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1
The Ritual of Elegiac Rhetoric

The rhetorical work of building a community of shared loss drags against elegists' desire to individuate themselves as writers. Elegy holds exemplarity and tradition, the consolatory promise of the continuity of the same, in tension with the poet's assertions of his or her particularity or difference. To evaluate the demands of tradition, this chapter will focus on the meaning of the term 'elegy' and its derivation from epideictic and deliberative rhetoric. Elegy could also be understood as a particular metre, the elegiac distich. A brief discussion of the perceived faults of this metre in the early modern period will pave the way for a return to the subject of prosody in Chapter 6. As a genre, elegy is identified by its content: praise and lament. The forces shaping lament will be investigated in Chapter 2. Here, elegy's commonalities of purpose and utility with epideictic reveal the social nature of praise, discussed in Section 1.2. Praise was perceived to improve the moral character of both writer and reader, orator and listener. This contributed to the placement of rhetoric at the centre of the early modern humanist curriculum. Section 1.3 scrutinizes a particular locus of elegiac production: the school and the university. These competitive learning environments also trained writers to consider occasional poetry as an opportunity for self-fashioning and display, Section 1.4 contends. Agonistic displays drew upon the openness of epideictic to its opposite, censure, to expand the critique of moral decadence typical of funeral sermons into a castigation of other poets. These elegiac criticisms are the subject of Section 1.5, which reveals how the material conditions of production – in particular, its venality – are projected by poets onto their competitors, but can end up indicting the entire genre.

1.1 Elegy: A note on terms

Poems both of lament and love – funerary poetry, and amorous lyrics in imitation of Ovid and Propertius – were called 'elegies' in the early modern period. Though the two types were distinct in content, they did retain some stylistic similarities: both could include self-defence or criticism of contemporaries, critical tendencies which will be particularly evident in many of the elegies discussed in this book.[1] Elegies are often thus characterised as *genera mixta*, poems which cohere from the blending of several traditions.[2]

Despite the ambiguities typical of 'elegy' as a generic category, the term usefully incorporates a larger range of forms and memorial practices than the epitaph, an epigram projected as or suited to monumental inscription, or the clearly funerary term 'epicede', which in the classical tradition refers specifically to formal songs sung in the presence of the corpse. Julius Caesar Scaliger had distinguished between the funerary genres in a similar way: an epicede is to be spoken over a body as yet unburied, the 'epitaphium recens' is produced for a recently buried body, and 'epitaphium anniversarium' commemorates the dead at yearly intervals after death, and so omits the lament.[3] But poets could use the terms interchangeably in the early modern period, as Henry Peacham acknowledges: 'The difference between an *Epicede* and *Epitaph* is (as Servius teacheth) that the *Epicedium* is proper to the body while it is unburied, the *Epitaph* otherwise; yet our Poets stick not to take one for the other.'[4] George Puttenham's reflections on the origin of the term 'obsequies' – that 'the lamenting of deathes was chiefly at the very burialls of the dead, also at monethes mindes and longer times, by custome continued yearely'[5] – show how the different elegiac genres commemorated the temporal processes of death and drying of the corpse, and of reconciliation of the bereaved with the community, processes celebrated in the folk and Catholic funerary rituals declining since the Reformation. Despite the prohibition of intercessory rituals, the seventeenth century still saw the composition of famous 'anniversary' poems by John Donne and Henry King.

In terms of metre, 'elegiac' normally refers to distichs consisting of a dactylic hexameter and a pentameter line. This was not the form of the most ancient funerary inscriptions, however, which are now known to be hexameter verses.[6] The epic connotations of hexameter made the elegiac distich appropriate for serious topics and 'passionate meditations' (both on love and on death).[7] It could also suggest the dynamics of public performance, giving the impression 'that the poet,

like the old minstrel, is addressing a circle of listeners'.[8] However, in the early modern period this sociability tended to be produced by tone, content and context rather than by metre. Funerary elegies were not conventionally associated with a particular metre; as a genre they were more frequently identified by their content, as when Philip Sidney listed 'the lamenting Elegiack' among his eight types of poetry.[9] When Sidney himself died, his elegists employed a variety of metres to honour Sidney's own versatile prosody in the *Arcadia*. In the seventeenth century, however, most elegies were written in rhyming couplets.[10]

The hobbled distich did not translate well to English. Puttenham described it as 'pitious', 'placing a limping Pentameter, after a lusty Exameter, which made it go dolourously';[11] Ben Jonson translating Horace's '*versibus impariter iunctis*' called the elegiac couplet 'Verse unequall match'd', in which

> first sowre Laments,
> After, mens Wishes, crown'd in their events,
> Were also clos'd.[12]

Jonson, who identifies 'sowre Laments' as the original topic for the elegiac metre, attempted a few Ovidian elegies, but for the most part avoided the genre. Both in form and in content, the elegy jarred with his laureate reputation – would Jonson write 'An elegie? no, muse; yt askes a straine / to loose, and Cap'ring, for thy stricter veyne.'[13]

1.2 The roots of elegy in epideictic

As a genre largely determined by its content, elegy could draw on the compositional principles of the prose genres, especially epideictic. Several excellent monographs on elegy's historical development and relation to classical and humanist rhetoric have already been written, and it is not my intention to repeat them here.[14] A few basic characteristics should be established, however. As a 'mode of enunciation' whose function was determined by its pragmatic context, elegy was associated with epideictic in ancient and early modern rhetorical treatises, and especially with funeral sermons and secular funeral orations.[15] But to praise, an orator must also persuade. Before discussing the ethical utility of praise, we should first clarify the relationship between elegy and deliberative rhetoric.

While Aristotle's resolving of the 'modes' into forensic, deliberative and demonstrative kinds continued to influence medieval and

Renaissance rhetoricians,[16] Aristotle himself recognised the possibility of these categories overlapping. Quintilian grouped deliberative together with epideictic as forms of oratory which do not require the audience to assess the justice or injustice of a legal claim.[17] Elegists use the strategies of deliberative rhetoric to persuade readers to grieve (or not to grieve). Thomas Wilson's letter to Katherine Brandon consoling her on the death of her sons Henry and Charles are given in his *Arte of Rhetorique* as examples of deliberative address.[18] Elegies, like funeral orations, combined persuasions against grief with warnings derived from the model of the deceased and the necessity of their deaths. The view represented by Isaiah 57:1 that 'mercifull men are taken away, and no man understandeth that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come' often provokes sermonists and elegists to use the occasion of a death to condemn the degeneracy of the age. In an elegy collected by Herbert Paston, God is said to have intended the 'death of the Countesse of Rivers' to 'upbrade our masking age', 'When vertues self was growne a crime'.[19] Jeremy Taylor declares that Lady Frances, Countess of Carberry, died because 'The age is very evil and deserved her not; but because it is so evil, it hath the more need to have such lives preserved in memory to instruct our piety, or upbraid our wickedness.'[20] In funeral elegies, similar critiques encourage readers to reform. Hardison observes that in Protestant funeral sermons laments are followed by a *consolatio* which reminds listeners of God's mercy.[21] Elegists also rail against the cruelty of providence, the frailties and iniquities of man, and the temptations to evil, before concluding with a reminder of heavenly bliss. This arc is apparent in Ben Jonson's poem on Venetia Digby, which begins with an emotional lamentation for her 'fall', in which 'I sum up mine own breaking, and wish all'. The poet rebukes his own 'blasphemy'; persuading himself not to despair, he can laterally exhort her family not to mourn her through an elaborate *ekphrasis* on the joys of heaven.

But it was not merely the excoriation of contemporary wickedness which encouraged listeners to reform. Praise of the dead was also intended to persuade. Barbara Lewalski observes that since Plato, rhetoricians seeking to define epideictic had focussed on virtue as the legitimate object of praise. Menander and the *Ad Herennium* distinguished the three *topoi* of praise as the goods of nature, fortune and character. The first two were external and accidental, and 'almost all Renaissance theorists agreed with Cicero and Quintilian that the goods of nature or fortune are not properly objects of praise in themselves, but should be treated chiefly as means of displaying the subject's virtue in using them rightly'.[22] Elegies, like other works of praise, were socially

useful because they encouraged readers to emulate the praiseworthy.[23] Even Plato, despite banishing poetry from his Republic, allowed for the composition of 'hymns to the gods and eulogies to good people',[24] because such hymns could teach the young to admire and achieve virtue, justice and nobility. The student who memorises 'works of good poets' finds there 'numerous exhortations, many passages describing in glowing terms good men of old, so that the child is inspired to imitate them and become like them'.[25] Aristotle also promoted the utility of poetry, for 'Young and Magnanimous men' tend to emulate the virtues praised in others, and thereby to improve society along with their own characters.[26] Following Aristotle, Erasmus made imitation the keystone of his theories of pedagogy, because 'Nature has given small children as a special gift the ability to imitate'[27] which teachers must direct towards the good. Memorising the rules of rhetoric also helped the young to understand and imitate 'good authors', according to Melanchthon: 'For no-one can become a successful author without imitating, yet no imitation is feasible without knowledge of the necessary precepts of rhetoric.'[28]

Hobbes summarises in his notes on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* that '*Prayse*, is a kind of inverted *Precept*.'[29] Enticing readers to admire the goods of character, praise encourages ethical development more effectively than laws or rules can. Scaliger, who also recognised poetry's conservative influence, comments that 'Aristotle ruled that since poetry is comparable to that civic institution which leads us to happiness, happiness being nothing other than perfect action, the poet does not lead us to imitate character, but action.'[30] Like Scaliger, Lucius Cary, the second Viscount Falkland, associates praise with masculine action in his praise of Ben Jonson. Jonson dispensed 'the Bayes of *Vertue*' and acted as 'the scourge of *Vice*'. His poems did 'our youth to noble actions raise, / Hoping [to earn] the meed of his immortal praise' (*JonsVirb* 3). Jonson and Falkland shared the humanist belief that the ennobling effects of praise contributed to the construction of a meritocratic society. Jonson had himself asserted in his elegiac ode on Henry Morison that 'love of greatness, and of good' 'knits brave minds and manners, more than blood'.[31] It is the shared regard for active virtue, not lineage, which joined these friends in 'union', and which also united the Tribe of Ben. As he writes in his advice to the children of Kenelm and Venetia Digby on the death of their mother, 'virtue alone is true nobility'.[32] Elevating the goods of character over fortune, panegyrists like Jonson revealed that even the most humble subject could become renowned. By distributing praise, these writers were working to improve society.[33] Praise also ennobled

the praise-giver. In order to be persuasive, the rhetorician must convince his listeners that he is trustworthy and competent. This contributes to the pedagogical utility of praise, to which we will return shortly.

In Falkland's celebration of 'noble actions', we can hear a warlike echo of a more particular purpose of classical praise. This purpose is revealed by Polybius' description of the Roman tradition of actors wearing funeral masks representing famous men. He muses that 'There could not easily be a more ennobling spectacle for a young man who aspires to fame and virtue.' Like Jonson's pen, mask ceremonies and funeral orations inspire 'young men ... to endure every suffering for the public welfare in the hope of winning the glory that attends on brave men'.[34] Keith Hopkins notes that such rituals subordinated individual self-interest to the common good, inspiring young men to heroic action 'in the hope of bringing glory to the family line'.[35] Monumental art, funerals and poetry paid the wages of excellence in glorious immortality. They also ensured that glory should serve the family and the state, not the fallen individual. As Chapter 6 will reveal, elegists not only counselled the bereaved to resist effeminate mourning, but also contributed to the maintenance of a militarised society through the praise of active virtue.

When writing on women and children, who rarely had the opportunity to show active virtue, elegists often focus on the goods of fortune such as family lineage. Comparatively few elegies for children were published, and those usually commemorate the child's unrealised potential as heir to a family title. An elegy on the Duke of Cambridge, who died in his infancy in 1677, claims 'We did it's Father's mighty *Genius* spy' in the child's gaze.[36] Because of the status of the family, the child is mourned by all, rather than just by his mother; it is the family, rather than the individual, which is honoured by the poet. The poem focusses on what the child might have become. There is little reflection on his particularity, or the impact of his death on his family. Similarly, elegies for women often focus on their families and on their faithfulness and virtue, rather than on their more specific qualities.

But not all praise was based on general categories of masculine virtue. Dennis Kay has argued that tributes to exemplary virtues in Renaissance funerary elegy were giving way to 'the affective communication of a unique loss'.[37] One unusual example of detailed and affective portraiture is the 'Funerall Eligy' on Cecilia Ridgeway, the Countess of Londonderry.[38] Its author promises 'a Playne True and Sumary Description of Her Life and Death without welt, Gard, or Embrodery'. This homely metaphor suggests that the anonymous author may be a woman; the poet identifies himself or herself as someone who wrote 'not for Publique

view' and 'who knew Her best and longest, and loved Her Best and Longest'. Rather than telling readers what women should be, this poem portrays Lady Cecilia as she was. It moves through the topoi of praise, recording that with the death of her brother Henry Macwilliam, Lady Cecilia and her four sisters stood to inherit the family estate. It describes her breeding and education, noting that Queen Elizabeth taught Cecilia to play 'the Bandora and the Lute'. While the care of the monarch (for a woman named after the patron saint of music) would be significant to any elegist, this detail reaffirms female social and patronage bonds which might have assumed special significance for a female poet.

Unlike many other elegies for women, this poem presents Cecilia's personal characteristics, not all of which render her as the ideal female familiar from funeral sermons. We learn that she 'was most adverse, to any Chainge'; that she refused to dissemble, to the point of seeming wilful; that she was a careful hoarder of all useful things; and that the 'word, obedyence, to be Prest, on Wyves, [^ (though merily)], It Pleased Her not mutch'. She liked her children to read to her as she did her domestic work. She injured her forehead in a coach accident, and suffered in crossing the Irish Sea, where her husband Sir Thomas was treasurer under Sir George Cary. Their courtship had been amiable, but perhaps she sought to temper Sir Thomas' ambitions by asserting the priority of family life: 'for Building, Clyming, so much Publycke Service doing, as might undo the Private, / She, did oft tymes (besyds advise) with dovelike = private = murumuring somewhat vary.'

The poet shows knowledge of contemporary medicine, listing the home remedies the Countess kept on hand for the treatment of her family and servants:

> As Corall, Seed-Perle, Bezar, Musk, Civett, Amber Greece
>   and Irish Slate
> Harts Horne and Unycorne, Crabs Clawes, Crampe curing
>   Hares Bones, and
> Methridate which being well aply'd, Seldome or never
>   came to Late
> besyds Hadocks Head Bones, Stags Marrow, Lemons,
>   Pomerytorons, and Pomegranetts
> hardly to be had in any Marchants Shops, much less
>   Contry Marketts . . .

This level of detail suggests careful observation of the Countess' kitchen cabinet; perhaps the elegist herself shares these medical skills.

Likewise, the poet lists the Countess' domestic chores, which included 'Tent worke, Turkey Worke, Damasking, Sheets, Blanketts, Coverlets, / Cushions, Coverd Stooles, Chayrs, Testers, Curtens and foote Carpetts ...' and so on. Of these 'good usefull works of Huswiffry / She had a Chiefe quick Hand in the Best, and in the Rest, She gave a Speciall Directory.' Public elegies for women by male poets tend to favour women's categorical virtues over details of their daily activities. But this poem relishes the domestic arcana for their own sake, documenting a specific life experience in the specialised vocabulary of female domestic labour.

This elegy instructs the reader in prudent household management, as well as revealing some of the private tensions experienced by headstrong women in the early modern period. It conveys public status to private, domestic and gendered labour, mourning the loss of a nuanced and highly individuated person, rather than exploring the merits associated with her vocational or social status. It describes a separate institution of learning (the home) and female forms of knowledge (sewing, medicine, etc.), building a domestic repertoire through material details rather than abstract qualities. Morally engaged and didactic, the poem is nonetheless distinct in its strategies of persuasion from other male-authored examples of epideictic rhetoric in the period.

1.3 Training up scholars: Elegiac rhetoric and schools

In this elegy, domestic knowledge is revealed as a kind of learning particular to women, just as the skills of rhetoric acquired in schools and universities are particular to men. Tzvetan Todorov argues that 'in a society, the recurrence of certain discursive properties is institutionalised, and individual texts are produced and perceived in relation to the norm constituted by this codification'.[39] The 'playne' elegy without 'embroidery' emerges from a particular institution, that of the home. But the properties of the elegiac genre which we have been discussing are normally 'institutionalised' and 'codified' by the early modern school, an institution from which women like Cecilia were excluded.

Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine comment that schools sought 'to produce a total routineness of imaginative writing by reducing its variety systematically' to types of verbal composition. 'Each type is expected to become second nature to the student, so that his public utterances will be pre-shaped to the requirements of public debate – the lynch-pin skill for social and political life.'[40] This rather stern Weberian account of routinisation highlights the social utility of rhetorical exercises. But it

also undervalues the usefulness to learning of pleasure as well as discipline, which was so often recognised by early modern pedagogues. Poetry, a category which included most fictionalisations, could be especially pleasurable. Scaliger commented that imitation 'is not the end of poetry', but an intermediate to the end which is 'the giving of instruction in pleasurable form, for poetry teaches, and does not simply amuse'.[41] This idea that poetry sugars the pill of moral instruction can be found in many early modern treatises, from translations of Horace's *Ars Poetica* to Sidney's *Defence of Poesie*. The empathy and sorrow which elegies elicit could also be regarded as a kind of pleasure. This indulgence of sorrow in the imaginative freedom of poetry will be examined in Chapter 2.

Poetry was not just useful because it gave pleasure: it was also morally effective. According to humanist educators, virtue and decorum were best taught through examples rather than abstract theories.[42] One practical exercise in rhetoric, for example, was the sketching of Theophrastan 'characters'. Following Aristotle (*Rhetoric* ii.12–17), students used characters to generalise about human nature for rhetorical effect. Such exercises directly influenced the production of poetic 'epitaphs', with their emphasis on vocations; but characters were also familiar from sermons, where they were adapted to illustrate ethical premises.[43] This training in ethical generalisation also contributed to the generality of elegiac portraiture.

Students' ability to generalise about character was also developed through the use of commonplace books. Under a selection of usually moral headings, readers compiled and transcribed *sententiae* which they could use later to bulk up their occasional poems. John Brinsley advocated the use of commonplace books 'for more store and variety of matter'. Students could turn 'of a sodaine to matters of all sorts, in the most exquisite and pure Poets: to have some direction both for matter and imitation; whether for Gratulatory verses, Triumphs, Funerals, or whatsoever'.[44] Writing an elegy does not require research into an individual's life so much as a trawl through the commonplaces of consolation and virtue retrieved from other poems. The commonplace book epitomises the active and imitative approach to reading encouraged by early modern educators. Writing elegies could also be part of responsive reading: Roger Lowe, a south Lancashire apprentice, wrote an elegy upon reading Edward Gee's *A Treatise of Prayer and of Divine Providence*, when 'in consideracion of the man's person and gravitie I was posesd with sadnes'.[45] While Lowe's poem commemorates a stranger, Elizabeth Lyttleton's commonplace book includes elegies and epitaphs for famous individuals alongside memorials for her own family. Funerary elegies

and epitaphs made up the bulk of the occasional verses recorded in such notebooks.[46]

Students usually began by writing epistles, embarking on imitations of poetry in the fifth form or above.[47] Cicero's and Seneca's letters offered models for consolation: they show how to manage the bereaved and apply standardised moral observations. Formulary rhetoric like Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique* supplied further examples. Formularies are 'made up of compositions drawn to illustrate rhetorical principles and presented as models for students to imitate in the process of developing themselves for the tasks of communication'.[48] But to become effective communicators, students would have to learn more than rhetorical finesse: they must also develop compassion. Wilson teaches that the consoler should enter into a 'felowshippe of sorowe' with his audience.[49] As Anthony Walker affirms in a funeral sermon, 'their Authority is greatest in comforting the calamitous, who bear a deep share in the same calamity'.[50] Through the *inventio* of sympathy, the speaker claims the authority of shared pain, and joins a community of loss. From there, he or she submits to an exemplary process of self-consolation which other mourners can imitate.[51] To be an effective orator or writer, the student should thus learn to act out the sorrows of condolence. As the introduction suggested, these emotions should be understood as both engendered and hosted by the ritual of rhetoric.

When a member of the community died, students could practice applying classical models to contemporary situations. In Brinsley's dialogue on education, his character Philoponus describes poetry as having 'very commendable use', including 'in occasions of triumph and rejoicing, more ordinarily at the funerals of some worthy personages'; therefore 'it is not amisse to traine up schollars even in this kinde also'. Such practice did not ensure that even teachers were capable of producing a good elegy, however: his interlocutor Spondeus condemns 'such flash and bodge stuffe as are ordinarily in some schooles', and includes himself among

> som Masters, who have thought themselves very profound Poets, who would upon an occasion of a Funerall have written you a sheete or two of verses, as it were of a sydden; yet amongst all those, you should hardly have found one such a Verse as you speake of, unlesse it were stolne; and most of them such, as a judicious Poet would be ready to laugh at, or loath to reade.[52]

Nonetheless, adult authors would sometimes publish their schoolboy exercises and academic verses. Milton's headmaster at St Paul's,

Alexander Gill included boyish funeral poems with his adult compositions; Milton added Latin and English elegies on Cambridge functionaries to his 1645 *Poems*.[53]

Like schools, the universities were regular producers of elegiac poetry, often collected together in tribute volumes. But anthologies did not only emerge in times of mourning. When Elizabeth I visited Oxford, the colleges posted poems on walls and entrances.[54] Such physical displays of text were complemented by printed anthologies drawing contributions from all colleges and ranks. Contributors were usually arranged in order of precedence, with the vice chancellor coming first, college presidents and university dignitaries followed by fellows and then students, in a hierarchical procession which resembled the heraldic funeral. Some colleges dominated the anthological market. Christ Church College, Oxford, in particular was a centre for verse production in the seventeenth century. Christ Church men such as Jasper Mayne, Richard Corbet, William Cartwright, Dudley Digges, John Berkenhead, William Strode, Martin Llewellyn and Nicholas Oldisworth were serial contributors to the university volumes. Cartwright and Mayne were particularly effusive: Cartwright wrote English poems for nine Oxford anthologies, Mayne for eight. Mayne was joined by fellow alumni Henry King and Richard Corbet in contributing an elegy to Donne's *Poems* of 1633. Mayne and King also joined '*Wits* generall Tribe' (*JonsVirb* 42) to pay tribute to Ben Jonson in *Jonsonus Virbius*, the memorial volume published four years later. The volume's editor was Brian Duppa, the former vice chancellor of Oxford under whose auspices many of the Christ Church poets prospered. These two volumes will be discussed at length in Chapter 5. A competitor with the Jonson memorial, and with Jonsonian literary values and political allegiances, was *Justa Edovardo King*. As David Norbrook has elaborated, this volume – best known for its inclusion of Milton's 'Lycidas', discussed briefly below – was also offered by Cambridge poets in the spirit of collegiate competition.[55] The educational context itself could have encouraged contests for self-distinction. Whether in the 'challenges' at Westminster School (examinations where students tried to outstrip each other in the precision and fluency of their Latin grammar) or the tutorial disputations at Oxford and Cambridge, students were taught to exhibit their mastery of rhetoric and thereby to differentiate themselves from their peers.[56] The desire for distinction through performance also animated many elegists, and made the disparagement of competitors an elegiac commonplace. That desire, bred by the educators themselves, is most famously conspicuous in the youthful elegies of John Milton.[57]

1.4 Elegy and self-display

Much has been written about Milton's posture of 'unreadiness' which culminates in the mature production of 'Lycidas'.[58] The elegy calls attention to the poet's youthfulness and his academic situation; it is pervaded by maternal images, including the veneration of Edward King and Milton's alma mater, Cambridge, as that 'self-same hill' on which the young poets were 'nurst'. Whether or not this maternal imagery conveys Milton's grief at the loss of his own mother on 3 April 1637, it affords the young poet, who 'to manhood am arriv'd so near', an opportunity to define himself as a liminal writer, emerging from infancy to the maturity of his epic ambitions. The naming of '*Fame*' as the spur 'to scorn delights, and live laborious days' identifies not only Milton's labours preceding this composition, but also his hopes for the poem. The desire to 'burst out' of asceticism and obscurity 'into sudden blaze' is a desire to be born to fame, and especially to the 'perfect witness of all-judging *Jove*' and approval under the law of the Father. But just as Phoebus 'touch'd my trembling ears' to correct the misapprehension of fame, the 'uncouth Swain' ends the poem when he 'touch't the tender stops of various Quills' and 'twitch't his Mantle blue'. This stilling of hectic, nervous motion resolves the agonistic tensions of each half of the poem, and aligns the fatherly god Apollo with the swain now liberated in his pursuit of 'Pastures new'. As the first person of the poem's opening lines transforms into this independent speaker, capable of embarking on his own journey into the world, so Milton proclaims his own independence. Even the name 'Lycidas', which derives from the Greek *lykideus*, or wolf cub, signals not only King's (and Milton's) youth but also a series of connections to Apollo, the god of poetry from whom the speaker derives his own authority.[59]

But the poem's famous critique of the clergy who 'Creep and intrude and climb into the fold' and fail to feed the 'hungry Sheep', embedded in a pastoral discourse where both the speaker and Lycidas are identified as shepherds, audaciously asserts the poet's prophetic role in criticising ecclesiastical abuses. The transgression against the generic decorum of pastoral elegy with the violence of St Peter's speech is consistent, Norbrook has argued, with Milton's tendency in many of the poems published in 1645 to make political points through modification of genre.[60] The elegy's topical critique also refers backwards to Virgil's fourth Eclogue, not only corroborating Milton's ambitious self-fashioning, but also drawing on the tradition of poetic licence for moralising endorsed elsewhere by the dead laureate Jonson. The pastoral

mode singles out Milton's elegy among the other contributions. In addition to being the genre with which Virgil preceded his epic productions, the pastoral emphasises a temporal apotheosis and renewal in literary form, rather than relying on the stock consolations of Christian piety alone. Ruth Wallerstein argues that 'Lycidas' 'makes use of the power of ritual to absorb man into the experience of the race, to detach him from the disproportion of the moment and draw him into that larger experience which he shares with all men'.[61] For Wallerstein, the secularisation of ritual lament and the promise of renewal in the pastoral mode transport the reader from the privacy of unique sorrow to a communal and ritually shared loss. Though 'Lycidas' can be regarded as exceptional in its violent renewal of pastoral conventions through religious critique, it shares in the elegiac habit of drawing attention to its writer.

Cicero constrained the funeral oration as 'by no means a suitable occasion for parading one's distinction in rhetoric' (*De Oratore* II.lxxiv.341), but seventeenth-century elegists conspicuously ignored that advice. Whether to announce his arrival or to make himself more desirable to potential employers, the elegist often dwells on his own virtues. These can be magnified rather than diminished by his use of the modesty topos. Elias Ashmole interrupts his lament for his mother's decease to recall the glory days:

> When I consulted Men, and happ'ly drew
> From their Converse, Learning and Credit too:
> When Bookes I Courted, and to Joy posest
> Minerva's Beauty, slept in her kind Brest:
> When those faire Mistresses I could behold
> And strike their Eyes with lookes, as safe as bold:
> When noble Speculacions, fil'd my Braine
> With pleas'd Delights; and satisfying Gaine,
> When no Ambitious thoughts, had skill or power,
> To tempt my humble Fortune . . .[62]

Though ostensibly commemorating his lost happiness and paying tribute to the woman who produced him, Ashmole is also advertising his virtues as a scholar, conversationalist and lover. Juliana Schiesari identifies this turn from lamentation to self-fashioning as a commonplace of Renaissance elegy which makes loss 'the enabling condition of [the male subject's] individualistic and otherwise inexplicable genius'.[63]

Nominating themselves as arbiters of virtue also enabled elegists to declare their own assets. Aristotle recommended that the epideictic

rhetorician, in order to be believed, must present himself as a judicious and trustworthy judge of virtue. Both Cicero and Quintilian confirmed that only someone with a personal knowledge of virtue – a good man – could praise goodness.[64] These well-known principles are reflected for example in Owen Feltham's explanation of why 'they that do praise / Desert in others, for themselves plant Bayes': 'For he that praises merit, loves it: thus / Hee's good, for goodnesse thats solicitous.'[65] Elegists prove their virtue by commending virtue, but with a prosodic and rhetorical modesty suitable to modest individuals. Falkland demands that epideictic be a modest genre, giving fame rather than taking it.

> Those shew their Judgement least, who shew their wit:
> And are suspected, least their subtiller Aime
> Be rather to attaine, then to give Fame.[66]

For Falkland, panegyric should reveal the subject's virtues, not advertise the poet's subtlety. This also contributes to the conservativism of the genre. If the elegist does not want to be accused of using a 'subtle' wit to draw attention to himself, his poem should also be generically and formally ordinary.

While the 'custom' of self-promotion casts suspicion on all praise, it is also the ground for that individuation which Alpers has said breathes new life into conventionality. Many like W. Abington warn fellow poets that 'with what veile so'ere you hide, / Your *aime*, twill not be thought your griefe, but pride' (*JonsVirb* 27). Even veiled criticism through satirical examples drew suspicion. As Dolan argues, poets use criticism to 'praeteritically display their skill in the very sort of attention-getting devices they were ostensibly condemning' (36). One of John Donne's admirers complains that

> Our commendation is suspected, when
> Wee Elegyes compose on sleeping men,
> The Manners of the Age prevayling so
> That not our conscience wee, but witts doe show.[67]

The genre is itself debased by self-interest and 'manners', by the elegist's attraction to the improprieties of 'wit' over the modesty of decorous language. Elegists are caught in a double bind, for the greater their poems the more suspicious readers will be of their ambitions. Rhetorical decorum requires that they suit their language and topoi to particular occasions through judgements of the needs of occasion; decorum

prompts the rhetor to attend to the 'manners of the age', not to contradict them. But those manners include a paradoxical performance of excellence within modesty, of distinction within similitude.

The difficulty of re-establishing convincing elegiac expressions of grief and greatness in such a context was an ancient commonplace.[68] As Henry King acknowledges, achieving a poetic range equal to the range of emotions inspired by diverse occasions – renewing the rhetoric which had been adapted to the situation of death itself, rather than its particular victims – proves increasingly difficult with time.

> Should we our Sorrows in this Method range,
> Oft as Misfortune doth their Subjects change,
> And to the sev'rall Losses, which befall,
> Pay diff'rent Rites at ev'ry Funeral;
> [...] We must want Tears to wail such various Themes,
> And prove defective in Death's mournfull Laws,
> Not having Words proportion'd to each Cause.
>
> (King 133–4)

For King, there are finite ways to communicate grief, and death's levelling 'laws' reduce human difference to the same dust and air. Frequent use of hyperbole dilutes its effectiveness in depicting intense grief; similarly, frequent idealisation of personal virtues and achievements left elegists like Thomas Jordan faltering for new words to establish human excellence. Denying the powers of inventive language to express truth, he attributes to Sir Nathaniel Brent 'More real merit [...] Then any Metaphor can magnifie'.[69] Jordan accentuates the contrast between the 'real' and the 'metaphoric', or between the person and his reconstruction in figurative language premised on dissimilitude. Conventions were powerful tools, charged by generations of use, crucial to displays of mastery of social and literary decorum. They could not be disregarded, but at the same time, re-energising them could require virtuoso displays – which must be managed without calling attention to either the virtuosity or the display.

1.5 Base pens for hire

Learning rhetoric, students acquired a moral and literary versatility which allowed them to adapt general virtues to particular social situations. But it was commonplace to critique versatility as a sign of corruptibility. In the

Gorgias, Plato defended rhetoric against the charge that the orator could be made to serve unjust or unethical ends. But the argument did not end there. For elegists, an unconvincing poem, failure to satisfy generic expectations, or expressions of hyperbolic grief might draw attention to the poet for altogether different reasons: the poet wants his reward. As I suggested in the introduction, many elegists were reluctant to call attention to the material conditions of the poem's production. Like elegies, stone memorials were determined by fashion, expectation and creative innovation within the limits of the form.[70] But unlike monumental sculptors, whom Nigel Llewellyn has described as 'agents in formalised rituals', not independent artists, elegists constantly assert their financial independence. It is easy to find evidence of the fees charged by monumental artists. Nicholas Stone, who also made Edmund Spenser's monument, records that in 1629 'I made a tomb for my Lady Paston of Norfolk, and set it up at Paston and was very extraordinarily entertained there and paid for it £340.'[71] However, no account of funeral expenses has yet been found to include payment for elegiac composition. The poems seem not to have been directly commissioned, even if a speculative elegist might hope for some 'reward' for his gift. Stressing their affective relationship to the dead and their struggle to scale their language to match loss, elegists protest against suspicions that they write from purely mercenary motives. But elegists also reiterate that suspicion themselves, incriminating their peers as bidding for patronage. By this risky strategy, elegists advertise their own sincerity.

Poets were incredibly sensitive to the charge of insincerity, a charge to which they were especially susceptible if they had never met the dead person they eulogised. Thomas Jordan knew John Steward only 'by Report', but nonetheless claimed to love him for his rumoured virtues. 'If a sad Stranger may presume to mourn', he claims, and

> If you'll conceive Sorrow can keep her Court
> In Souls that have the Cause but by Report,
> Or if the loss of virtue you believe
> Can make its Lover (though a Stranger) grieve:[72]

then 'Admit my Wet Oblation'. Cleverly, Jordan argues that if readers believe that panegyric in general can induce a love of virtue, then he too must be allowed to become enamoured with Steward's reputation. Corbet also declares his lack of acquaintance with his subject proves that he does not 'strive / To winne accesse, or grace, with Lords alive'. He claims to have investigated his subject's worth by *litotes*, arriving at

a recognition of 'negative goodnesse'.[73] Corbet's research produces the topics of praise. By demanding negatively what Haward should have eschewed – 'Did he attend the Court for no man's fall?' and so on – he exposes the corrupting influences of class, property and court. Through this clever *recusatio*, Corbet turns his lack of specific knowledge about the dead into the virtue of negativity: Haward is not famous because he is not infamous. Corbet's scepticism towards the court promotes him as an honest broker, the critical conscience of authority. Like Corbet, Samuel Daniel portrays himself as honest as well as financially independent. Daniel's 'Funeralle Poeme' on Charles Mountjoy asserts his freedom:

> But *Devonshire* I here stand cleere with thee
> I have a manumission to be free,
> I owe thee nothing, and I may be bold
> To speake the certaine truth of what I know.[74]

Daniel's love of virtue levels the social distinctions between him and Devonshire, who stands 'with' him on an equal footing. Poets like Daniel deny not only the patronage relationships which may have produced their elegies, but also the terms of gift exchange and friendly mutuality which were generally recognised in the mortuary rituals of deathbed pronouncements, bequests, funeral hospitality and the construction of memorials. But this excessive declaration of indemnity has an unintended effect: it also undermines the social relationships which those exchanges and rituals sanctioned. Lacking a credible relationship to their subject, the poets again find themselves suspected.

By revealing the rhetorical or material poverty of their competitors, elegists show rhetorical confidence and deny their own needs. Thomas Philipot ridicules his competitors at 'common Funeralls', where 'each vulgar quill' falls into 'some broken rapture'. Their 'watry tribute of the eye' becomes 'some easie Elegie'.[75] Although he might be judged to have incriminated all poets by this satire, Philipot distinguishes his own 'refined verse' from what Thomas Carew in his elegy for Anne Hay calls 'base pens, for hire' (Carew 67). Sometimes the act of writing did involve payment: Roger Lowe, a Lancashire apprentice and village notary, also collaborated on elegy with James Woods, who 'told me of his sadnes for Eles Lealand's death, and he delivered to me a paper of verses that he had made and gave me them to write out'.[76] Though he was paid for his scribal work, Lowe describes their activity as inspired by grief. In other cases, the financial motive is more apparent. Nicholas Oldisworth owned in the margins

of a manuscript poem to his patron Sir Edward Hungerford that 'for these verses I was largely rewarded with gold'.[77] He also accounts for his elegiac lines on Thomas Hulbert. Hungerford 'prescribed the mater of them to mee, intending to sett upp this Epitaph at his owne Cost, because Thomas Hulbert had diligently waited on him, when hee was high Sheriffe of Wiltshire'.[78] The content was provided by Hungerford, while Oldisworth did the versifying. Needless to say, his elegy makes no mention of the financial transaction, grounding its *inventio* in Hulbert's virtue alone.

The salt dealer Nicholas Murford prepared an oblique memorial for Henry Ireton to achieve a specific financial outcome: he wanted to be bailed from prison. Murford sent a manuscript memorial volume to Oliver Cromwell from the Fleet on 25 February 1651, with a note that 'These worthles papers I present to you, / To cancel th' Bond of gratitude long due'. The bonds included the £13,000 lent by his father to Charles I in 1632. He pays his debt of praise and gratitude to Ireton, encouraging Cromwell to pay the government's own debt in exchange. This cheeky request for repayment is embedded in an 'Apology to his Excellency the Lord Generall CROMWELL / that these Offertures were not presented (as intended, and sent) at the Funerall'.[79] Murford imagines the lying in state, funeral and interment in great detail, on behalf of a reader like himself (unlike Cromwell) who has no access to these scenes. 'See what my still searching ey discovers', he writes, signifying his own imagined presence at the obsequies and reminding Cromwell that he is kept a close prisoner without such freedom to range. The elegist's insertion of himself into the privileged space of the funeral was a commonplace which, Chapter 3 will argue, sought to convince readers that the poet was not a slavish fee-pen or hanger-on, but a worthy participant in a ritual celebration of love and loyalty. Here, it might also serve to remind Cromwell of the financial dues to a forgotten guest.

Such declarations of financial need are rare; more often, poets latch on to particular occasions as an opportunity to charm employers or patrons and to achieve a limited fame among readers of anthologies. Jasper Mayne rebukes 'the small Poets of our Twilight Times' who 'Call in their borrowed Fires, and break in Rimes' on the slightest provocation (Cartwright b4^{r}). Mayne's criticism sets up an implicit hierarchy, with 'small poets' infinitely inferior to the brightest stars of the literary firmament. Like fashions in mourning wear, elegies are modish; writing elegies and fixing 'a *Labell*' to the hearse of an author's collected works had become, Henry Vaughan admits, 'all the *mode*' (Cartwright sig. [*6]^{r}). Similarly, R. Mason recognises that ''Tis the World's fashion now' for

false poets, like comets, to confuse the public after the real suns of poetry have set. Their poetry

> so throng'd, so Epidemick grown,
> *Captains* and *Poets* made up half the Town;
> Scribling as madly as the other fight,
> As if they try'd how scurvy they could write[.]

The disease and civil disorder engendered by these poets lead, eventually, to conflict, rather than the moral edification expected from epideictic poetry. Such criticism of other poets resembles the 'hatred of literary invention' in seventeenth-century England which is a focus of John Dolan's work on occasional poetics. Perhaps unsurprisingly, that hatred rarely touches the poet himself; Mason is unusual in self-consciously reflecting on his own status:

> But am I not so too? I raile and curse
> This Riming Age, yet help to make it worse:
> Can that be Wit in Me that's Fool in Them?
>
> (Cartwright [4*2]^{v})

Such criticism of the 'Riming Age' is not restricted to elegies, of course. Campion argued that 'the facilitie and popularitie of Rime' created 'as many Poets as a hot sommer flies'.[80] Jonson in *The Underwood* also rails against the 'ryming Age', when 'Verses swarme / At every stall.'[81] While the context of these two remarks were defences of different forms of prosody, it is notable that both poets associate verse production with vermin and the market for cheap commodities. Marvell uses the same imagery in his commendation of Richard Lovelace's *Lucasta*, a collection to which we will return in Chapter 5:

> The Ayre's already tainted with the swarms
> Of Insects which against you rise in arms.
> Word-peckers, Paper-rats, Book-scorpions,
> Of wit corrupted, the unfashion'd Sons.[82]

Lovelace represses the rebellion of verminous newsbook writers, who spread radical contagion. John Berkenhead, a royalist, laments that since William Cartwright is gone 'groveling Trifles crawl / About the World'. He associates mercenary poets with libels and nonconformist ministers: 'Small Under-witts do shoot up from beneath. / They spread, and swarm,

as fast as *Preachers* now' (Cartwright *8^{r}). Amid the turmoil of the Civil War, criticism of mercenary production of text was regularly tied to a desire to return to earlier, more restrictive orders of literary production and of the moral, social and political authority it underpinned.

'Em. D.' agrees that poetry is polluted with commercialism, as he joins ten other writers to laud Thomas Beedome. In this 'riming Age', Thalia can be heard 'whistling at the plow', and

> All trafficke with the Muses, tis well knowne
> The Scullers boat can touch at *Helicon*.
> Who quaffs not there? doe we not daily see
> Each guarded foot-boy belch out Poetrie?
> Who so illiterate now, that will refuse,
> For some slight Minion to invoke a muse?[83]

Surplus traffic, water poets who 'quaff' the sacred waters, servants and other lower-class writers pollute Helicon's pure streams. Like those who 'Mourn for Ribbands, and the sadder Cloths', and 'Buy your Grief from th' Shop; and desperat lye / For a new Cloak till the next Lord shall Dye', W. Towers says, poets 'Weepe for Gaine'.[84] The bequests which are supposedly exchanged for poetic tributes are now the sole inspiration for them. The result is the commercialisation of grief. Mayne offers his sarcastic condolences to the 'Poor soules', who Cartwright's death has made reluctant

> To their torn Black now to return again.
> Their Verse no longer will their Reckonings pay,
> Thin as their stuff Cloaks, and more lean than they,
> Who in a meaguer sadness walk the streets,
> As when a hard frost with sharp Hunger meets.
>
> (Cartwright b4^{r})

Cartwright has raised the commodity value of the elegy, educating tastes and making low-quality producers redundant. Their sorrow results not from compunctious grief, but from hunger and cold. Cartwright's verse did not 'sail / By one Wind, like theirs, who write by Retail'; the need to return marketable products did not restrict his artistic and intellectual explorations, likened here to colonial enterprise. Mercenary poets, by contrast, 'Rime only for some life-preserving pay', to feed themselves. Every day they churn out verse as if they were 'the paper Merchants

factors',[85] consuming paper, generating demand for the stationers but failing to edify readers. Such critiques express the desire for an aesthetic monopoly, simultaneously rejecting and revealing the elegy's commercial status. Elegiac slaves to occasion write to serve their bodily needs, rather than to elevate themselves and their readers. But Mayne himself is saved from the implications of his own criticism only by his ability to distinguish Cartwright's true virtue from his larcenist imitators. The result is a different kind of negative goodness: Cartwright and Mayne are not poetasters because they are not conspicuously in need of money.

Denouncing other elegists' insincerity and venality was an elegiac commonplace throughout the seventeenth century. Such accusations also reflected the commercialisation and professionalisation of literary production, the shift from aristocratic patronage networks to the tense and competitive realm of the marketplace. The elegist who compared his rivals to scheming mourners also recognised the increasing pressure on the rigid primogeniture system in the context of seventeenth-century social and economic developments, pressures which will be particularly apparent in the critical elegies discussed in Chapter 5. But the discourse of money, contagion and bodily needs also provokes unexpected references to sexuality. An elegy on the venerable Countess of Devonshire (who died at over 100 years of age) claims her perfections 'dazells' the '*Dablers* of the Quill',

> Whose *Prostituted* Pen's for sordid Hire,
> *Dawb* glorious Vice, and from *Apollo*'s Quire
> Filch *Sacred Raptures*, which profanely they
> Upon the *Shrine* of every *Wanton* Lay.[86]

'Borrowed' mourning blacks and 'wanton' poetry are signs of moral corruption, poets prostituting their muses for wages. While the poet contrasts the Countess' chastity with her admirers' literary incontinence, such accusations of wantonness add their force to the exclusion of women from printed publication of commemorative elegies. Female poets would have to risk not merely the stigma of print, but also the localised elegiac charge of greed and lechery in order to intrude on the rituals of the hearse.

1.6 Conclusion

Rhetorical training formed the basis of adult writers' understanding of the rules and decorum of elegy. By making the production and consumption of praise a central fixture of the curriculum, early modern

educators sought to cultivate heroic masculinity and other communal values. Conventions, idealisation and the mechanics of persuasion worked to assimilate readers and writers to a dominant literary and social ethic; but the mastery of rhetoric as a kind of ethical superiority also helped to distinguish particular poets. The competitive structure of the school disputation and the literary marketplace exacerbated this agonistic relationship between conformity and distinction. Having established that the rhetorical machinery of elegy depended on epideictic and deliberative conventions, we will now consider exactly what the elegist was trying to persuade the bereaved to believe.

I have argued that the effectiveness of elegy did not depend on dramatic violations of conventions and types; instead, elegy relied on generic expectations to portray the dead subject as a model of civic and personal virtue. This act of persuasion was premised on social consensus about the nature of virtue. It was also possible, of course, to be virtuous in grief, and models for appropriate mourning imposed their rhetorical constraints not only on the consoler, but also on the bereaved. Just as elegists exceeded classical precedents and pedagogical models while producing conformist texts, so were dying and mourning individuals influenced but not utterly controlled by Christian and Stoic moral guidance. In the following discussion of the rhetoric of mourning, it will become clear that constraints did not simply inhibit the spontaneous outflow of personal feeling, any more than rhetoric itself inhibits poetic expression. Rather, the related 'genres' of Christian and Stoic consolation sanctioned certain privileged modes of responding to personal loss. While some mourners resisted those modes in writing, all found themselves in the shadows of grief, below a 'horizon of expectations' illuminated by Christian faith.

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