

WOMEN, DEATH AND
LITERATURE IN
POST-REFORMATION
ENGLAND

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A map of death

In the late fourth century, St. John Chrysostom condemned women's excessive mourning in terms that would be echoed twelve centuries later by writers of the Reformation, for whom the excesses of ancient ritual lamentation were easily aligned with those of Catholic superstition. He complains that women:

make a show of their mourning and lamentation: baring their arms, tearing their hair, making scratches down their cheeks. Moreover, some do this because of grief, others for show and vain display. Still others through depravity both bare their arms and do these other things to attract the gaze of men . . . I have heard that many women, forsooth, attract lovers by their mournful cries, gaining for themselves the reputation of loving their husbands because of the vehemence of their wailings. Oh, what a devilish scheme! Oh, what diabolic trickery!¹

Four interrelated points of interest to an assessment of women's literal and figurative roles as mourners in the early modern period emerge from Chrysostom's comments. First, female lamentation is depicted as a group activity in which a community of women (united by shared sorrow and often by bonds of kinship) joins together to mourn. As such, it is a unique forum for woman-to-woman address, a discursive community whose characteristic forms of speech² are specific to the sex of its members and to their task. Second, mourning is "women's work" whose casting as excessive in literary and cultural forms supports the post-Reformation construction of masculinity as manifested in measured sorrow. As Claudius advises Hamlet, his "obstinate condolment" amounts to "unmanly grief."³ Third, the physical nature of women's mourning (frequently reflected in the period's literary and visual images)⁴ stresses the body's centrality to lamentation and the figurative merger of the (collective) body of mourning with the (individual) body of death. Thus the mourner's self-mutilation arises from her intimacy with the flesh and mirrors, empathetically, the ravages of death on the corpse itself. The

female speaker of Zachary Boyd's "The Queenes Lamentation for the Death of Her Son" (1629) graphically illustrates the empathy between the metaphorically entombed female body of the maternal mourner and (here, and most commonly) the male body being mourned: "My flesh and skinne hath he [God] made olde, hee hath broken my bones . . . Hee hath set mee in dark places, as they that bee dead of olde: Hee hath hedged mee about that I cannot get out."⁵ Finally, Chrysostom's censure of women's amatory motives in excessive lament points toward the blending of mourning and sexuality, Thanatos and Eros, in the female mourner.⁶ From this potent conflation, images such as Elisabetta Sirani's *Penitent Magdalene* (figure 1) emerge, where Magdalene's penance (enabled by her grief at Christ's tomb) is at once a feminized version of Christ's scourging and the incorruptible remains of her sexual body.⁷

This chapter traces the trajectories of these four characteristics of female mourning through a series of texts that reflect the material and cultural work performed by mourning women in post-Reformation England. The communal, excessive, physical, and sexual aspects of feminine mourning emerge clearly from a survey of women's lamentational and funerary activities in the period, offering points of focus for a discussion of the figurative uses to which the mourning woman was put. My goal is to read from the historical evidence of early modern women's various and intimate associations with the body in death, through a collection of works which adapt these themes to portray the period's most popular biblical mourner, Mary Magdalene, and, finally, into the post-ascensional poetics of Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. I contend that reformers stigmatize mourning as feminine – as associated with the body rather than the soul, earth rather than heaven – to support a new formulation of men's internal grief; the stoic acceptance of death which, as Protestant *artes moriendi* instruct us, is the sign and certainty of election. This emphatic association of women with death's materiality aestheticizes the female mourner and approximates the technique of embalming by offering a permanent, female memorial to displace the male body's corruption onto the sexualized icon of the woman who mourns him. The post-Reformation advocacy of moderate mourning rewrites Catholic approaches to death by locating the unacceptable or heretical within the figure of the mourning woman. While male polemicists encode female mourning with specific forms of ideological and affective power, women writers find in feminine lament an unusual license to write and publish. In her "map of Death,"⁸ Lanyer transvalues and reinvents immoderate mourning as a means of authorizing her text.



1 Elisabetta Sirani, *Penitent Magdalene*.

A central metaphor employed in my discussion is embalming, a term referring in the early modern period to both the ritual anointing of bodies and the “balsamic art”⁹ of their preservation. It is a practice of particular interest, since, as sixteenth and seventeenth-century historians and surgeons frequently report, it is authorized for use by Christians by Mary Magdalene’s anointing of Christ’s body.¹⁰ As such, its conceptualization in the period and its figurative deployment are sites of conflict between

gendered treatments of the corpse, while the material aspects of “opening the body” (the common term for embalming in the period) stand in a difficult relationship to the perceived sexual enclosure of female bodies.

Embalming’s flexible meanings and implicit register of gender can be glimpsed in this brief comparison. After arguing in his *Nekrokedeia, or The Art of Embalming* (1705) that the art was “approved by Christ” when he cast Magdalene’s anointing of his head as proleptic (“She is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying,” Mark 14:8),¹¹ the surgeon Thomas Greenhill calls embalming “an Emblem of the Resurrection,” a necessity for Christians who believe in the eventual reunion of body and soul.¹² John Sweetnam’s sorrowful Magdalene, on the other hand, “not finding her deare Maisters dead body which she hoped to have imbalmed,” is herself, “imbalmed in woes . . . As with her Maister she had byn intomb’d.”¹³ In the former instance, Mary’s foundational gesture of mourning and attendance on the corpse are appropriated and spiritualized in Greenhill’s efforts to find a scriptural precedent for the contemporary art of embalming – a procedure whose rightful practitioners (he argues vigorously) are male surgeons.¹⁴ In the latter, the aesthetics governing feminine mourning dictate Magdalene’s dissolution in tears, rendering her – just shy of knowledge of the Resurrection – a lachrymose emblem of the material, rather than spiritual, *corpus Christi*. Finally, Lanyer revises these two masculine castings of the feminine art of embalming, when Christ’s anointing by female mourners (that is, the female Church) becomes not an emblem of, but a means to, resurrection:

The *Maries* doe with pretious balmes attend,
But beeing come, they find it to no end.

For he is rize from Death t’Eternall Life,
And now those pretious oyntments he desires
Are brought unto him, by his faithfull Wife
The Holy Church.

(106)

Although she is indebted to the tradition of feminine lament, Lanyer finds a new poetics of mourning, authorized by and composed of the sanctified tears of female mourners.

I

Early modern embalming, and the period’s discussions of the practice in antiquity, suggest that issues of gender and class are intertwined with

the art and its cultural meanings. Alexander Read, in his *Chirurgorum Comes* (1686), invokes the question of class in describing the ancient Jewish method of embalming: “Then [the corpse] is anointed with Oyntements made of several sorts of Spices, and after the Head is shaved, the Body is wrapt in white Linen Shrouds made for this purpose, which are of no great value, that a mean may be kept between the rich and the poor.” He adds, unbiblically, “After this manner, in all probability, was *Lazarus* embalmed before his burial, he being not of the meanest Jews; and yet *Martha* feared he would stink in four days time.”¹⁵ Death rituals in early modern England, embalming included, were less concerned with keeping “a mean . . . between the rich and the poor” than with articulating class distinctions even in the grips of the great leveler, death. For the most part, embalming occurred in accordance with rank, since the procedure was reserved for monarchs, the nobility, and high church officials whose protracted heraldic funerals necessitated the preservation of the corpse.¹⁶ Philibert Guibert’s *The Charitable Physitian* (1639) describes the process in detail. After “the Chyrurgeon make[s] a long incision from the necke to the lower belly,” he removes the heart, lungs, stomach, bowels, bladder, and diaphragm, “and taken all out . . . put into a large basin or vessell.” He continues:

The head or Cranium shall be sawed in two, as you doe in an Anatomie, and the braines and parts shall be put into the vessell with the bowells, together with the blood that hath been drawne out of the three bellies; that is, the head, the brest, and the belly infoerious, and put them altogether into the barrell, and hoope it round, to be buried . . . The head, brest, and belly inferiour being also emptied and cleansed, you shall begin to emblame them: beginning at the head being well washed within with the said vineger compounded, and then with pieces of Cotton soaked in the said vineger and filled with balme, the head shall be filled, and both the pieces of the skull shall bee bound together with thred.¹⁷

After draining the blood from the neck and extremities, the embalmer washes the corpse with vinegar, stuffs it with “cotton balmed,” and anoints it with “Venice Turpentine, dissolved in oyle of Roses or oyle of Spike, and then it shall be covered over with Sear-cloth and put into a Coffin of Lead.”¹⁸

Guibert’s treatise offers a starting point for considering women’s literal and figurative relationships to the increasingly professionalized technique of embalming. The text, while addressed to male surgeons, was printed in a volume with treatises which, as the title page announces, “shew the manner to make and prepare in the house with ease and little paines all those remedies which are proper to all sorts of diseases,

according to the advice of the best and ordinarist Physicians, serving as well for the rich as the poor.”¹⁹ It appears, in other words, within a volume addressed to female as well as male householders, but assumes (without demanding, as Greenhill will sixty years later) a professional, male readership. Recipes for household balms (for treating wounds, burns, and common medical conditions) appear alongside those for oils used in embalming, neatly illustrating in fact the figurative cross-gendering of embalming as it draws its authority from Mary Magdalene’s practice. The translator’s prefatory advice that readers purchase “roots, Hearbes, Seeds, Flowers, &c. at the Herborists or herbe women in Cheap-side,”²⁰ casts these women as descendants of the three Maries and female counters to the London Company of Barber-Surgeons, under whose authority embalming was placed.²¹ While the structure of Guibert’s text implies that women understood the process of embalming, if only from a theoretical viewpoint, accounts describe their participation in the procedures themselves, as assistants to male surgeons. Clare Gittings reports, for instance, that four women were employed to dress and trim the embalmed body of Nicholas Bacon (d. 1578) before it was shrouded, and when James Montague, Bishop of Winchester, was embalmed, 10s was paid to “a woman to attend the surgeons with water, mops, cloths and other things.”²²

These activities are clearly an extension of women’s time-honored domestic duties of preparing the corpses of family members and neighbors for burial. In the absence of an undertaking profession, the ceremonial washing of the corpse (which, like embalming, derived its biblical authority from Magdalene’s anointing of Christ)²³ was commonly performed by women within the household, often with the help of neighborhood women and female servants.²⁴ Midwives were sometimes employed to undertake this duty. Parochial and household accounts from the period, as David Cressy reports, frequently note payments to poor women for washing, watching, laying out, and winding – the mundane work of preparing the corpse for disposal. Shrouding, too, was women’s work: sixteenth-century probate accounts mention payments to women who, following the washing of the corpse, wrapped it in its shroud or winding sheet.²⁵ In numerous affidavits dating from the late seventeenth century, women who had shrouded corpses witness that they had used shrouds made of wool, rather than linen, in compliance with the Act of 1678.²⁶ Women not only shrouded the corpse but also provided shrouds. At her death in 1514, for example, Alice Bumpsted left “2d to each of the two women that shall sew my winding sheet.”²⁷

By tradition, the corpse was watched continually during its laying out from the moment of death to the moment of burial, a duty which, at all social ranks, most often fell to the women of the household. During the laying out, women grieved and prayed over the corpse, perhaps in the company of men who pursued the more worldly pastimes of drinking and playing cards.²⁸ Women's occupations as watchers reflect the pre-Reformation habit of hiring poor women as beadswomen to pray for the souls of the departed, a practice which was condemned by reformers as Popish superstition but persisted through the early years of Elizabeth's reign.²⁹ At the deaths of children, maidens, brides, or women dying in childbirth, women sometimes served not only as watchers but also as pallbearers.³⁰ Ralph Josselin records that on his infant son's death in 1647, "Mrs. King and Mrs. Church: 2 doctors of divinities widdowes: the gravest matrons in our towne layde his tombe into the earth: which I esteeme not onely testimonie of their love to mee, but of their respect to my babe. Mrs. King and Mr. Harlakenden of the priory closed up each of them one of his eyes when it dyed."³¹ After his daughter's death in 1650, he notes, "Mrs. Margarett Harlakenden, and Mrs. Mabel Elliston layd her in her grave, those two and Mrs. Jane Clench and my sister carryed her in their hands to the grave."³² Finally, women's wills often extend ties between female mourners into the afterlife through woman-to-woman bequests which, as J. S. W. Helt writes, "served as gendered markers which sustained and maintained a sense of spiritual and material affinity between the dead and the living community."³³

Early modern women took part not only in death's domestic rites but also in public mourning. College of Arms regulations governing heraldic funerals required that chief mourners be of the same sex as decedents: "a man being deade hee [is] to have only men mourners at his Buriall, And at a woman's buriall to have only women moreners."³⁴ As such, spouses could not appear as chief mourners for their deceased partners, nor mothers for sons, sisters for brothers, and so on. When Mary Sidney Herbert opens "The Dolefull Lay of Clorinda" with the question, "Ay me, to whom shall I my case complaine, / That may compassion my impatient grieffe?" (1-2), she indicts the gendering of public mourning ceremonies and the cultural foreclosure on women's expressions of grief. In the absence of a public place (both literal and figurative) to accommodate a sister's lament for her brother, Herbert resolves, "Then to my selfe will I my sorrow mourne, / Sith none alive like sorrowfull remaines" (19-20).³⁵ Her complaint reflects the social restraints imposed upon heraldic mourners which, in fact, prevented Herbert's

participation in her brother's funeral in 1587.³⁶ While spouses' roles were limited in heraldic funerals (a limitation that led to the popularity of private nocturnal funerals in the seventeenth century, whose accommodation of personal grief offered relief from College of Arms rules),³⁷ they were not entirely excluded. At Sir Edward Coke-Lee's funeral in 1605, for example, the procession included fifty-six male mourners and, following the chief mourner (Sir Henry Lee), "Mrs. Cecill, Mrs. Goore, Ladye Lee, Mrs. Mary Lee, Mrs. Durning, Mrs. Ame Lee, Mrs. Wilford, Mrs. Blackwell, Mrs. Masie, Mrs. Hoppill, Mrs. Tourner, and Aldermen with out blacke."³⁸ Conversely, William Cecil's note on the order of mourners for the funeral of his second wife, Mildred Cooke Cecil, in 1589 lists thirty women including the deceased's sister, Elizabeth Russell, as chief mourner, followed in the procession by twenty-one men, among them (one surmises) Burghley himself.³⁹

While the most intimate relatives of the deceased might be relegated to the most marginal of roles at the funeral, provisions of mourning garments for almsfolk of both sexes ensured women's participation in public mourning, distantly removed from emotional center stage.⁴⁰ Thomas Becon's *Sicke Mannes Salve* (1561) objects to the custom "that, when a man of honest reputation departeth, and is brought to be buried, there should follow him certain in fine black gownes, and certain poor men and women in coarser cloth," saying, "Let the infidels mourn for their dead: the Christians ought to rejoyce when any of the faithful be called from this vale of misery unto the glorious kingdom of God." Although Becon's protagonist insists, "if it were not for offending other, and that it should also be some hindrance unto the poor, I would wish rather to have none, than otherwise," he nonetheless provides "that 'thirty poor men and women do accompany my body unto the burial, and that each of them have a gown of some convenient colour . . . [and] that thirty poor children be there also, and that every one of them have a seemly gowne.'"⁴¹ At Queen Elizabeth's funeral in April, 1603, 260 poor women, recipients of the crown's charity, led the cortège.⁴² Henry Machyn's diary records the details of numerous London funerals from 1550 to 1563, and often reports charitable bequests of mourning garments to poor men and women who marched in the procession. At the burial of "my lade Mores, wyff of sir Crystoffer Mores, knyght" on May 22, 1551, Machyn reports, "she gayff . . . men and women vijxx mantylls, fryse gownes, and o[ther] gownes and cotts iiijxx," and on February 20, 1554, "master G[e]orge Pargeter, Thomas Pargeter's sone late mare of London," was buried "with mony mornars, and with armes, and

mony goewnes gyffyn to pore men and women.”⁴³ Not all of Machyn’s records distinguish the sex of mourners, but of those that do, thirty-one involve gifts to men only, fifteen to women only, and thirty-nine to both male and female almsfolk. While bequests to female mourners are slightly more frequent by women (in twenty-two of the thirty-nine cases recorded by Machyn), men also include the female poor as almsfolk with some regularity. These numbers imply women’s extensive participation in public mourning in the period, but with important qualifications of their affective bonds with the deceased: while female almsfolk – mourners for hire, as it were – testify to the decedent’s generosity and good works, women with an emotional stake in the burial of a male relative are relegated to minor roles and marginal places in the ceremony proper.

Post-Reformation almsfolk carry the traces of their Catholic ancestors, beadsmen and beadswomen. When Becon’s dying Christian makes out his will, he provides for the poor but insists that “these purgatory-rakers shall neither rake nor scrape for me with their masses and diriges, when I am departed.”⁴⁴ More remotely, almsfolk recall classical examples of the *threnos*, hired female mourners whose expertise in ritualized gestures of grief was a central feature of Greek and Roman burials.⁴⁵ Antiquarian treatments of classical hired mourners in the period generally approach them with a disapproval that suggests the easy conflation of Catholic beadswomen with the classical *threnos*: Scottish clergyman William Birnie, for example, condemns both the “hypocrysie” of Roman professional mourners (“whom they styled Praeficae”) and “the exorbitance of superstitious exiquies . . . (as in their bel-ringings, lamp-lighting, dirge-singing, incense burning, holy watering, letanie praying, soule-massing, vigilles keeping, and other such gear)” current in Catholic funerary rites.⁴⁶ John Weever, similarly, describes the “counterfeit hired mourners” of antiquity (“which were women of the loudest voices, who . . . cried out mainly, beating of their breasts, tearing their hair, their faces, and garments”) and the “Praefica” (“an old aged Beldam”) who led them, adding disapprovingly, “This is a custome observed at this day in some parts of Ireland, but above all Nations the Jewes are best skilled in these lamentations.”⁴⁷ The provision of mourning garments to almsfolk (whose function, unlike that of their classical and pre-Reformation predecessors, was to celebrate the decedent’s generosity rather than to amplify grief at his or her passing) and the relative exile of close female kin from the funeral proper reflect the post-Reformation rejection of both Catholic and feminine excesses in mourning. The replacement of female kin by recipients of and witnesses

to the decedent's civic-minded charity diminishes the likelihood of public displays of affective excess.

These well-documented practices suggest the largely unacknowledged and unrecorded work of attending and mourning the dying and the dead undertaken by early modern women, activities whose traces can be gleaned in the textual remains of the period. The ubiquity of women's death rituals in post-Reformation England is indicated by allusions to the collective body of female mourners of all stations. In the domestic tragedy, *Arden of Faversham*, gentlewoman Alice Arden invites her maidservant to join her in a short-lived rite of mourning for the murdered Arden (whom moments before Alice has stabbed): "Come, Susan, help me lift the body forth. And let our salt tears be his obsequies."⁴⁸ Alice's desire, however ironic, to create a small community of mourners is symptomatic of the degree to which women were expected to engage in ritualized lamentation – so much so that the absence of these obsequies could signify (as it certainly does in the play) domestic disorder and cultural decline.⁴⁹ At the same time, female mourners frequently appear as a synecdoche of the chaos and instability surrounding them: William Muggins' *London's Mourning Garment* (1603) calls upon the "Dames of London Cittie" to mourn thousands of deaths during a five-month epidemic of bubonic plague and uses "weeping Mothers" to emblemize the city's general sorrow.⁵⁰ In the same year, Radford Mavericke's *The Mourning Weede* convenes "all the Ladies of honor, and others in this land" to mourn the passing of the queen on the model of the Old Testament lament for Jephthah's daughter:

When the virgin daughter of *Jephthah*, Judge of Israell was . . . put to death . . . the virgin daughters of Israell her fellowes *went foure times a year*; while they lived, out into the wilderness, that there they might bewaile her Virginitie. That Virgin doubtles, never loved *Israell* halfe so well, as our Virgin Queene hath loved England; therefore . . . let all the Virgins in this land, establish it for a law in their hearts, to mourne yearely in measure upon the day of the death of their fellow Virgin, (in respect of their virginitie) though while she lived, far above them in authority.⁵¹

Similarly, the female speaker of "The Queenes Lamentation," Elizabeth Stuart, daughter of James I and Queen of Bohemia, invites her countrywomen to join her in mourning: "O yee Daughters of Britaine my native Soile: Conveene your selves together: Come all and joyne your sorrowes with mine: Come contribute teares in abundance, that wee may deplore our damage: Come, come and helpe mee to mourne for my first Borne."⁵²

When Mavericke advises England's virgins to mourn *in measure*, he echoes reformers who frequently accuse women of excessive grief and, conversely, censure immoderate mourning as feminine. The anonymous *Preparacyon to Deeth* articulates the scriptural basis of this Protestant assault on grief: "We muste not lamente and mourne of ungodlynesse and superstycion, as the unfaythefull heathen do whiche beleve not the resurrecyon of the dead."⁵³ As many texts of the period do, *The Preparacyon* cites as the biblical authority for moderate grief Christ's lamentation at Lazarus' tomb: "For the hope of Christen men is perfyteley assured, that the deade peryshe not, but slepe, as Chryste sayeth, Lazarus our frend slepeth."⁵⁴ Mavericke glosses the episode as showing that we must "mourne as Christians, and not as the Heathen and the Papists doe,"⁵⁵ while Greenhill makes explicit the gendering of grief implicit in early modern versions of the story which contrast the simplicity of Christ's mourning – "Jesus wept" – with the excesses of Magdalene's sorrow.⁵⁶ The ancients, he writes:

also on occasion sha'vd off their Hair, beat their breasts, cut their Flesh, and with their Nails tore holes in their Faces . . . These Frantick Actions, tho' practis'd sometimes by Men, were more frequent among Women, whose Passions were more violent and ungovernable . . . These cruel and ridiculous Ceremonies were restrain'd by Laws made on purpose, to restrain such Excesses in Funerals; nevertheless a moderate Sorrow and Mourning was never disallow'd, but on the contrary commended and promis'd as a Blessing to the Godly.

The proof of this promise is Christ's moderate mourning at Lazarus' grave.⁵⁷

Protestant portraits of wivish grief attempt to devalue and circumscribe female mourners' practices and power. Far from disappearing from the currency of mourning, the female mourner is given a central role that reflects both the gendering of grief and a new fascination with the physical, female, body in and of mourning as a living extension of the body in death. "The Queenes Lamentation" typifies male writers' uses of women's physical grief: following the Queen's violent lament, in which her body is empathetically wracked with sorrow and entombed by grief, Boyd offers his "Balme of Comfortes," urging the queen to moderate, masculine mourning.⁵⁸ This interest in the female mourner as both a living-dead image of the corpse and a work of art is reflected in early modern embalmers' shift in focus from the pragmatic goal of par-boiling the body (to make it portable) toward an ideal of aesthetic preservation.⁵⁹ Claude Gaichard's 1581 description of ancient Egyptian embalming voices this awareness of the female body, and its sexuality,

in death: he reports, following Herodotus, that noblewomen and those who were renowned for their beauty (“qui ont . . . reputation de beauté”) were kept three or four days at home before being delivered for embalming, so that “les embaumeurs ne s’accointent d’elle. Car, certain d’entre eux, à ce q’on dit, fut une fois treuvé abusant du corps d’une femme nouvellement mort”⁶⁰ (the embalmers would not have [sexual] contact with them. Because, a certain one, they said, had one time been found abusing the body of a newly dead woman). The same consciousness of the body that prompts Gaichard to share this information accounts for noblewomen’s increasing reluctance to commend their bodies into the hands of male embalmers (a phenomenon which will occupy us more fully in chapter 2). This reluctance suggests not only women’s modesty, extending even to the insensible corpse, but also a willingness to forego the presumed physical benefits of balsamic preservation to safeguard their sexual integrity and the moral incorruptibility that chastity implies.

Not only the female corpse but also the body of feminine grief was subject to scrutiny and regulation. In post-Reformation England, the female mourner’s unruly body was clothed according to culturally determined rules to ensure the transfer of property within a patriarchal system of exchange. Following the death of Lodovic, Duke of Richmond and Lennox in 1624, Abraham Darcie published a volume in praise of his widow’s tears designed to display her “mournfull life, and disconsolate estate . . . by which her most entire, matchlesse and sacred love is evidently manifested.”⁶¹ Darcie clearly understands the widow’s public expressions of insuperable loss as evidence of her chastity and wifely devotion: “She lives in moane/ Single in bed; He lies in tombe alone.”⁶² After describing the duchess’s excessive grief, Darcie offers “A Most Consolatory Comfort,” encouraging the duchess, and his readers, to forego immoderate sorrow:

Sorrowes excesse doth no lesse vicious seeme,
Then we the overplus of mirth do deeme;
For the excesse of grieffe or exaltation,
Is a disorder in our mind and passion.⁶³

Although Darcie presents the duchess’s immoderate grief in order to correct it, his praise of her mournful widowhood argues that a widow’s public display of grief is essential to her self-representation as a chaste, loving spouse. The duchess’s excessive mourning is not only a *textual* necessity, supporting Darcie’s orthodox moderation, but a *cultural* necessity as well, guaranteeing her continued submission to her husband’s will

(now literally manifested in a legal document), her agreement with its provisions for the transfer of property, and her willingness to restrain her unruly passions within the confines of culturally sanctioned mourning. The passion of excessive grief displaces, even as it refers to, the more threatening sexual passions assumed in the period to be especially uncontrolled in widowhood due to a woman's sexual experience in marriage.

Absent from her husband's funeral in fact, the textually present widow of Darcie's *Funerall Teares* adorns and supports the dynastic continuity assured by the burial rites themselves.⁶⁴ But an early modern widow would wear mourning for a period far exceeding the brief public performance of the funeral. On the model of Roman civil law, a year's mourning was generally observed by spouses, while shorter periods were, by the eighteenth century, recognized for other blood relations.⁶⁵ Some early modern widows, though, continued to wear mourning clothes or veils for years, and sometimes for the rest of their lives.⁶⁶ The widow's veil marked her empathetic death with her husband, her "participation . . . in the mortuary state."⁶⁷ This suspended animation also restricted widows to their homes for fixed periods, their rooms and beds hung in black.⁶⁸ After her husband's death in 1632, for example, Elizabeth of Bohemia "lay in a bedroom hung with black serge for eight days" before publicly donning her widow's weeds.⁶⁹

While widows' mourning garments symbolized chastity and submission (to God's will and to the perpetually potent will of their husbands),⁷⁰ their reliability as indicators of widows' moral characters was uncertain. Concerns about grieving widows' potential hypocrisy stemmed from the perception that "donning mourning could also send out a signal of matrimonial availability."⁷¹ As women became increasingly interested in fashionable mourning habits⁷² – an interest reflected in Anne Clifford's note that after Queen Anne's funeral in 1619, "I went to my Sister Beauchamp to shew her my mourning attire"⁷³ – their male governors expressed growing fears about possible manipulations of grief's symbols toward less-than-submissive ends.⁷⁴ The anonymous *Englands Welcome to James* makes a slightly incongruous use of the common view of widows' weeds as symbols of sexual availability to praise the new sovereign. When the widowed England, "clos[ing] her mourning thoughts in sable hew," hears the news that she "shalt have a King," she resolves:

Then as the widdow I rejoyc't a fresh,
And quite forgot the sorrow I was in:
When she is tempt with frailty of the flesh

To take new husband, new Joyes to begin,
 And having taine him being trick and trim,
 As she is gladsome on the wedding day
 So I rejoyc't hearing them thus to say.⁷⁵

The fear that women might exploit sexuality in mourning recognizes both the necessity of their public mourning to masculine exchanges of property and the impossibility of controlling feminine desire through imposed codes of dress or conduct. Pastor Robert Willan hints at this dilemma when, in a funeral sermon preached in 1630, he approves of the custom “barring noble widdowes from ceremoniall and solemne sorrow, confining them to closset mourning,” concluding, “Tears shed in private as they fall lesse visible, so lesse forced.”⁷⁶ John Weever’s *Ancient Funeral Monuments* (1631) worries about the potentially fraudulent grief of both husbands and wives, who, like latter-day Wives of Bath, “with a few counterfeit teares and a sowre visage masked and painted over with dissimulation con[tract] second marriages before they have worne out their mourning garments, and sometimes before their cope mates be cold in their graves.”⁷⁷ Although *widowers’* grief sometimes also veered toward immoderation (Robert Cecil and Kenelm Digby providing notable examples), their excessive mourning did not prompt suspicions of amorous or deceptive motives.⁷⁸ When John Dunton’s *Mourning-Ring* (1682) cribs Weever’s comments fifty years later, he portrays a self-conscious widow contemplating the difficult balance she must maintain to avoid unacceptable expressions of immoderate grief, on the one hand, and an inappropriate lack of emotion, on the other: “I cannot allow an intermission or forbearance of Tears, lest I should appear unnatural,” she reasons, “If I do not weep I did not love.”⁷⁹

This memorable phrase of Dunton’s grieving widow expresses a double-bind implicit in the “second widowhood”⁸⁰ of women’s public mourning. While public expressions of grief affirm a widow’s chastity and sincerity, over-expressive mourning promotes her sexual availability. Despite post-Reformation prescriptions for moderate mourning, *some* public sorrow on a widow’s part was an expected tribute to her departed husband. Figures from the notebooks of physician Richard Napier reflect widows’ willingness to admit (at least to their doctor) their difficult restraint of sorrow and, by implication, the cultural license afforded them: one-third of the episodes of illness, despair, or melancholy treated by Napier were triggered by the death of a spouse, and of these forty-two cases, thirty-three were widows.⁸¹ The mean in mourning becomes

particularly hard to negotiate in codes of conduct for grieving widows: if too little grief implies a lack of love, too much suggests an uncontrollable will that might as easily express itself in sexual promiscuity as in self-serving manipulations of mourning's habits. Rowland Whyte records just such a transgressive use of mourning in 1599: "My Lady of *Essex*," he writes, "is a most sorrowful Creature for her Husbands Captivity; she wears all blacke of the meanest Price, and receves no Comfort in any Thing."⁸² Elsewhere, he notes that *Essex*'s sisters also donned mourning with overtly political goals in mind: "The two ladies, *Northumberland* and *Rich*, all in black, were at Court before the remove; what success they had with her *Majesty* I do not know; they were humble suitors to have the *Earl* removed to a better air and to a more convenient place."⁸³ If the *Essex* women manipulate mourning to their own ends, the *absence* of mourning could also denote a perverse and powerful female will. Arguing Elizabeth I's guilt in the murder of Mary, Queen of Scots, Robert Persons asks:

What mourning garmentes were there seen throughout the whole Courte, for this facte? What signe of sorrow, and publick affliction? Of her Mother, it is written, that when she heard of Queen *Dowagers* death, she mourned in yellow sattin with Gould lace: what apparell Queen *Elizabeth* did mourne in for Queen *Maryes* death by her selfe commanded, I read not: but that then as the cause was, somewhat like of both theyr joyes, both of Queene *Anne* and Queene *Elizabeth*, mother and daughter, by the fall of their adversaries, it is probable also that their mourning habits were not unlike.⁸⁴

Elizabeth's political will, conflated with Anne Boleyn's sexuality, manifests itself in her imagined, sexualized transgression of the rules of mourning ("yellow sattin with Gould lace"), her refusal to grieve at Mary's first, hurried burial in March, 1587, and her failure to appear as chief mourner (or otherwise) at the second.⁸⁵ A woman's public performances of mourning – necessary to attest to her submission, humility, and genuine grief – uncomfortably testify to the troublesome relationship between her hidden desires and passions and their outward show.

Jeremy Taylor's appropriation of a story from Petronius encapsulates this heightened awareness of the female body as a point of merger for death, mourning, and sexuality, and the female mourner's value in efforts to authorize moderate grief. An Ephesian widow "descended with the corpse into the vault, and there being attended with her maid resolved to weep to death, or dye of famine, or a distempered sorrow." A soldier

who is guarding an execution nearby, struck by “the comely disorder of sorrow” and “sad prettiness” of the widow, promptly falls in love. She, in turn, “fell in love, and that very night in the morning of her passion, in the grave of her husband, in the pompes of mourning, and in her funeral garments, married a new and stranger Guest.” The next morning, upon finding that one of the executed bodies has disappeared, the widow advises the soldier to “take the body of her first husband whose funeral she had so strangely mourned, and put it upon the gallows in the place of the stolne [*sic*] thief; he did so, and escaped the present danger to possess a love that might change as violently as her grief had done.”⁸⁶ The striking elements of the story, among them the widow’s violent mourning, living death, and self-entombment, the necrophilic wedding in the grave, and the tale’s troubled relationship to the Crucifixion – all of which are taken up in the “tears” of Mary Magdalene – are both lingered over by Taylor in his lengthy narrative, and dismissed in his moralization of the tale as a call to mourn “gravely, decently, and charitably.”⁸⁷

II

Like Taylor’s Ephesian widow, early modern Magdalene is both entombed and eroticized. Near the end of the pseudo-Chaucerian *Complaynte of the lover of Cryst saynt Mary Magdaleyn* (1520), she resigns herself to the grave: “My body also unto this monumente/I here bequyeth with boxe and oyntemente.”⁸⁸ The poem closes with the standard *imitatio Christi* of the dying Christian, but stops woefully short of resurrection:

My soule for anguysshe is now full thrysty
 I faynte ryght sore for hevynesse
 My lorde my spouse (Cut me derelinquisti)
 Syth I for the suffer all this dystresse
 What causeth the to se me thus mercylesse
 Syth the it pleaseth of me to make an ende
 (In manus tuas) My spyryte I commende.

(B6v)

Sixteenth-century treatments of Mary Magdalene, both Catholic and Protestant, emphasize her mourning for the lost body of Christ, exploiting women’s association with death’s materiality. Gervase Markham’s *Mary Magdalens Lamentations for the Losse of her Master Jesus* (1601) recalls Mary’s proleptic anointing of the living Christ as she mourns his absent corpse:⁸⁹

And to embaulme his breathlesse corps I came,
 As once afore I did anoint his feet,
 And to preserve the reliques of the same,
 The only remnant that my blisse did meet:
 To weepe afresh for him in deapth of dole,
 That lately wept to him for mine owne soule.

J. C.'s *Saint Marie Magdalens Conversion*, which appeared during the plague of 1603, emphasizes Magdalene's pre-Resurrection grief and offers its subject "as most fitting this time of death . . . much like a mourning garment, fitting both the time and the matter."⁹⁰ Of the period's two most popular versions of the story, the pseudo-Chaucerian *Complaynte* leaves the disconsolate Mary in Christ's empty tomb, oblivious to the Resurrection, while Southwell's *Mary Magdalens Funerall Teares* (1591) devotes only ten of its sixty-eight pages to events following her expression of recognition, "Rabboni."⁹¹ In Markham's tears, moreover, Mary's story is told through seven separate "lamentations," the sixth of which is performed at this famous moment of peripeteia (and the seventh following Christ's "noli me tangere"). Even in her joy, Mary Magdalene figures mourning. This paradox is reflected in Gian Girolamo Savoldo's painting of Mary at the tomb (figure 2): she appears with her jar of balm before the empty tomb in the standard pose of classical female mourners (huddling within her hooded cloak, hands to her face), the emblem of female lamentation. Yet she turns toward the source of light which must, subtly, symbolize the Resurrection.

The emphasis of these images on the moment just before, on Magdalene languishing in sorrow, portrays female mourning as at once excessive, exemplary, and aestheticized. Mary's graphic memory of the Crucifixion in the *Complaynte*, where Christ's "blood dystylled downe on my visage / My clothes eke the droppes began to steyne" (A3v) as she knelt at the foot of the cross, concludes by referring to traditional visual motifs for representing violent grief:⁹²

Than gan I there myne armes to unbrace
 Uplyftyng my hande mournyngly
 I lyghed and sore sobbed in that place
 Bothe heven & erth myght have herde me crye
 Wepyng I sayde alas incessauntly
 O my sweete herte my goostly paramoure
 Alas I may not thy body socoure.

(A4v)



2 Gian Girolamo Savoldo, *Saint Mary Magdalene Approaching the Sepulcher*.

In the empathy between Magdalene's mourning body and the male body being mourned, she rivals and usurps the Virgin's privileged claim to grief, a commonplace of the Catholic cult of the Virgin exemplified in the medieval genre of the *planctus Mariae*.⁹³ An example drawn from this genre displays the continuities between the Virgin's physical lament and Magdalene's: at the Crucifixion, the Virgin "uttered a great shout and said, 'My Lord, my Son. What has happened to the beauty of your body? How can I bear seeing you suffer so much?' And with these words she tore her face with her fingernails and beat her breast."⁹⁴ In the Catholic *ars moriendi*, the Virgin acted as an intercessor for the dying based on her empathetic Passion: "her sone cryst Jhesu hath dyed &

suffred so tourmentous a deth & in her owne syght to her grete socour and motherly compassyon I hope she wolde be loth that theke precyous passyon sholde be loste in ony creature that her blessyd sone suffred so pacyently.”⁹⁵ While Sweetnam portrays the Virgin’s sorrows, affirming that “the dolours of Childbirth (from which by particular priviledge she was freed) were doubled at the foot of the Crosse,” he also asks her leave, “by the greatness of thy grief to take proportionable measure of the sorrowful pang of the weeping Magdalene” (95).⁹⁶ Similarly, the *Complaynte* claims for Mary Magdalene the heart-piercing grief traditionally given to the Virgin: when Christ’s side is pierced, she exclaims, “My herte was perced with very compassyon / that in me remainyd no lyfe of nature / Strokes of dethe I felte withouten mesure” (A4).⁹⁷ This displacement of the mother of Christ by the “lover of Cryst” clearly reflects a reformed view of mourning which rejects intercession and restrains excessive grief with a stoic certainty of salvation. By the end of the sixteenth century, the Virgin’s right to excessive mourning is devalued by Protestants and Catholics alike. In Southwell’s *Triumphs Over Death* (1595) she is “the patterne of christian mourners [who] so tempered her anguish, that there was neither any thing undone that might be exacted of a mother, or any thing yet done that might be disliked of so perfit a matron.”⁹⁸ While the Virgin thus becomes an example of moderate mourning, it is left to Mary Magdalene to enact her excessive grief. The loss of the Virgin’s maternity as a justification for violent mourning, on the one hand, casts the mourner’s privileged relationship to Christ as accessible to all Christians, since it is attained by Magdalene only by her love. On the other hand, the mother’s replacement by lover produces a remainder which is aestheticized in Magdalene’s textually embalmed form.

Mary Magdalene’s special status as the lover of Christ transforms her grief from excess to *exemplum*. Thus Markham states:

And Marie shewes to maids and matrones both,
 How they should wepe and decke their rose-like cheekes
 With showers of greefe, whereto hard hearts are loth,
 And who it is her matchlesse mourning seekes:
 And when we ought to send our reeking sighs,
 To thicke the passage of the purest lights.

And Marie showes us when we ought to beat
 Our brasen breasts, and let our robes be rent,
 How prostrating, to creepe unto the feat

Of that sweet lambe, whose bloud for us was spent,
 And that we should give way unto our woes,
 When the excesse no fault or error showes.

(A4v)

Although Mary's grief is excessive, Markham exhorts women to imitate her "matchlesse mourning" in commemorating not the physical death of loved ones, but the Crucifixion of Christ.⁹⁹ While Mary's unknowing grief actually constitutes an instance of excessive lamentation for the body's demise, for Markham and writers like him she figures spiritual sorrow (that is, penance). As Sweetnam's Magdalene advises the sinner, "View him upon the Crosse, and choose this part. / Then take him downe, and bury him in thy hart."¹⁰⁰ This internalization of grief – literally of Christ's sepulcher – is supported by Magdalene's overt, immoderate mourning, much as mourning in measure is supported by reformers' casting of women's collective tears as excessive.

Meanwhile, Mary mourns forever within works that aestheticize her sorrow, presenting it for readers' edification and pleasure – in the humanist formula, to teach and delight. This aestheticization is implied by the form that her tears usually take: three of the five texts under discussion are lyric poems, and a fourth, Sweetnam's, cannot resist breaking into verse at the maudlin moment when Mary, "not finding her deare Maisters dead body which she hoped to have imbalmed, she stood at the monument without, weeping."¹⁰¹ To counter the reader's heart-as-sepulcher, the *Complaynte* gives us Mary's embalmed heart as a relic of her devotion to her "dere love" – not the body as emblem of the spirit, but the opposite: the spirit literalized in the permanently preserved, eternally material body:

And in token of love perpetuall
 Whan I am buryed in this place present
 Take out my herte the very rote and all
 And close it within this boxe of oyntement
 To my dere love make therof a presente
 Knelynge downe with worde lamentable
 Do your message speke fayre and trefable.

(B5v)

Guibert's description of the procedure for embalming the heart explains the practice lying behind Mary's apparently literary love token.¹⁰²

The Heart being washed with the said Vineger compounded, shall bee put to infuse in the said Vineger in a pipkin being plaistered round the lidde, that the aire enters not the space of five or sixe dayes, then take it out and make an incision in it, and fill it with balme and pieces of Cotton balmed, and sowe it up againe, and sew it well into a little bag made of Searecloth, and put it into a case of Lead, Silver, or Pewter, fashioned in the forme of a Heart, and cary it whither you please.

The heart-shaped casket makes explicit the aesthetics governing the embalming of the heart itself: the crafting of a permanent memorial object from bodily remains within which the internal seat of affection is laid open, externalized, literalized. The spirit made flesh.

Mary's embalmed heart points toward an aestheticization of her metaphorically entombed form whose results, first, objectify her as the mummified body of grief, second, graphically depict the dead *corpus Christi*, and third, emphasize her sexuality. Complementing the *Complaynte's* image of the embalmed heart, Sweetnam describes Mary's transformation by grief into myrrh, the bitter material of embalming: "No Mary more, but Mara be thy name, / Let bitterness in thee thy name expresse."¹⁰³ Mary is at once the embalmer of Christ, the embalmed, and the balm itself. The image of Mary as balm easily merges with that of the text as a balm. Thus Markham ends by recounting the disciples' "content, the balme of troubled mind" (H1) upon hearing Mary's report of Christ's Resurrection (supposing that his work will produce the same results in readers), while the *Complaynte* consigns Mary's body with her balm to the grave ("My body also unto this monumente / I here bequyeth with boxe and oyntement"), presenting her mournful self-embalming as a balm and model for empathetic readers.

Mary's petrified mourning reflects her obsession with the body of Christ. Since it is because she is unable to complete the rites of mourning that she mourns, the early modern Magdalene carries the trace of women's attendance upon the dying and the dead. Markham's pragmatic Magdalene displays her familiarity with the physical aspects of attending the corpse when she wonders, "Would any theefe have so religious beene, / To steale the bodie, and the clothes not take":

I know that Mirrhe makes linnen cleave as fast
As pitch or glue, well tempered or made;
And could a theefes stolne leasure so long last,
As to dissolve the Mirrhe, and bare the dead,

Breake up the seales, open the Tombe and all?
Where was the watch when these things did befall?

If all this yet cannot persuade my mind,
Yet might my owne experience make me see,
When at the crosse they stripped him, unkind,
I saw his garment would not parted bee
From goarie backe, but tare his tender skin,
Much more if it with Mirrhe had noited bin.

Ile looke into the sheet, if there remaine,
Any one parcell of his mangled flesh,
Or any haire pluckt from his heads soft maine,
If none, that shall my wearie woe refresh:
Ile thinke a better chaunce betides my love,
Than my misdeeming feare will let me prove.

(E4-E4v)

Mary's experiential knowledge of death's materiality informs her graphic portrait of the corpse's demise which, inscribed within the poem, embalms Christ's "mangled flesh" alongside her own entombed, benighted sorrow.

The female mourner's intimacy with the physical body of death, as we have seen in the period's conflations of mourning and marriage, implicates female sexuality in grief. As both embalmer and embalmed, Mary Magdalene engages the art's nominal pun by embodying the opening that is at once anatomical and sexual. Thus Sirani's Magdalene (figure 1, p. 17) continues in her penance the empathetic passion which characterizes her career as Christ's chief mourner. Her dishevelled garments mirror the dishevelled state of the wounded body she both mourns and imitates, carelessly revealing her breasts as Chrysostom's female mourners might bare their arms "to attract the gaze of men," or as Taylor's Ephesian widow unknowingly seduces the soldier with her "comely disorder of sorrow."

Textual manipulations of Magdalene's sexualized grief support the Protestant advocacy of internal, penitential tears. In Lewis Wager's dramatic interlude, *The Life of Marie Magdalene*, Mary's "life in sinne vile and vain" is characterized by her preoccupation, and that of the play's male personifications of the Vices, with her sexual body.¹⁰⁴ Mary enters the play, "triflyng with her garmentes," and complaining that the shoddy work of a tailor has inadequately framed her form as a work of art:

MARY I beshrew his heart naughtye folishe knave,
The most bungarliest tailers in this countrie,

That be in the world I thinke, so God me save,
Not a garment can they make for my degree.
Have you ever sene an overbody thus sytte?

...

What, I am ashamed to come in any mans sight,
Thinke you in the waste I am so great?
Nay by this twentie shillings I dare holde,
That there is no gentlewoman in this land,
More propre than I in the waste I dare be bolde.¹⁰⁵

As the play progresses, Mary's seduction by the Vices proceeds entirely on the basis of her body. Infidelity flatters her with, "I warrant you with these clothes they wil be content, / They had leifer have you naked, be not afrayde, / Then with your best holy day garment,"¹⁰⁶ while Pride, Cupidity and Concupiscence give her a lesson in seductive dressing:

PRIDE Your garments must be so worne alway,
That your white pappes may be seen if you may.
CUP If yong gentlemen may see your white skin,
It will allure them to love, and soone bryng them in.
CON Both damsels and wives use many such feates,
I know them that will lay out their faire teates,
Purposely men to allure unto their love,
For it is a thyng that doth the heart greatly move.¹⁰⁷

Finally, when Christ enters the play announcing that "For to salvation I have hir dressed" (F3v), Mary appears "sadly apparelled" to perform the "obsequie" toward which the play's action is directed, replacing her "carkas," entombed in vice, with the living-dead *corpus Christi*:

MARY With this oyntment most pure and precious,
I was want to make this carkas pleasant and swete
Whereby I was mayd more wicked and visciuous,
And to all unthriftynesse very apt and mete.
Now would I gladly this oyntment bestowe,
About the innocent feete of my saviour,
That by these penitent fruictes my lord may know
That I am right sory for my sinfull behaviour.¹⁰⁸

In Wager's interlude, Mary's conversion involves her body as completely as did her life of vice, and because it proceeds by point-by-point reversal (from suggestive to sad apparel, from concern for one's own body to the care of the Savior's), her sexual body is implied by and present within her saved one. Magdalene's sexualized mourning constitutes a marriage

in the tomb. As Sirani's setting for Mary's self-flagellation reminds us (figure 1, p. 17), in Magdalene's subsequent career as a saint she is self-entombed in a hermitage where, dead to the world, she enacts an imitation not of Christ's life but of his death. And, as the painting also suggests, her sexual body is not swallowed by the grave, but remains vital, miraculously preserved by the painter herself.

In the *Complaynte*, this marriage is performed by Mary's self-willed death for love of Christ. She records in her own epitaph, "Here within restesth a gostely creature / Crystes true lover Mary Magdaleyn / Whose herte for love brast in peeces tweyn" (B5). Echoing the Song of Songs, Magdalene merges the languages of religion and eros ("Adieu my lorde my love so fayre of face / Adieu my turtyll dove frende of hewe," B6) and invites a community of female mourners to join her in lamentation, and to lament her death: "Ye vertuous women tender of nature / Full of pyte and of compassyon / Resorte I pray you unto my sepulture / To synge my dyinge with grete devocyon" (B5). This address reflects Mary's traditional role in collective mourning (as one of the three Maries), and points outward toward readers – in Markham's judgment ("And Marie shewes to maids and matrones both, / How they should wepe"), specifically female readers – to establish a community of mourners whose empathetic Passion, their excessive but acceptable grief, unites them spiritually with Christ. In J. C.'s portrait of the communal sorrow of Mary and the Virgin (who is "like the dead, or deathes palle wife"), mourning is a marriage consummated in the grave:

Shall you and I (deare Ladie) plight our troth,
And wed our selves to sorrowes restles bed;
Our love and ioye is taken from us both,
And we are lefte for to bewale the dead.¹⁰⁹

If the embalmed figure of sorrowful Magdalene seems constructed for the sake of establishing internal, masculine mourning, she also embodies a physical intimacy with Christ which serves as a model for Christian fellowship, for a community based upon the rituals of collective female mourning. Sweetnam makes this clear in his handling of Christ's tears at Lazarus' grave. Rather than the episode's conventional deployment to correct excessive female mourning with moderation, Sweetnam offers it as an *exemplum* of the affective bond between Mary and the Savior, and of the persuasive power of women's tears:

But when the shining lame of Eternity cast his beautifull countenance upon that watry cloud [Mary], it did not turne the cloud into a bright and gladsome

hew, but rather (O Miracle!) was himselfe invested with a cloud of grieffe, & lacrymatus est Jesu, and Jesus wept. O beautiful teares of Blessed Magdalen unto the which Christ Jesus joynes his tears! O strange Adamant of divine love of our devout Pilgrime, who draweth water from the rocke, and teares from Christ himselfe!¹¹⁰

From this point of view, female mourning is not merely justified, but sanctified and able not only to mourn, but also to raise, the dead.

III

Aemilia Lanyer's lyric retelling of Christ's passion, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, presents a "map of Death" to a community of mourning women constructed by the text itself. The centrality of women's mourning to the narrative is expressed on the title page: "*Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum, Containing, 1 The Passion of Christ. 2 Eves Apologie in defence of Women. 3 The Teares of the Daughters of Jerusalem. 4 The Salutation and Sorrow of the Virgine Marie*" (1). Numerous dedicatory poems praising noblewomen from whom Lanyer sought patronage¹¹¹ invite these women, like sisters of mourning Magdalene, to anoint and embrace Christ's body, already entombed in their hearts:

Therefore (good Madame) in your heart I leave
 His perfect picture, where it shall stand,
 Deeply engraved in that holy shrine,
 Environed with Love and Thoughts divine.

There may you see him as a God in glory,
 And as a man in miserable case;
 There may you reade his true and perfect storie,
 His bleeding body there you may embrace,
 And kisse his dying cheekes with teares of sorrow,
 With joyfull grieffe, you may intreat for grace;
 And all your prayers, and your almes-deeds
 May bring to stop his cruell wounds that bleeds.

(108)

Lanyer's poetics of mourning are deeply indebted to the discourses of female lament current in her culture and to the aesthetics of female lamentation, with its attendant strategy of embalming the female body of mourning, governing the tears of Magdalene. But she revises these commonplaces, rewriting Magdalene's metaphoric embalming and entombment in the image of women's restorative tears as a balm. "The oyles of Mercie, Charitie, and Faith" (106) enact the body's healing and,

ultimately, its resurrection, no longer preserving the body *in* death, but freeing it *from* death: “These pretious balmes doe heale his grievous wounds” (107). Lanyer also reverses the devaluation of mourning as feminine when, incorporating Mary Magdalene’s excessive but exemplary grief into her text, she represents female lament both as the basis of a privileged relationship between women mourners and Christ, and as sanctified by that communion. In her address “To all vertuous Ladies in generall,” Lanyer recasts Magdalene’s embalming of Christ as the ritual anointing of the faithful that consecrates these women as priests of Israel, and as gifts of the Magi now offered by grieving women: “Annoynt your haire with *Aarons* pretious oyle, / And bring your palmes of vict’ry in your hands . . . / Sweet odours, mirrhe, gum, aloes, frankincense, / Present that King who di’d for your offence” (14). United with the *corpus Christi* in death and in the afterlife, these sanctified mourners “flie from dull and sensuall earth, / Whereof at first your bodies formed were” (15). Thus Magdalene’s marriage to Christ in the grave becomes the mystical marriage of the Church and Christ: “Take this faire Bridegroom,” Lanyer advises the ladies, “in your soules pure bed” (20).

The erotic language of the Song of Songs infuses Lanyer’s poem, as it does the tears of Magdalene, but adorns not the eroticized female church as lovers of Christ, but Christ as “dying lover” (33). Christ’s crucified corpse expresses his love for the specifically female faithful: “Which I present (deare Ladie) to your view, / Upon the Crosse depriv’d of life or breath, / To judge if ever Lover were so true, / To yeeld himselfe unto such shamefull death” (105).¹¹² Indeed, the female witnesses to the Passion, whom Lanyer conducts to the foot of the cross, intimate with the mourning Maries and the maimed Christ, are asked both to mourn the brutalization of Christ’s dying body and to learn desire for his restored corpse, anointed and attended by mourning angels:¹¹³

No Dove, no Swan, nor Iv’rie could compare
 With this faire corps, when, ‘twas by death imbrac’d;
 No rose, nor vermillion halfe so faire
 As was that pretious blood that interlac’d
 His body, which bright Angels did attend,
 Waiting on him that must to Heaven ascend.

In whom is all that Ladies can desire;
 If Beauty, who hath bin more faire than he?
 If Wisedome, doth not all the world admire
 The depth of his, that cannot searched be?

If wealth, if honour, fame, or Kingdoms store,
Who ever liv'd that was possest of more?
(39-40)

Drawing on the aesthetics of Magdalene's opening in her tears, Lanyer performs a textual preservation of the *corpus Christi* which understands embalming not as the art of death, but as the art of life.

A pair of blazons further objectifies and eroticizes Christ's dualistic body in Lanyer's revision of the female mourner embalmed in grief.¹¹⁴ In the first blazon, the ladies are asked to gaze upon the mournful image of the body in death:

His arms dis-joynted, and his legges hang downe,
His alabaster breast, his bloody side,
His members torne, and on his head a Crowne
Of sharpest Thorns, to satisfie for pride:
Anguish and Paine doe all his Sences drowne,
While they his holy garments do divide:
His bowells drie, his heart full fraught with griefe,
Crying to him that yeelds him no reliefe.
(101)

The second blazon, drawing heavily on the Song of Songs, supplements the first with the highly artful image of the resurrected Savior:

This is that Bridegroom that appeares so faire,
So sweet, so lovely in his Spouses sight,
That unto Snowe we may his face compare,
His cheekes like skarlet, and his eyes so bright.
...
His head is likened to the finest gold,
His curled lockes so beauteous to behold.
...
His cheekes are beds of spices, flowers sweet;
His lips, like Lillies, dropping downe pure mirrhe,
Whose love, before all worlds we doe preferre.
(107)

The figurative dismemberment of the body in the blazons and the transformation of the flesh into precious objects (alabaster, gold, spices, myrrh) recall Magdalene's embalmed heart and her transformation into balm. In Lanyer's handling, however, this spiritual embalming is not performed on the female mourner's body, but attends the male body being mourned.

She retains the empathy between female lament and its male object, but while male authors entomb and eroticize the female body of mourning as an external emblem of internal, masculine grief, Lanyer displays the textually embalmed body of Christ – to borrow Greenhill’s phrase and return the art of embalming to women’s hands – as “an Emblem of the Resurrection.”

As for the female body in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, it is, like Wager’s Magdalene, dressed for salvation, first by donning mourning garments and then, newly arrayed for the bridal, by casting them off. The poem begins with the image of the night sky as clothed in mourning, “Then will I tell of that sad blacke fac’d Night, / Whose mourning Mantle covered Heavenly Light” (65), an image that delivers readers to an inaugural echo of Christ’s scriptural suffering in Gethsemane: “That very Night our Saviour was betrayed.”¹¹⁵ Similarly, the Countess of Cumberland’s piety is figured in “the sack-cloth [she] do’st weare both night and day / . . . Which [she] shak’st off when mourning time is past, / That royall robes [she] may’st put on at last” (116). In the poem’s opening moments, “vertuous Ladies” are arrayed in “wedding garments” of “purple scarlet white” (12), colors which “celebrate Christ’s passion,”¹¹⁶ while at its close, the Countess exchanges her mourning garments and appears, “Deckt in those colours which our Saviour chose: / The purest colours both of White and Red” – as a marginal note explains, “Colours of Confessors & Martirs” (129). Lanyer’s post-ascensional view of the Passion with its certainty, so unlike Mary Magdalene’s, of resurrection safeguards the purity and modesty of the poem’s inscribed community of female mourners. She thus replaces the physical, sexual body of mourning with the emblazoned body of Christ as the poem’s central metaphor, emblem, and work of art.

Lanyer’s use of the embalmed male body expands ultimately to authorize her activities as writer. Her frequent images of Christ’s body as the text itself suggest this: “Thy Soule,” she explains to the Countess, “desires that he may be the Booke, / Whereon thine eyes continually may looke” (109), and elsewhere, “your soule may reade / Salvation, while he (dying Lord) doth bleed” (32). As the *corpus Christi* is literalized in Lanyer’s literary corpus, she gains authority from it, presenting her text as the embodiment of Christ, preserved in precious balms, and herself as a female Magus, bearing gifts:¹¹⁷

For having neither rich pearles of India, nor fine gold of Arabia . . . Arramaticall Gums, incense, and sweet odours, which were presented by those Kingly Philosophers to the babe Jesus I present unto you even our Lord Jesus himselfe . . . The

sweet incense, balsums, odours, and gummess that flowes from that beautifull tree of Life, sprung from the root of *Jessie*, which is so super-excellent that it giveth grace to the meanest & most unworthy hand that will undertake to write thereof; neither can it receive any blemish thereby. (34–5)

Lanyer's "unworthy hand" is empowered by the balms distilled from Christ's body to present the "Lord Jesus himselfe." Her poem, like Markham's narrative of Mary Magdalene, becomes a "balme of troubled mind," enabled not by the embalmed body of female mourning but by the body of Christ, opened and objectified as the book itself.

Lanyer's validation of her authorial voice through its association with the transubstantiated *corpus Christi*, present in and as the book, is mirrored in her narrative of the Passion and women's roles within it. Her address "To the Vertuous Reader" famously condemns men who slander women as "such . . . that dishonoured Christ his Apostles and Prophets, putting them to shamefull deaths" (48). Women, on the other hand, enjoy a special place of privilege in relation to Christ:

it pleased our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, without the assistance of man . . . to be begotten of a woman, nourished of a woman, obedient to a woman; and that he healed women, comforted women: yea, even when he was in his greatest agonie and bloodie sweat, going to be crucified, and also in the last houre of his death, tooke care to dispose of a woman: after his resurrection, appeared first to a woman, sent a woman to declare his most glorious resurrection to the rest of his Disciples. (49–50)

This hierarchy of gender is apparent throughout the poem, reaching its most polemical moment in "Eves Apologie in defence of Women," which exonerates Eve for her part in the Fall and informs men that, "Her weaknesse did the Serpents words obey; / But you in malice Gods deare Sonne betray" (86):

Whom, if unjustly you condemne to die,
Her sinne was small, to what you doe commit;
All mortall sinnes that doe for vengeance crie,
Are not to be compared unto it:

...

If one weake woman simply did offend,
This sinne of yours, hath no excuse, nor end.
(86–7)

Lanyer not only censures the Passion's male villains but also criticizes the Disciples for their lack of constancy: "Those deare Disciples that

he most did love,” she complains, “were earth, / Which made them apt to flie, and fit to fall: / Though they protest they never will forsake him, / They do like men, when dangers overtake them” (78). While men, even the Apostles, are “earth,” and thus “apt to flie,” the women of the Passion, “flie from dull and sensuall earth.” If men are Christ killers in Lanyer’s poem, women, including the author and readers, are empathetic mourners:

When spightfull men with torments did oppresse
 Th’afflicted body of this innocent Dove,
 Poore women seeing how much they did transgresse,
 By teares, by sighes, by cries intreat, may prove,
 What may be done among the thickest presse,
 They labor still these tyrants hearts to move;
 In pitie and compassion to forebeare
 Their whipping, spurning, tearing of his haire.
(94)

Lanyer’s “Teares of the Daughters of Jerusalem” clearly recalls other textual communities of female mourners (Mavericke’s comparison of the virgins of England to the Daughters of Israel, for instance, or Elizabeth Stuart’s invocation of the Daughters of Britaine in “The Queenes Lamentation”). Moreover, the central place given to the Virgin’s sorrows in Lanyer’s poem repairs the maternal mourner’s eroded status in post-Reformation religious works and arts of dying. Lanyer’s Virgin appears in “griefes extreme” (94), in excessive but justified sorrow: “How canst thou choose (faire Virgin) then but mourne, / When this sweet offspring of thy body dies, / When thy faire eies beholds his bodie torne, / The peoples fury, hears the womens cries” (99–100). In the midst of reporting the Virgin’s grief, she recalls the Annunciation to note that a woman is the agent by which Christ gave “his snow-white Weed for ours in change / Our mortall garment in a skarlet Die, / Too base a roabe for Immortalitie” (99). A similar conflation of the Virgin’s sorrows and the Annunciation appears in Protestant *artes moriendi*, when the dying Christian is advised not to call upon the Virgin as mediatrix but to imitate her humility at the Annunciation: “saye with the good Virgine Marye, behold thy servant (O Lorde) be it unto me accordinge to thy word.”¹¹⁸ Lanyer’s quotation of Mary’s song of thanksgiving, the Magnificat (“All people Blessed call, and spread thy fame,” 95), also asserts this merger of the Annunciation and the Virgin’s sorrows, implying that Mary’s speech might validate Lanyer’s. The poem affirms the Virgin’s privileged status

as mourner, and as speaker, and expands her position to embrace the community of female mourners, including the author. Mary's enabling role in the incarnation is a model for the enabling tears of Jerusalem's daughters. In both cases, women enjoy a special fellowship with Christ based on their empathetic suffering with him.

Much as Sweetnam emphasizes the affective bond established between Magdalene and Christ by their shared tears at Lazarus' tomb, Lanyer returns to a biblical moment in order to assert the marriage in tears of Jerusalem's daughters and Christ, and to authorize her own textual performance:

Thrice happy women that obtained such grace
 From him whose worth the world could not containe;
 Immediately to turne about his face,
 As not remembring his greate griefe and paine,
 To comfort you, whose teares powr'd forth apace
 On *Floras* bankes, like shewers of Aprils raine:
 Your cries inforced mercie, grace, and love
 From him, whom greatest Princes could not moove:

 To speake one word, nor once to lift his eyes
 Unto proud *Pilate*, no nor *Herod*, king;
 By all the Questions that they could devise,
 Could make him answere to no manner of thing;
 Yet these poore women, by their pitious cries
 Did moove their Lord, their Lover, and their King,
 To take compassion, turne about, and speake
 To them whose hearts were ready now to breake.
(93)

Recalling Sweetnam's praise of the "strange Adamant," Magdalene's sorrow ("O beautiful teares of Blessed Magdalen unto the which Christ Jesus joynes his tears!"), Lanyer exclaims, "Most blessed daughters of Jerusalem, / Who found such favour in your Saviors sight" (93). Lanyer's use of the episode revises the biblical source (Christ's admonition of the women in Luke 23:27–31), which is more a grim prophecy than a consolation: "But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming in which they shall say, Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck." In Lanyer's hands, the daughters' tears, like Magdalene's, draw forth Christ's speech, and the speech itself – its fact rather than its content – convenes and comforts a community of mourners authorized by

their affective bond with him.¹¹⁹ Lanyer also revises the episode's use by reformers to justify moderate mourning and condemn feminine excess. Mavericke, for example, recounts the moment to prove that "Mourning in measure, in faith and in the feare of God . . . is consonant to the will or law of God,"¹²⁰ while excess is not:

when the women of Jerusalem wept and wayled exceedingly at the crucifying of Christ (& what true Christian could behold the same without weeping) because in their wailing haply they did not consider the true cause of their mourning, which should have been for the miseries that were to come upon them, and their posterity, therefore Christ himselfe reproveth their weeping.¹²¹

In Mavericke's account, the daughters of Jerusalem, like Magdalene, are unaware of the Resurrection. Their mourning is unlawful because it inappropriately, excessively mourns the body, ignoring spiritual salvation. In *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, however, the mystical union of the female Church and Christ is anticipated in the daughters' union with the Savior in mutual sorrow. Christ both becomes a female mourner in the company of others and licenses their tears. The episode, like Mary Magdalene's anointing of the living savior, anticipates the celestial marriage of female souls to their lover, Christ. Thus the female mourners at the foot of the cross blend imperceptibly with the inscribed community of mourners in Lanyer's text: the Countess, the "Deere Spouse of Christ" (101) joins the daughters in witnessing the Crucifixion, while the "pretious balmes" of the three Maries bleed into the "pretious oyntments" with which the female Church, dressed "in those rich attires / Of Patience, Love, Long suffering, Voide of strife" (106), attends the resurrected body of its Bridegroom.

A source for Lanyer's treatment of the daughters' tears may be found in Thomas Playfere's *The Meane in Mourning*, a sermon preached at the parish church of St. Mary's Spittle in 1595 (that is, in the London neighborhood immediately adjacent to Lanyer's home parish of St. Botolph, Bishopsgate, where she was baptized in 1569 and married in 1592), and published in five editions between 1595 and 1616.¹²² The sermon explicates Luke 22:28, "Weepe not for mee, but weepe for your selves," offering a gendering of the Passion that parallels Lanyer's. "Foure sorts of people were about Christ, when Christ was about his passion," Playfere writes: executioners tormented him; the Jews mocked him; lookers-on marked him; and "well-willers . . . lamented him." "Now although it be very likely that among these his *well-willers*, divers, godly men wept for him," he reasons, "yet it is certaine, both that *more women* wept then men,

and that the *women more wept* than the men. *More women: more weeping.*¹²³ He explains this immoderate weeping by, startlingly, attributing women's tears not to their essential, bodily weakness but to the cultural and providential functions they served: "*More women wept* than men, partly by the permission of men, who thought that the womens weeping came rather from weaknes in themselves, then from kindness towards Christ. Partly by the providence of God, who suffered *more women* to weepe than men, that the women, which bewailed Christes death, might condemne the men, which procured it."¹²⁴ Moreover, he defends the daughters' tears in imagery that anticipates Lanyer's: "And had not these women then far greater reason to lament the death of Christ who made every one of them a wedding garment, wherein he did marrie them unto himselfe . . . who cloathed every one of them with Scarlet, and with the royall robe of his righteousnesse, yea and gave his owne deare selfe unto them, that they might put on the Lord Jesus?"¹²⁵ Playfere not only offers a precedent for Lanyer's view that women's tears condemn men's wrong-doing at the Crucifixion, but he also associates the episode with Eden, foreshadowing her defense of Eve: "For the sinne of a woman, was the ruine of man. Therefore the women willingly *wept the more*. That though a woman did most in the second death of the first Adam; yet these might doe least in the first death of the second Adam."¹²⁶

While Playfere's sermon contains tantalizing points of contact with Lanyer's poem, its gendering of mourning is vastly different: Playfere uses the biblical episode to feminize and condemn immoderate grief and to defend mourning in measure. "They to whom Christ here speaketh offend in th'excesse," he explains, "And so here, Christ . . . sayeth unto them, *weepe not*. Forbidding thereby immoderate weeping, which is condemned *in nature; in reason; in religion.*"¹²⁷ Further stigmatizing women's mourning as excessive and, conversely, immoderate mourning as feminine, the sermon presents masculine wisdom as a balm and comfort that counters Lanyer's presentation of women's tears as balm. Thus he concludes, "if wee must not weep immoderately for the death of Christ, then we must not greeve our selves greatly for the death of any Christian."¹²⁸ Playfere surveys moderate biblical mourners, including "Christ for Lazarus his friend," to correct the daughters' tears and to prove that, "It is great folly and childishness to weepe immoderately for the dead, and that it is on the other side a hie point of *wisdome* to be moderate in this matter."¹²⁹ Rather than approving women's public mourning, as Playfere's opening passage promises and as Lanyer's poem enacts, *The Meane in Mourning* uses feminine tears to support an orthodox

gendering of grief that silences women's excesses and authorizes the moderate examples of their male governors.

Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum, however, illustrates both Lanyer's indebtedness to and reversal of the aesthetics of embalming current in the tears of Magdalene and early modern treatments of women's mourning. The post-Reformation censure of feminine grief as physical, immoderate, and sexual casts Magdalene's excessive but exemplary tears as external performances of grief that enable internal, moderate male mourning and the potency of the text as balm. For Lanyer, excessive mourning is both desirable and spiritual, since the anointing of Christ's body becomes an emblem of resurrection and a restorative tool in the hands of the chaste female Church. Thus the period's ideological demarcation of feminine grief as a uniquely volatile emotional site energizes Lanyer's textual work of mourning, allowing her to transvalue women's tears as tokens of the affective and spiritual bonds between themselves and Christ which sanctify women's speech. Her feminization of mourning responds to and releases the affective power of the mourning woman – a power embalmed within the static figure of feminized grief – by opening the *corpus Christi* within her map of Death. Released from self-entombment, feminine mourning supports Lanyer's convocation of a tearful but triumphant community of female saints.