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"The dread of something after death": *Hamlet* and the Emotional Afterlife of Shakespearean Revenants

Christy Desmet

- 1 Contemplating suicide, or more generally, the relative merits of existence and non-existence, Hamlet famously asks:

Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the *dread of something after death*,
The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveler returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of. (*Hamlet*, 3.1.84-90, emphasis added)¹

Critics have complained that Hamlet knows right well what happens after death, as is made clear by the earlier account of his father, who is

Doomed for a certain term to walk the night
And for the day confined to fast in fires
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purged away. (1.5.15-18)

This place from which no one (supposedly) returns, as described by the spirit, is patently a Dantean purgatory, where penitence is exacted on and through the physical body. But the (deceased) penitent's experience of that place remains affectively inaccessible, despite the abundant religious literature devoted to the topic. In this essay, I argue that the early modern English imagined a range of post-mortem experiences and the emotions felt by those who experienced them and that the subsequent uncertainty engendered in the living is best defined as "dread." Those who contemplate the "undiscovered country" and those who have returned from death's pale are both afflicted with this emotion. "Dread" is an emotion that links the living inexorably with the dead.

Dread

- 2 The first step toward anatomizing the emotional life of those who have passed over into the "undiscovered country" involves the range of connotations attached to the word "dread." From my explorations of EEBO (Early English Books Online), the term "dread," within the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is predominantly religious, found in biblical commentaries, *Song of Songs*, prayers based on Augustine, and the *Book of Common Prayer*, but also serving equally partisan religious arguments from both Protestants and Catholics. "Dread and awe" of God is a common collocation. "Dread" can also refer specifically to fear of the afterlife and most especially of its physical pains and punishments (see, for instance, *The Doctrynnalle of dethe*, 1498,² or *A medicine for the soule*, 1550).³ There is another long-standing tradition of "dread" in the face of political authority, supported of course by the doctrine of divine right; "dread sovereign" is a common phrase.

- 3 Searching the Folger Digital Texts produces results comparable to the search in EEBO, although Shakespeare's use of the word is more secularized as a common emotion and more inscrutable in its causes and effects. As in the other texts I looked at, Shakespeare's plays are rife with "dread" sovereigns, ranging from Henry IV to the Duke of *Measure for Measure*. Rosencrantz, for instance, says to Claudius and Gertrude,

Both your Majesties
Might, by the sovereign power you have of us [himself and Guildenstern]
Put your dread pleasures more into command
Than to entreaty. (*Hamlet*, 2.2.27-30)

- 4 There are a notable number of appearances in the second *Henriad*, where the word is associated with "dreadful" preparations for war. In this context, the religious connotations of "dread" can be co-opted by the secular arm of government, as when in *1 Henry VI*, Winchester nostalgically recalls the "dread" Henry V had produced in the French people he conquered: "Unto the French the dreadful Judgment Day / So dreadful will not be as was his sight" (*1 Henry VI*, 1.1.28). Not surprisingly, a heavily religious version of "dread" characterizes *Macbeth* and that monarch's "deed[s] of dreadful note," which amount to sacrilege (*Macbeth*, 3.2.49). In this respect, Macbeth is akin to Aaron of *Titus Andronicus*, who at point of execution rhapsodizes about the "thousand dreadful things" he wishes that he could have accomplished beyond the list of specific atrocities that he rehearses (*Titus Andronicus*, 5.1.143). Finally, *Julius Caesar* translates awe of God into a Roman key when Casca demands of Cassius,

But wherefore did you so much tempt the heavens?
It is the part of men to fear and tremble
When the most mighty gods by tokens send
Such dreadful heralds to astonish us. (*Julius Caesar*, 1.3.55-59)

The secular/religious binary collapses with the greatest ideological force in Portia's well-known ode to mercy, which is superior to the signs of monarchic power such as the king's scepter, "the attribute to awe and majesty / Wherein sit the dead and fear of kings" (*The Merchant of Venice*, 4.1.198).

- 5 In Shakespeare, there can also be a more specifically legalistic dimension to dread, as when Bertram of *All's Well* hands down the "dreadful sentence" detailing his conditions for accepting Helena as his wife (*All's Well That Ends Well*, 3.2.63). Similarly, Coriolanus experiences the "dreaded justice" of banishment from Rome (*Coriolanus*, 3.3.135). This

connotation will play a minor role in the case of revenants, most of whom have ended life badly, or with a damaged reputation, and have a quarrel with the historical record's representation of them and their deeds. Finally, there is a more visceral, emotionally primitive sense of dread as a common emotion in the face of life's ordinary pains and challenges. In Sonnet 97, for instance, within the speaker's overarching conceit that his absence from the beloved is like winter, the tree's "leaves look pale, dreading the winter's near" (line 14).

- 6 Let us now take the paradigmatic case of Hamlet's dread of that unnamed something after death. When Marcellus reports the ghost's appearance to Hamlet, he says that Horatio is reluctant to credit the "dreaded sight"'s authenticity (*Hamlet*, 1.1.30), dismissing it as a fantasy. The frightened soldiers report the apparition to Horatio on condition of "dreadful secrecy" (1.2.217). They later worry that the ghost will lure Hamlet over the "dreadful summit" of a cliff. While these rather vague uses of the term "dread" provide a general atmosphere and context for the dread that afflicts Hamlet, there are two more pointed uses of the word that deserve attention. The first is Hamlet's reference, during the closet scene, to the father's "dread command," which in this context refers to Hamlet's promise to "revenge" his "foul and most unnatural murder" (1.5.32):

Do you not come your tardy son to chide,
That, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by
Th' important acting of your dread command?
O, say! (3.4.122-124)

How are we to interpret this statement? Is the dread command regal, as Rosencrantz suggests Claudius's demands are? Is it political, like the dreadful wars waged by Henry V? Or is it religious dread that revenge may subject him to damnation?

- 7 Further clues may be sought in the dynamics of Hamlet's and the other Danes' actual encounter with the apparition representing the elder Hamlet. The guards offer a textbook case of fear in the face of the apparition. As Horatio reports, the ghost

walked
By their oppressed and fear-surprised eyes
Within his truncheon's length, whilst they, distilled
Almost to jelly with the act of fear,
Stand dumb and speak not to him. (1.5.212-216)

We are not privy to the exact source of the soldiers' fear. Hints come throughout the play; the ghost may be a damned spirit, may drive men to suicide by luring them over a cliff, or simply brings with him the contagious, terrifying aura of the afterlife. The latter explanation seems most probable, at least according to the ghost's own interpretation, who predicts that the tale to Hamlet of his purgatorial sufferings, famously

Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair to stand an end,
Like quills upon the fearful porpentine. (1.5.21-25)

- 8 As Stephen Greenblatt's study of Purgatory in medieval and early modern England demonstrates at length, the pain and suffering experienced by Purgatory's inhabitants communicates itself viscerally to the living, as listening to the visitants' narratives makes them experience through their own bodies the reality of life after death. According to Greenblatt, the doctrine of Purgatory emerged relatively late in pre-Reformation theology—the twelfth century—to ease anxieties about the severe divide between heaven and hell, encourage good works, and raise money for the church. Paradoxically, the

effectiveness of the doctrine as a deterrent to sin depended on its capacity to instill fear in the faithful.⁴ In visual as well as verbal representations, Purgatory looks a lot like hell, softened only by the promise of eventual rescue, and afflicts its inhabitants with severe pain: "From this perspective, fear was a gift to be assiduously cultivated."⁵

- 9 Greenblatt's study over-emphasizes, perhaps, the monolithic nature of the fear that circulates between revenants from Purgatory and their witnesses. As Jeremy Tambling's study of affect in Dante's *Purgatorio* shows, the cardinal vices that characterize the denizens of Purgatory are unsettled, being built through the intersection of various ethical systems that, when applied to embodied persons with specific histories, reveal subjects-in-death to be in process as much as their living selves were: the "modern" quality of Dante's text, according to Tambling, "lies in its extraordinarily engaged attention to double and shifting states of affect."⁶ Greenblatt also may skew understanding of the early moderns' perception of the afterlife by focusing so intently on Purgatory. He argues, for instance, that apparitions of the dead are not concerned with reputation or fame: "These hauntings are not about the dream of occupying a place in the memories of future generations, not about the longing to escape from the limitations of one's own life-world, not even about the craving for persistence that leads men to engrave their names on stone tablets."⁷ But this is precisely the motive for revenants in what has come to be called the complaint tradition. While Purgatory's denizens are focused through pain on the past that ended with death and with the nature of their judicial selves and their sins, revenants who complain retain a strong consciousness of their continuing role in historical legend and of their fame's continuing vicissitudes over the long expanse of time.

Complaints from the Undiscovered Country

- 10 While *Hamlet's* apparition evokes briefly the tradition of tales from Purgatory, there is another genre, popular in the early to middle 1590s, at work behind the scenes in Shakespeare's play. This is the early modern female complaint, as defined by John Kerrigan in his edition of poetry from this genre. The complaint, most simply, is framed as a dialogue between a female revenant and a male witness whose character and participation in the colloquy vary from example to example. These revenants evince a strong but indefinable affect—something between sorrow and anger, to use Horatio's formula for evaluating ghosts' expressions—that is grounded in dissatisfaction with their historical reputation. In seeking to work themselves out of a position of moral vulnerability and to justify their lives, these ghostly women turn weakness into strength, emotional turbulence into forceful eloquence. They submit themselves to the court of public opinion, defending themselves from a social condemnation that continues to rankle their peace, even after death, from the shore of that "undiscovered country" that Hamlet dreads.⁸
- 11 The complaint's literary ancestors are equally the *Mirror for Magistrates* and Ovid's *Heroides*. Between 1559 and 1610, *The Mirror for Magistrates* went through four editions under several editors, and played a significant role in the construction of time and historical character in Shakespeare's English history plays.⁹ Philip Schwyzer, for instance, notes that Humphrey of Gloucester and Eleanor Cobham, central characters in *2 Henry VI*, made their first appearance in the 1578 edition of the *Mirror*.¹⁰ He notes as well that in *Richard III*, the titular character who opens the play, addresses "the audience much like a

ghost in the *Mirror* stepping out to collar" William Baldwin, the work's original compiler.¹¹ Betrayed, and often sexually profligate, women of English history also become part of the *Mirror* tradition; they generally receive harsher judgment than their male counterparts and are also more tightly controlled by the narrator.¹² One notable example is Thomas Churchyard's account of *Shore's Wife*, which was included in the second, 1563 edition of *A Mirror for Magistrates*. Jane Shore, the unfortunate mistress of Edward IV, is a character who is deployed as a negative *exemplum* of female behavior by Richard III but never appears in the play to challenge the sexual and political accusations that Richard articulates against her. Shakespeare's Richard, it seems, has usurped Mistress Shore's place in the *Mirror* tradition and usurped her voice.

- 12 The second predecessor of the female complaint, Ovid's *Heroides*, had been Englished as early as 1567.¹³ In these fictional verse epistles, which are part lament, part argument, historical women such as Dido not only rehearse their tales of romantic abandonment and demand the listener's pity for their unfair treatment and untimely demise, but also rewrite the historical record from the woman's perspective, a new narrative that lays all blame at the feet of the feckless men who desert them. This drive toward self-defense in the face of a negative historical judgment and the speaker's ontological status as deceased—their stories are transmitted through the fiction of recovered letters—link the *Heroides* and its later imitators with the *Mirror*. But while the confessional ghosts of the *Mirror* "trace their destruction to a specific vice or failing," the women of Ovidian complaint are bent on self-justification.¹⁴
- 13 In the 1590s, the two genres tend to coincide and to make their female heroines more aggrieved, more confrontational, and even more eloquent. For instance, in Thomas Churchyard's revision of *Shore's Wife* from the 1563 *Mirror*, which was reprinted as *Churchyards Challenge* in 1593, Mistress Shore has grown even more celebratory about her brash behavior during her life.¹⁵ Elizabethan poets were also busy creating their own works in the tradition of female complaint. A particularly popular fictional figure who extends and challenges the *de casibus* frame that controls the female complaint in the *Mirror* tradition was fair Rosamond of Samuel Daniel's *Complaint of Rosamond* (1592), the mistress of Henry II who eventually was poisoned by his wife, Elinor of Aquitaine. In Daniel's version, Rosamond is not only obstreperous—remarking snidely that while she is not able to cross into Elyseum, "*Shores wife is grac'd, and passes for a saint*"¹⁶—but also argues quite vociferously with the narrator about the truth of her story.
- 14 Rosamond begins as a traditional revenant, referring in the opening stanza to both her continuing shame and the horror of her current existence:

Out from the horror of infernall deepes,
My poor afflicted ghost comes here to plaine it:
Attended by my shame that never sleepes,
The spot wherewith my kinde, and youth did staine it:
My body found a grave where to contain it,
A sheete could hide my face, but not my sin,
For Fame finds never tombe t' inclose it in.¹⁷

Rosamond experiences what Hamlet only imagines in the "To be or not to be" soliloquy, a restless afterlife deprived of healthy sleep and the "ioyfull blisse"¹⁸ enjoyed by ghosts in Elysium. Rosamond is, in fact, homeless, doomed to wander on this side of the Styx until "lovers sighes on earth" shall deliver her soul into eternal rest. The problem she has fulfilling this condition comes from the fact that history has passed Rosamond by: "Time hath long since worne out the memorie / Both of my life, and lives uniuert depriving."¹⁹ No

lover can sigh for her unless they remember who she is or the nature of her history. Even her funerary monument, Rosamond notes, has already begun to crumble.²⁰ As the poem continues, Rosamond dwells less on her misery and more on making a formal case for pity by shifting blame for her sexual sin to other factors: the dangers of the court; her own beauty and eloquence; a wicked advisor; the heat of youthful passion—"Treason was in my bones";²¹ and most legalistically, the fact of the King's power and the paradox that she will "live defamed" irrespective of whether she yields or resists and is violated by him.²² This Rosamond is a force to be reckoned with, something of a historian in her own right. But the stakes for the revenant herself are affective as well as judicial; she rehearses eternally and in vivid detail the steps by which she was ruined, alternating between sorrow and anger in her misery. The poem's governing conceit is that Rosamond has chosen Daniel as her confidante so that he might persuade his cruel mistress Delia to sigh for her; but when Rosamond departs to wait eternally at the Styx's shore, Daniel returns to his fruitless sonnetteering, "to prosecute the tenor of my woes: / Eternall matter for my Muse to mourne."²³ Rosamond's woe proves contagious, or at the very least, her tale fails to lift the poet out of the romantic miasma in which she found him.

- 15 There were other female complainants of the 1590s, whose authors included Shakespeare's and Daniel's fellow Warwickshire writer Michael Drayton, who refashioned the *Heroides* as *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (1598). Rosamond makes a reappearance; also among the women chronicled here is Katherine of France, widow to Henry V, this time in her second marital role as Welshman Owen Tudor's widow.²⁴ Shakespeare himself showed interest in the genre and the poetic competition it generated among this group of writers in *The Rape of Lucrece*, a poem that, not coincidentally, contains nine instances of the word "dread." Contemplating his crime, Tarquin is tossed between desire and dread, and Lucrece, as Tarquin looms over her bed, also awakes to her dreadful reality. The narrator urges us to

Imagine her as one in dead of night
 From forth dull sleep by dreadful fancy waking,
 That thinks she hath beheld some ghastly sprite,
 Whose grim aspect sets every joint a-shaking.
 What terror 'tis! But she, in worsen taking,
 From sleep disturbèd, heedfully doth view
 The sight which makes supposèd terror true. (*Rape of Lucrece*, lines 449-455)

At the point of her own violation, Lucrece finds herself in the position of Hamlet, the recipient of a visitation from the undiscovered country beyond death—except in her case, she sees clearly her potential to become, with the success of Tarquin's rape, a complaining and unjustified revenant. Lucrece could potentially suffer the fate of Jane Shore and Rosamond, in that she has no good choices: succumbing to Tarquin's will without resistance brings her virtue into question; on the other hand, if she resists, he threatens to kill her and then publish a false story of her liaison with a groom that will brand Lucrece as an adulteress for the rest of history. This last danger is foremost in Lucrece's own mind as she delivers her account of the rape to the collected Roman men and then commits suicide, in effect becoming her own historian and forestalling any possibility that she would need to return from the beyond as a female complainant to right the historical record. Lucrece's less fortunate sisters, however, are in a different situation. Like penitents in the medieval Purgatory, they experience an enduring connection with the living without being capable of acting on that historical stage. They

experience history in process and watch their own changing role in history, without being able to act beyond death.

That something after death

- 16 I would like to suggest that the existential dilemma of these female complainants colors *Hamlet* and Hamlet's experience of the undiscovered country after death. While the literature on Purgatory depicts a graphic world of tortures both physical and psychological, the narrators of female complaints are plagued not only by their continued existence after death, but their acute awareness of time's forward march for the living, which both exacerbates their bad reputation and, even worse, begins to erase them from memory. While Senecan ghosts may be preoccupied by revenge, as Hamlet senior is at some points of the play, the protagonists of historical complaint are concerned with memory. To some extent, this is true of all stage ghosts, as Peter Stallybrass argues:

Most stage ghosts have active stakes in inheritance, which is both about the ownership of the future and about the control of memory. Most of these ghosts are the revenants of men and, specifically, aristocratic men: Andrea in *The Spanish Tragedy*; Andrugio in *Antonio's Tragedy*; Hamlet in *Hamlet*; Banquo in *Macbeth*; Alonzo in *The Changeling*; Brachiano in *The White Devil*. They return to claim a future that they "properly" own and that has been taken away from them.²⁵

Female revenants, by contrast, are combatting the bias of patriarchal history. Their problems are two-fold: challenging the simplified, misogynistic accounts of their own deeds and misdeeds found in standard histories, the dilemma for Jane Shore; and the erasure of women's histories, the predicament in which Samuel Daniel's Rosamond finds herself. In life, she was immured in a castle, to serve the desires of her sovereign. After death, as Rosamond complains to Daniel's narrator, she has watched her tomb be destroyed and thus, all evidence of her existence erased. As Stallybrass puts it, "When Samuel Daniel reused the form of the female complaint for *The Complaint of Rosamond*, it was self-consciously to remember the unremembered, to bring back to life a woman whose memory had been erased."²⁶

- 17 I would suggest that the apparition of Hamlet's father, as a revenant, finds himself very much in the predicament of the female complainant. While he alludes to, and no doubt experiences, the night wanderings and daytime exercises endured by ghosts that Greenblatt explores in his book on purgatorial *Hamlet*, the ghost has other problems, as well. One is the historical record. It is said that King Hamlet died while sleeping in his orchard when in fact, he was "by a brother's hand" of "life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched" (*Hamlet*, 1.5.80-81). This misconception he sets straight with his tale to Hamlet, trusting to the son to disseminate that tale. The ghost of Hamlet senior is also combatting the erasure of his life's memory. Gertrude, no Niobe she, remarries within a month, twice two months, whatever: "(O God," Hamlet laments, "a beast that wants discourse of reason / Would have mourned longer!" [1.2.154-155]). And so he charges Hamlet to "Remember" him. Typical of this play, however, the rectified story of the elder Hamlet, like the tale of his Purgatorial tortures, remains untold. Thus, he is denied even the narratological satisfaction of history's downtrodden female complainants.

More in sorrow than in anger

- 18 Renaissance female complainants can be querulous; they argue constantly with their interlocutors. They are also aggrieved, complaining about their own bad fame or lack of recognition and sniping at other historical women whom they could know only from written histories and literature. In an effort to alter, emphasize, and control history's course, they name and curse their enemies. And they also suffer. Running the emotional gamut from sadness to vituperation, they experience what R. S. White and Clara Rawnsley call "mixed emotions," not only vicissitudes from one passion to another but liminal states that are not definable as particular emotions, affective moods that bleed into one another.²⁷ The ghost in *Hamlet* resembles them to a significant extent. He frowns, but according to the eyewitnesses, he shows "a countenance more in sorrow than in anger" (*Hamlet*, 1.2.247). Like the female complainants, he is keen to set right the historical record, and he passes a harsh judgment on Gertrude—"O Hamlet, what a falling off was there!" (1.5.54)—although he never reaches the point of cursing his antagonists, not even Claudius. He and those who encounter him are linked by a mutual affect of "dread."
- 19 This ghost's emotional resemblance to the living is reinforced by Gail Kern Paster's humoral analysis of *Hamlet* in *Humoring the Body*. According to Paster, the Galenic model of humors "locates the emotions, or passions, in the ebbs and flows of the body's fluids. Emotions flood the body not metaphorically but literally, as the humors course through the bloodstream carrying choler, melancholy, blood, and phlegm to the parts and as the animal spirits move like lightning from brain to muscle, from muscle to brain."²⁸ Significantly, "dread" is both cause and symptom of humoral disarray. As *The Method of Physick* recounts, for instance, the cause of syncope or swooning, for instance, is a rapid evacuation of blood or, on an emotional level, "feare, dread, and all such like perturbations of the mind."²⁹ Dread that works on the body to immobilize and prevent action is amenable to the specifically humoral vicissitudes between rage and paralysis that Paster outlines in her chapter on *Hamlet*. Pyrrhus from the Player's speech, with his sword suspended in mid-air over the hapless Trojan patriarch Priam, is roasted o'er in wrath; in effect, his body movements are choked up and his vengeful arm immobilized by excess of choler. If choleric Pyrrhus is stuffed with excess humors, melancholy Hamlet is depleted in body and passions. As Paster writes,

deficits of appetite explain why self-reproach in Hamlet expresses itself as the perception of bodily lack. His withdrawal by grief and disappointment into the inactivity of melancholy means that he is not consuming enough of his world's "stuff" behaviorally, pneumatically. In this he is precisely the opposite of Aeneas's Pyrrhus, that excessive consumer both of his own body and spirits and of the human material of Troy.³⁰

A similar languor, or sense of dread, infects the ghost's mood. The apparition of young Hamlet's father fits a sub-genre of ghost that can be found in contemporary cinema, including films of *Hamlet*. This melancholic revenant, characterized by something between sorrow and lack of affect, is epitomized for me by the low-key ghost played by Bruce Willis in the popular thriller *The Sixth Sense*.³¹ Willis is on a mission, first, to compensate for his hubris as a psychologist in life by helping a young boy afflicted by angry ghosts and second, to let his wife know that she "never came second" emotionally to the job that caused his death. Throughout the film, where his status as a ghost comes as a final surprise, Willis is measured, contemplative, but also detached from his

surroundings. One cue to his status is the character's detachment from his social setting, which is expressed in both his lack of conversation and his physical isolation. He stands in opposition to the furious ghosts who have been victims of crime and torment the little boy Willis befriends both physically and psychologically.

- 20 In the film's final scene, a woman cyclist who has been killed in an accident just moments before appears at the car window to address her grievances to the young boy. Something between the melancholic psychologist and this seething victim, holding forth to her male historian, is what I imagine as the emotional range of early modern revenants deriving from the female complaint tradition. My imagined ghost of Hamlet senior would emphatically not be Brian Blessed in the epic 1996 Kenneth Branagh *Hamlet*. He would be more like Paul Scofield as the ghost in Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*, where the ghost sits brooding, without really making eye contact as he recounts the story of his murder to the son.³² Most of all, he would be like the revenant of Sam Shepard in the Almereyda *Hamlet*, whose dark countenance matches his son's anomie. Whether standing on the balcony outside his son's apartment, slumped in a chair opposite young Hamlet as he tells his tale, or vanishing into the Pepsi machine, this Hamlet demonstrates repeatedly the permeability of that barrier between the living and the dead.³³

Conclusion: Remember Me

- 21 Like Jane Shore, fair Rosamond, and their kin, the spirit of Hamlet's father is plagued by dread—a persistence of consciousness and personal memory after death, combined with the knowledge that his story can be nothing more than an incomplete footnote in historical chronicle. Unlike the female complaints produced by Shakespeare and other writers in the 1590s, *Hamlet* remains pessimistic about the possibility of revising, or even preserving individuals' history. The emblem of the female complainant in this play is Hecuba. Evoked in the Player's speech as a paradigmatic figure of historical mourning, Hecuba laments the fall of Troy and her husband's cruel slaughter at the hands of Pyrrhus. Derived equally from texts by Virgil and Ovid, the figure of Hecuba would have been familiar from the schoolboy exercises in ethical lament or *ethopoeia*. Not limited to tears and sighs, by the rules of rhetoric Hecuba must speak, and speak at length. In Rudolph Agricola's Latin translation of Aphthonius' *Progymnasmata*, before being sent into exile she rails against Fortune and recounts her own history:

Fortune, called a strait or an estuary and not without reason, I unhappily have now experienced. How haughtily I, so very blessed, gloried. The daughter of a king, the wife of a king, the mother of the fairest and bravest of heroes, I have now fallen into so many great calamities that they neither can be worked out or expressed. Fortune bore me up high so that I might suffer a heavier blow when I fell.³⁴

In this exercise, Hecuba's *de casibus* account of her fall from high places and her cursing of Fortune place her within the tradition of female complaint. In Shakespeare's case, by contrast, Hecuba is bereft of language to lament. The Player describes her pathetic appearance, as she

run[s] barefoot up and down, threat'ning the flames
With bisson rheum, a clout upon that head
Where late the diadem stood, and for a robe,
About her lank and all o'erteemèd loins
A blanket, in the alarm of fear caught up— (*Hamlet*, 2.2.530-534)

- 22 Anyone who had seen this sight, according to the Player, would have—like Hecuba herself in the schoolboy exercise—“Gainst Fortune’s state [...] treason have pronounced” (2.2.536). But the queen herself is inarticulate:

[I]f the gods themselves did see her then
 When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport
 In mincing with his sword her husband’s limbs,
 The instant burst of clamor that she made
 (Unless things mortal move them not at all)
 Would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven. (2.2.538-543)

Instead of the eloquent arguments of Jane Shore and Rosamond, we get only Hecuba’s inarticulate “burst of clamor” and the counterfactual surmise that *if* the gods *had seen* the sight, they too *would have cried* in horror and pity. The fact of the matter, however, is that Hecuba is denied her speech and the gods remain unmoved.

- 23 Hecuba’s fate in the Player’s speech bodes ill for Hamlet’s final request that Horatio, instead of sealing his own fame with a stoic suicide, live on to report Hamlet and his “cause aright”:

You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
 That are but mutes or audience to this act,
 Had I but time (as this fell sergeant, Death,
 Is strict in his arrest), O, I could tell you—
 But let it be.—Horatio, I am dead.
 Thou livest; report me and my cause aright
 To the unsatisfied. (*Hamlet*, 5.2.366-372)

Like the heroines of female complaint, Hamlet wants his judicial “cause” to receive a favorable judgment; he wants for life and actions to be vindicated. For Hamlet as for his father, however, this vindication remains out of reach, Fortinbras’s final pronouncement confers on the prince a bland, hesitant epitaph—that had he lived on and been tested on the historical stage, Hamlet would have “proved most royal” (5.2.444). Hamlet too will recede into the background of historical chronicle, as just one figure in the parade of forgotten kings whose reigns were short, but not memorable.

- 24 Hamlet is just one of Shakespeare’s largely feminized revenants who return from the undiscovered country to set the historical record straight and to communicate to us their dread of the afterlife. Some, like Lucrece and Lavinia from *Titus Andronicus*, are ghosts before their time. Others, like the more traditional revenants of *Julius Caesar* and *Richard III*, intervene directly in history. Most spectacular of all, as a female complainant, is Queen Margaret in *Richard III*, who although literally dead by the time represented in Shakespeare’s play, nevertheless wanders in and out of the plot to curse her enemies and organize the lamenting women into a unified group of what Phyllis Rackin has called “anti-historians” who challenge “official” English history.³⁵ These revenants, like Hamlet’s father and Hamlet himself, continue to whisper to us the familiar words —“Remember me.” They pass on as well to us their dread, hoping for justification in the historical record that has heretofore excluded them.

NOTES

1. *Hamlet*, Folger Digital Texts, based on the print editions of Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine for the Folger Shakespeare Library. Folger Digital Texts are freely available at <http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org> (last accessed 31 August 2017). All subsequent references to Shakespeare's plays and poems will be to this edition and will be given directly in the text.
2. *The Doctrynalles of dethe*, Enprynted in Westminster, In Castons hous, by me Wynkyn de Worde, [1498].
3. Anon, *A medicine for the soule as well as for them that be sick, most necessary in the bytternes of death, and in their last moost daungerous seasons*, London, R. Tottell, ca. 1550.
4. Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 28.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
6. Jeremy Tambling, *Dante in Purgatory: States of Affect*, Turnhout, Belgium, Brepols Publishers, 2010, p. 263.
7. Greenblatt, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
8. Kerrigan's long introduction to his anthology of female complaint poetry offers a thorough genealogy of the genre; see John Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and "Female Complaint": A Critical Anthology*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1991, p. 12, 28, and *passim*.
9. Paul Budra, *A Mirror for Magistrates and the de casibus Tradition*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000, 1-13.
10. Philip Schwyzer, "'Most out of order': Preposterous Time in *The Mirror for Magistrates* and Shakespeare's Histories," *A Mirror for Magistrates in Context*, ed. Harriet Archer and Andrew Hadfield, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016, 231-245, p. 234.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
12. As Deborah Greenhut explains, Turberville in particular works to keep his female speakers under control: first, by making them moralize their plights and second, by framing their epistles with arguments in the narrator's voice (Deborah S. Greenhut, *Feminine Rhetorical Culture: Tudor Adaptations of Ovid's Heroides*, New York, Peter Lang, 1988). See also Raphael Lyne, "Intertextuality and the Female Voice after the *Heroides*," *Renaissance Studies*, 22, no. 3, 2008, 307-323.
13. George Turberville, trans., *The heroycall epistles of ... Publius Ouidius Naso, in English verse*, London, Henrie Denham, 1567.
14. Schwyzer, *op. cit.*, p. 235; see also Kerrigan, p. 28.
15. Thomas Churchyard, *Churchyards Challenge*, London, John Wolfe, 1593.
16. Samuel Daniel, *Complaint of Rosamond*, in Kerrigan, *op. cit.*, line 25.
17. *Ibid.*, lines 1-5.
18. *Ibid.*, line 9.
19. *Ibid.*, lines 17-18.
20. *Ibid.*, lines 701-707.
21. *Ibid.*, line 309.
22. *Ibid.*, line 337.
23. Daniel, *Complaint of Rosamond*, in Kerrigan, *op. cit.*, lines 738-739.
24. Michael Drayton, *Englands Heroicall Epistles*, London, P.S. for N. Ling, 1598.
25. Peter Stallybrass, "Hauntings: The Materiality of Memory on the Renaissance Stage," *Generation and Degeneration: Tropes of Reproduction in Literature and History from Antiquity through*

Early Modern Europe, ed. Valeria Finucci and Kevin Brownlee, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2001, 287-316.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 306.

27. R. S. White and Clara Rawnsley, "Discrepant Emotional Awareness in Shakespeare," *The Renaissance of Emotion: Understanding Affect in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, ed. Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2015, 241-263, p. 141-142.

28. Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 14.

29. Philip Barrough, *The methode of phisicke conteyning the causes, signes, and cures of invvard diseases in mans body from the head to the foote. VVhereunto is added, the forme and rule of making remedies and medicines, which our phisitians commonly vse at this day, with the proportion, quantitie, & names of ech [sic] medicine*, London, Thomas Vautroullier dwelling in the Blacke-friars by Lud-gate, 1583.

30. Paster, "Roasted in Wrath and Fire: The Ecology of the Passions in *Hamlet* and *Othello*," *op. cit.*, p. 25-76, p. 48.

31. *The Sixth Sense*, dir. M. Night Shyamalan, perf. Bruce Willis, Haley Joel Osment, Hollywood Pictures, 1999, DVD.

32. *Hamlet*, dir. Kenneth Branagh, perf. Kenneth Branagh, Brian Blessed, Castle Rock Entertainment, 1996; *Hamlet*, dir. Franco Zeffirelli, perf. Mel Gibson, Paul Scofield, Canal+, 1990.

33. *Hamlet*, dir. Michael Almereyda, perf. Ethan Hawke, Sam Shepard, Miramax, 2000.

34. *Aphthonii sophistae Progymnasmata, partim a Rodolpho Agricola, partim a Ioanne Maria Catanaeo, Latinitate donata*, Londini, Henricum Middeltonum, 1572, p. 183, my translation. The 1520 English translation by Richard Pynson includes the *ethopoeia* of Niobe, but not of Hecuba.

35. Phyllis Rackin, "Anti-Historians: Women's Roles in Shakespeare's Histories," *Theatre Journal*, 37, no. 3, October 1985, 329-344.

ABSTRACTS

The Shakespearean corpus provides fifty instances of the word "dread." My examination suggests that an atmosphere of dread correlates with specific genres (the Roman plays, English histories), subjects (politics and history), and works (*The Rape of Lucrece* and *Hamlet*). In a few cases, notably *Lucrece*, "dread" is also associated with an acute awareness of life-after-death in the form of history and reputation. Dread of God's judgment is a common theme in uses of word before 1600, as recorded by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In *Hamlet*, however, there emerges a more modern connotation of "dread" as a malaise that persists after death. The old-fashioned ghost has confidence that his *material* condition in whatever afterlife he inhabits could make Hamlet's hair stand on end; he has a traditional early modern sense of dread as terror that expresses itself through the body. But the dread that stays Hamlet's hand is different. I place Hamlet and his father's ghost within the context of other early modern revenants who relive emotionally their pasts. These revenants belong to the poetic female complaint, a tradition popular in the 1590s that specifically informs *The Rape of Lucrece*. The dread felt by Lucrece and Hamlet comes from anticipating historical reputation but also from a perception of the conflict between historical character and lived reality that haunts historical actors in the afterlife.

Le corpus shakespearien contient cinquante occurrences du mot « dread » (terreur). Mon analyse suggère qu'une atmosphère de terreur est associée à des genres spécifiques (les pièces romaines,

les pièces historiques anglaises), à des sujets spécifiques (la politique et l'histoire), et à des œuvres spécifiques (*Le Viol de Lucrece* et *Hamlet*). Dans quelques cas, et en particulier *Lucrece*, la terreur s'accompagne aussi d'une conscience aiguë de la vie après la mort sous l'aspect de l'histoire et de la réputation. La terreur du jugement de Dieu est un thème commun dans les emplois du mot « dread » avant 1600, d'après les relevés du dictionnaire *Oxford English Dictionary*. Dans *Hamlet*, toutefois, émerge une connotation plus moderne du terme : un malaise qui perdure après la mort. Le fantôme démodé est sûr que sa condition *matérielle* post-mortem pourrait faire se dresser les cheveux de Hamlet ; il a un sens de la terreur typique de la Renaissance, et qui passe par le corps. Mais c'est une autre terreur qui arrête la main de Hamlet. J'étudie Hamlet et le fantôme de son père dans le contexte d'autres revenants de la première modernité qui revivent en émotion leur passé. Ces revenants appartiennent au genre de la complainte féminine, tradition populaire dans les années 1590 qui informe *Le Viol de Lucrece*. La terreur que ressentent Lucrece et Hamlet provient de leur anticipation de leur réputation historique, mais aussi de leur perception du conflit entre le personnage historique et la réalité vécue qui hante les protagonistes historiques dans l'autre vie.

INDEX

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