the composer of the epigram does not have the scope to indulge in extensive philosophy, we see traces of the traditional consolations which the threnodic poets were able to expand upon at greater length.

[43] Cf. Stecher (1981) 28; Day (1989) 17–18.

[44] The verb οἰκτίρω is prominent (e.g. *CEG* 13, 27, 28, 51, 68) but other words or phrases indicating pity are also used.

[45] The command στῆθι is used in *CEG* 27 and 28. In 13 the command to stop is left implicit, but the inscription nevertheless uses an imperative (νέισθε) and requires the passer-by to read and mourn before continuing his journey.

[46] Cf. Friedländer and Hoffleit (1948) no. 135; Day (1989) 19.

As well as the sorrow associated with the ritual lament, epigrams also incorporate ideas of praise and commemoration. The inscription is part of a monument designed to preserve the memory of the deceased: effectively a physical instantiation of their reputation.[47] The purpose of erecting a funerary monument is to create a permanent reminder of the dead man and of the deeds which deserve to be commemorated. While funeral inscriptions and engraved *stelai* mostly date from the sixth century, we find the idea that *kleos* can be physically captured anticipated in the *Iliad*, as Hector imagines the monument of the adversary he kills as a way of reminding future generations of his greatness (7.85–91). The content of the description may involve explicit praise. For example, the epigram may allude to the great deeds of its *laudandus*, such as a glorious death in war (*CEG* 13, 27). Alternatively, the dead man is frequently praised for his virtues: in particular *aretē* and *sōphrosynē*, which are frequently juxtaposed.[48] The monument itself is sometimes introduced as the tomb of a good and self-restrained man ($σ\hatε̂μ'$ $ἀγαθο̂$ | $καὶ$ $σόφρονος$ $ἀνδρὸς$, *CEG* 34, 36), suggesting a link between virtue and memorialization. While most inscriptions are relatively discreet with their praise, some can be much more effusive: for example *CEG* 69 consists of a list of positive qualities ($εὔδοχσον$ | $σόφρ[ονα$ $κ]$|$αὶ$ $πινοτόν$ $πᾶσαν$ $hέχον$|$τ'$ $ἀρετέν$).

Lamenting and remembering the dead thus took various forms in the Greek world, ranging from the ritualized emotion of the female lament to the restrained public statement made by the funerary epigram. We see a distinction between private and public lamentation: the former provides a vehicle for the expression of strong emotion while the latter is used to commemorate and praise the dead man, or as a starting point for exploring general philosophical themes. This distinction also suggests gender boundaries, whereby the personal lamentation of women is constructed as separate from

---

[47] Sourvinou-Inwood (1995) 147–51 argues that referring to the monument or burial is an indispensable feature of the funerary epigram, linked to its function to commemorate.

[48] North (1966) 13 sees this phrase as evidence of a new type of *aretē* to replace heroic values. Whether or not one is inclined to accept this developmental model, it is certainly true that *aretē* and *sōphrosynē* are core civic values and constitute high praise for the citizen of a *polis*.

the restrained and philosophical lamentation of men. Despite the diversity of these types of lament, however, we see common themes emerging. Lamentation is frequently designed to articulate the dead man's social position, whether through personal expressions of bereavement or through formal praise of his fine qualities or deeds.

FUNERAL LEGISLATION

These continuities nonetheless fail to take account of one of the most problematic issues in ascertaining tragedy's relationship to ritual lament: namely, the changes which affected the Greek funeral in the pre-classical period. For other forms of ritual song, we have little firm evidence as to whether they changed substantially during the archaic and classical period. On the whole, ritual purports to be conservative and so it seems safe to speculate that ritual allusions evoke not only the poetic past but also contemporary practice. In the case of funerary song, however, the situation is very different, for we know that the state explicitly outlawed many of the funerary practices which had previously been traditional. Thus, when tragedy alludes to these ritual practices, it is not simply evoking a tradition, but recreating activities which would be illegal if performed in real life.[49] In order to understand what the tragedians are doing in their portrayal of heroic grief, it is necessary to examine the funeral legislation and its effects on Athenian mourning.

During the archaic period, various *poleis* across Greece introduced legislation aimed at changing and controlling the funeral.[50] In Athens, Solon's laws included detailed regulations on funerary practice described by Plutarch and Demosthenes (Plut. *Sol.* 21, Dem. 43.62); Cicero also attests a set of post-Solonian laws dealing with the same topic (*de Leg.* 2.59–66).[51] Part of the legislation's aim appears to

---

[49] Cf. Foley (2001) 26–7.

[50] For similar legislation in other cities see Plut. *Lyc.* 27 (Sparta); Stob. *Flor.* 44.40 (Catana); Cic. *de Leg.* 2.66 (Mytilene). Garland (1989) and Seaford (1994) 76–8 give a useful overview.

[51] Cicero simply describes the laws as 'some time later' (*post aliquanto*), and scholars have debated whether they belonged to the Peisistratid period or to

have been to restrict the scale and expense of funeral ritual: for example, Plutarch tells us that Solon's laws forbade sacrificing a bull or burying the dead man with more than three garments. Similarly, the legislation attested by Cicero limited the size and decoration of tomb monuments to what ten men could construct within three days, preventing aristocrats from constructing very large or ornate tombs. As well as financial restrictions, the legislation attempted to reduce the public impact and emotional intensity of funerals. Whereas in the *Iliad* Hector's *prothesis* lasts for nine days, the Solonian *prothesis* was limited to a single day, preventing prolonged lamentation. The funeral procession itself had to take place before sunrise, again limiting the public impact it could create. Displays of grief were strictly regulated: the practice of self-laceration was banned, as were set-piece lamentations (presumably performed by professional poets), while Cicero also tells us that the post-Solonian restrictions forbade praise of the dead except at public funerals. The mourning practices of women in particular were controlled: women were required to walk behind men in the procession, and only close relatives or women over 60 were allowed to follow the procession or enter the tomb.

The rationale behind the legislation is debated, but it seems likely that its purpose goes beyond the purely economic, and rather acts as an ideologically driven mechanism.[52] Avoiding ostentatious behaviour is a typical feature of Greek morality, often emphasized through *gnōmai* about the dangers of excess and the importance of remaining *metrios*. As we saw in our discussion of *epinikion*, excessive behaviour by individuals was felt to pose dangers to the community as a whole. Moreover, funerals provided a natural forum for aristocratic families to flaunt their wealth, and to play out rivalries with other clans: further conditions which led to social instability and had

Cleisthenes: for the former position see Richter (1945); (1961) 38–9; Boardman (1955) 53; for the latter see Clairmont (1983) 75. Garland (1989) 5–6 gives a summary of the issues involved.

[52] Seaford (1994) 79–81. Sourvinou-Inwood (1983) sees the legislation as representing a shift in cultural attitudes towards death, but I see Seaford's political explanation as more convincing given the changes in government and social structure which were occurring throughout Greece during this period. See also Garland (1989).

been influential in the rise of tyrants.[53] As well as lavish funerals, aristocratic clans also organized cult rituals in honour of their ancestors, including the performance of *thrēnoi* commemorating the dead. Participation in this kind of family cult could be seen as encouraging loyalty to the clan above the wider community of the *polis*. It is therefore unsurprising that the restrictions on private lamentation coincided with a rise in public funerals, and a revival of hero cult, thus providing new and more corporate focuses of loyalty.[54]

Whatever its rationale, the legislation had a large impact on the nature of Athenian funerals, and hence on the way ritual lamentation was perceived.[55] The banning of 'set-piece laments' (τὸ θρηνεῖν πεποιημένα, Plut. *Sol.* 21.6.1) would have made commissioning a *thrēnos* problematic: indeed Nilsson suggests that the legislation explains why so few *thrēnoi* survive.[56] Similarly, the limitations placed on female mourning must have changed the nature of the *goos*, as well as restricting public female involvement in mourning.[57] Alongside the restrictions on personal funerals we also find the development of new forms of public lamentation, in particular the

---

[53] See Snodgrass (1980) 94–5 on how Solonian measures responded to social disruption caused by aristocratic behaviour.

[54] See Alexiou (1974) 18–19; Holst-Warhaft (1992) 116; Seaford (1994) 106–14. For the relationship between private and state burial, see Stupperich (1977) 56–7, 71–137.

[55] The funeral legislation may not have been entirely successful—certainly the introduction of the second set of legislation described by Cicero (*de Leg.* 2.65) might suggest that the Solonian legislation needed further refining or was not being adequately observed. Nevertheless, even if the legislation was not always enforced, it still had important ramifications for the Athenian funeral, as attested by the changes in grave reliefs. For a discussion of the issue see Ruschenbusch (1966) 36–7; Shapiro (1991) esp. 631, 646–7; Thomas (2005) 41; Stears (2008) 142–3.

[56] Nilsson (1911) 81, cf. also Alexiou (1974) 18.

[57] We should be careful not to go too far here, though, for despite the restrictions women continued to lament their dead, walk in the funeral procession, and visit the graves of their relatives, as depicted on *lekythoi*: cf. Gould (1980) 50; Shapiro (1991) 649–55; Stears (2008) 143–50. While some scholars regard the funerary legislation as targeting women, it is more likely that the real target was loud and disruptive funerals, and that women were regulated simply because of the extrovert nature of mourning expected of them: cf. Stears (2008) 143.

public funeral oration in honour of the war dead, which incorporated praise of the dead into a more civic and less socially divisive form.[58]

In tragedy, however, the real-life restrictions are rarely observed, or even alluded to. Tragic characters (including women) mourn their dead in a public setting, and at great length. Whereas the legislation insists the *prothesis* and mourning take place within the bounds of the house, in tragedy the dead are frequently brought out on-stage, so that the bodies can be handled and lamented in full view of the audience. Tragic lament rarely sets a tone of restraint and moderation, but rather of intense and passionate grief. Plato confirms that the differences between tragic and real-life lamentation were obvious in ancient times, as he uses it as part of his justification for disliking tragedy.[59]

In the *Republic*, Plato deals with this topic twice, approaching it from different philosophical perspectives. Socrates first advocates banning poetry which depicts lamentation by male heroes on the grounds that it encourages an unsuitable attitude towards misfortune: good men should be equipped to bear catastrophe calmly and without emotion (3.387d–388e). The attitude which Socrates encourages is one borne out by surviving forms of public lament— *thrēnos* and funerary epigrams—and this suggests that Socrates' attitude is rooted in accepted morality. Socrates interestingly does not suggest that only female characters should be allowed to indulge in passionate lamentation, but rather limits it still further to the 'less respectable women and bad men' (γυναιξὶ δὲ ἀποδιδοῖμεν, καὶ οὐδὲ ταύταις σπουδαίαις, καὶ ὅσοι κακοὶ τῶν ἀνδρῶν, 3.387e10–388a1). This reflects the restrictions on female mourning, implying that virtuous women would have been expected to grieve in a more

---

[58] Seaford (1994) 141 sees Solon's legislation as transforming poetic lament into separate genres, and in particular as lying behind the eulogistic and restrained tone of the public funeral oration. For the connection between ritual lament and funeral speech, see also Alexiou (1974) 150–4; Loraux (1986) 44–50. Loraux, however, sees a conflict between *thrēnos* and *encomium* whereas, as I argue here, both are inherent to all forms of ritual mourning.

[59] van Wees (1998) 16–17 suggests that Plato is more fervent about the importance of self-control than other classical sources, but nevertheless it is clear that an ideal of restraint exists (cf. e.g. Thgn. 355–9, 441–2; Eur. *Hel.* 947–53, *IA* 446–50; Dem. 18.97, 60.35), and instances where people fail to exhibit self-control play against this. See also Dover (1974) 167–8.

orderly manner: by Plato's time any public form of grief appears to have been regarded as distasteful. Socrates returns to this topic at the end of the dialogue, and gives a further justification for his views on art based on the philosophical division of soul and of city. In this section he explains that poetic lamentation is designed to indulge and strengthen the lowest and most bestial part of the soul, and hence is liable to have a morally corrosive effect on its audience (10.605c–606e). Underlying Plato's philosophical argumentation is the premiss that tragic lamentation is fundamentally different from approved real-life behaviour: indeed, this is made explicit when Socrates contrasts the pleasure Athenians take in watching poetic displays of grief with their restrained attitude towards their own misfortunes (605d10–e2). While Plato is not always a good source for the attitudes of ordinary Athenians, it would be difficult for him to make this argument if it were not in fact true that poetry was not subject to real-life conventions (both about lament and about other issues Plato takes issue with such as religion). Plato's belief about how tragic lamentation affected the soul may have been contentious, but his observation that different standards applied for poetic characters and for real mortals is hardly a surprising one.

Plato makes it clear that, in classical Athens, separate conventions applied to poetic depictions of lamentation and real-life expectations governing lament. This distinction is reminiscent of Plato's complaints about poetry's portrayal of the divine, where he also emphasizes the difference between literary portrayals of the gods and how they are regarded in cultic contexts. As modern scholars have established, Plato's complaints about religion echo a real-life distinction between poetic and cultic attitudes towards the gods, but it seems likely that such logical discrepancies were more worrying to intellectuals and philosophers than to the general public.[60] It might be tempting, then, to take a similar line with regard to lamentation: indeed the *Republic* passage makes clear that Athenians openly apply double standards when they watch mourning displays on-stage. However, the fact that tragic-style lamentation had been banned in Athenian society for more than a hundred years makes it harder

---

[60] See Mikalson (1991); Parker (1997): see Ch. 3 for further discussion of this theme.

simply to attribute the passionate laments of tragedy to convention. The funerary legislation makes it clear that wild lamentation had in fact been regarded as socially destabilizing in the past, and, assuming that the rules were still obeyed, that Athenians still viewed excessive mourning practices with suspicion.

LAMENT IN TRAGEDY

Given the subject-matter of tragedy, it is not surprising that its characters frequently need to lament. As Sheila Murnaghan points out, tragedy focuses as much on the experience of living on after catastrophe as on death itself, and we are encouraged to watch and learn from the responses of the bereaved as well as the deaths of the major characters.[61] Tragic lamentation has been the subject of a great many studies, and could easily fill a monograph in its own right. Rather than reduplicating the work of other scholars here, I will instead focus on the aspect of tragic lamentation most pertinent to this book: how the tragedians evoke and deploy motifs which evoke traditional or ritual lament. For the reasons explored above, I will not look solely for allusions to the lyric *thrēnos*, but will examine tragedy's attitude to ritual mourning-song more generally. Because of the political nature of funeral lament, I will look in particular at plays which explore the meaning of different types of mourning, and which draw the audience's attention to the gap between the tragic world and their real-life experience of funerary practice.

Despite the prevalence of lament in tragedy, we rarely find lamentation of a form which directly represents the ritual lamentation of the Greek funeral.[62] Rather, the lament is usually twisted in some way: for example, the mourner may be lamenting in isolation rather than as part of a group; the lament may be sung by the actual person who is about to die, or the body itself may be absent, isolating the lament from the funeral ritual with which it is normally associated. Tragedy's perversion of ritual normality is hardly unique to

---

[61] Murnaghan (1999–2000) 109.
[62] For a list and discussion of all tragic lament see Broadhead (1960) 310–17.