

Đurđina Šijaković

Institute of Ethnography SASA, Belgrade
djurdjina.s@gmail.com

Shaping the Pain: Ancient Greek Lament and Its Therapeutic Aspect*

In this paper, which is the first part of a wider research, I focus on different aspects of ancient Greek lament. One of its most important aspects is the therapeutic aspect: by verbalizing, revealing the pain and by sharing it with others, the pain itself is becoming more bearable both for the woman that laments and for the bereaved family. Related to this therapeutic is the creative aspect of lament: the woman that mourns has to lament in order to make it easier for herself and others; but while lamenting, she is creating something. In spite of this constructive, let us call it creative-therapeutic potential, the lament carries in itself a different, rather dark and gloomy potential, if it calls for vengeance, not reconciling with the fact of someone dear's death. Deeply rooted in funeral ritual, a lament respects certain ritual rules, and yet it is a spontaneous expression of pain. Examining these mutually dependent aspects of lament, I will turn attention to the position of lament in Greek rites and tragedy, that summit Greek art and literature. Ritual lament within ancient tragedy is, as always when it comes to Greek culture, an inexhaustible topic. Although tragedy belongs to literary tradition, it is a trustworthy source for ancient Greek ritual practice; lament within tragedy is thus a ritual lament, and not only a literary one. Characters of many tragedies will mention the therapeutic aspect of lament, examined in this paper: they consider tears, wails and words directed to the deceased as joyful service, enjoyment, music, song precious and indispensable.

This paper has its supplement, shaping the pain in few case studies. Inspired by laments of Montenegrin women, those that I have heard or read, I am re-reading Euripides' *Electra* and *Electra* by Danilo Kiš (in which both Euripides' drama and

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Montenegrin folklore is reflected), I am watching the Michalis Kakojannis' movie *Electra*. Electra's pain for loss, the one that through despair leads to anger and vengefulness, is found written or filmed: it is captured in work of art, but it emits folklore and ritual characteristics. Her sorrowful dirge, hers and of so many other women, is deeply rooted in funeral rites, and so, although a spontaneous expression of grief, it obeys certain ritual rules. One of the most important aspects of the lament is its therapeutic aspect: by verbalizing, expressing, externalizing pain and by sharing it with others, the pain itself becomes more bearable both for woman that laments and for other bereaved. From that perspective I am re-reading one of the most beautiful Serbian epic poems, *The Death of Jugović's Mother*, which tells us about a mother that didn't lament.

*Κάλλιο έχω να μοιρολογώ
παρά να φάω και να πιώ.¹*

*I would rather lament
than eat or drink.*

It has been lamented among the people of so many nations; after deities and beloved humans; it has been mourned through the song in choir, in duet and alternation, or by one person, in most cases by a woman; the grief of the bereaved was shown by a close female relative or by a professional female mourner followed by a musical instrument, pipe for instance; in front of gathered people or in solitude; at home, right after someone's death, in funeral procession, on the grave (also later – by a road, by a spring, in a shade...); spontaneously and on dates that label the end/beginning of a certain cycle. The lament is a part of funeral rites and cult, therefore it is a song of ritual character. Nevertheless, it is a precious phenomenon of folk literature. Vojislav Đurić properly says that lament is “the song of the whole manhood” that binds “centuries and nations, and colorful piles of people, scattered here and there” and these centuries and nations, observed through the practice of lamentation “for a moment create a uniform parade, an entity, the humankind” (Đurić 1940, 4). We can say without hesitation (moreover we should always bear it in mind) that this “song of the whole manhood” is being written by women: bereaved mothers, sisters, daughters and wives; it is the women, who bring life, that give a send-off to it while it leaves this world. “So many times a stone would shed a tear, hearing how mournfully a mother cries over a son or a sister over a brother.” (Karadžić 1966, 834 under *tužiti/to lament*)

¹ From a modern Greek lament. – The Peloponnesian region Mani is well-known by laments and vendettas up till our days. In this paper I didn't have chance to engage in modern Greek lament, which sheds light on the ancient one to a great extent (and vice versa). On this topic see abundant literature: on Maniot laments Holst-Warhaft 1995, 75–98; on the continuum of the Greek lament from ancient times till now Alexiou 200, on lament as a part of funeral rites in rural Greece Danforth 1982.

In various, especially in traditional patriarchal cultures, it is common for laments to be performed by women as a part of important and detailed funeral ritual. Both men and women, of course, mourn over the dead, but in different ways: women tend to mourn longer, in public, louder, and “articulated” – through a lament; it is performed, initiated and led by women that acquired skill in lamenting;² they are recognizable and memorized in their community by this gift (each one) as *skilled lamentress*, as her “teacher” calls one of the women I spoke with during this research. They express their own pain and/or the pain of the bereaved family (and the sorrow is not necessarily for the same deceased), they articulate this pain, channeling it through a song that is an imaginary dialogue with deceased, a direct speaking to him.

Lament and its Aspects: Socio-Politic, Creative-Therapeutic and Revengeful

This dialogue with the dead reflects particular power that women possess in the domain of death as well as potential danger for community, related to this power. Gail Holst-Warhaft sees this problem threefoldly. Firstly, a lament can be device for stimulating vendetta, uncontrolled reciprocal violence (against which one society established specific laws). Secondly, since it concentrates on grief and loss, female lament may deny justification and value (sometimes even exclusivity) of dying for a benefit of community, thus making it more difficult for authorities to recruit and create a loyal, bold and plucky army. Finally, in patriarchal societies in which woman has been constantly underestimated, apart from certain control over life (as birth-givers and midwives), she had a certain control over death as well, exactly through her significant role in funeral rites. (Holst-Warhaft 1995, 3) That is why, let us concentrate on ancient Greece, from VI century BC onwards, in many poleis including Solon’s Athens, laws forbidding excessive mourning were passed. Many of these laws were very severe on female role and behaviour during funerals, especially on female lament.³

Lamenting, therefore, is not simply a female answer to death: it emerges from whole community’s relation towards death, and further towards life. Greek tragedians understood it very well, using tradition in which women speak spoke directly to the dead, “raise them from their graves” and incite them to interact with those alive. Of course that lament is intertwined with tragedy, the art preoccupied with death: bloodshed, slaughter, sacrifice, vengeance... Gail Holst-Warhaft argues

² In many regions familiar with performing laments, in some occasions professional mourners were hired; for some compensation they would lament in public and certainly with a trained skill.

³ That is why so many women in mourning had to deal with, shall we say, Antigone’s opponent. This suppressing of female voice in classical Greece had an influence on creating and shaping two genres: funeral oration and tragedy. These genres, developed in “male” Greek society, show up to a point male perspective of female mourning, conflict between male and female intercourse with death and the dead, and a gap between private and public funeral. With these topics is especially occupied Nicole Loraux (Loraux 1984), as well as Gail Holst-Warhaft (Holst-Warhaft 1995, 98–171) and Lada Stevanović (Stevanović 2009, 141–187).

that tragedy is at least partly adaptation of traditionally female art of lamenting and that we can sense it in language, in traces of music and dance, in the deeply ritual (Holst-Warhaft 1995, 11). Elements of lament form an ineradicable substratum inside of another, urban, male art. Accordingly, in researching and attempting to understand the ancient Greek culture in which the mourning of dead had fundamental importance for community, lament and tragedy are inseparable and complementary phenomena.

Lamenting practice of women is by all means closely connected with their traditional power in the context of funeral rites. However, lamenting is an act of creating, a craft, and an *art*. (Therefore, fading of this tradition is fading of an art.) If art emerges when we cannot rationally express what we feel, if art is the scream of life and if pain (or another emotion) is the essence of art... than lament is art *par excellence*. *Lamentresses* are folk poets, composers and singers, as well as actors, scenic performers. Painful art of lament is female art, gender-specific. But not every woman could be lamenter: it is necessary to possess certain verbal and musical skills, to know how to combine them in order to shape one self's (or others') pain into a work of art. She uses stock of textual and musical formulae established by tradition, and shapes inexpressible feelings into thoughts, ideas, comprehensible and tangible; she is a crafts(wo)man, creator, performer, folk poet, artist. Some performances surprise us with vigorous, intensive and beautiful expression; with poignant metaphor and subtle choice of words; with melody intoxicating in spite of its monotony, repetitive rhythm and unexpected changes. Sometimes, simply the body position of a woman while lamenting speaks for itself; sob, groan, moan, whimper, sigh, pause, speech through tears, frailty of body and shiver of voice, the effect of diphonic/polyphonic structure of lamenting in duet/group – these are all elements that an actor utilizes on stage. Now, the close relation of lament and (classical Greek) tragedy becomes more explicable, more clear and natural. This genre of lamentation is characterized by multiple fluidity: it is a form between speech and song, it joins traditionally fixed formulae and individual skillfulness; process of composing flows analogously with process of (public, scenic) performing. It oscillates between spontaneous expressing one's psychic pain on one side and carefully deliberated poetic fabric worth admiring on the other. It unites rushes of different feelings that interchange.

The lament ambiguously carries in itself constructive and (self-)destructive power. With previously reviewed creative-artistic aspect another one corresponds – the therapeutic aspect, but let us turn attention to the dark side first. The lamenter, being in direct contact with death through the act of lamenting, is some kind of a medium like witch or shaman, considers Angela Partridge. Based on this theory, a person who laments deceased is in a transitional phase: during liminary stage, which means during her lament, she is being isolated from her society (Partridge 1980, 25–37). In this transitional phase of “conversation” with the dead, a lamenter self-mutilates: pulling the hair out, scratching her face, beating her chest – these are all common characteristics in many culture where lament was practiced. This kind of scene makes a strong impression on an observer and underlines this feature of a woman that dirges as a medium between the living and the dead: she is perceived as

unbalanced due to the pain, even crazy and dangerous towards herself and others. Ambiguously and paradoxically, in spite of connecting lament with insanity, lament is understood (especially by women who themselves lament) not only as an uncontrolled emotional outburst, but also as a device that helps channeling extremely difficult emotions. Directing these emotions to a vent that lament represents, one is actually avoiding madness and (self-)destructiveness. This cathartic, constructive, *therapeutic potential* of lament is very important and it is close to the liminal aspect of a lamenter as a demarcation mark/bridge from the world of the living to the world of the dead and vice versa. All the women I spoke with agree on the claim that lamenting is an inner need, socially more acceptable and healthier (both for a bereaved woman and for all gathered) than uncontrolled crying, shrieking and sobbing. Therefore, the lament is structured, articulated, emotionally formulated answer to death. As Lada Stevanović notices, the lament functions on psychological level, by means of direct confrontation with loss (during a ritual practice that is, as well as a whole ritual, time-limited), and on communicational level, by means of sharing one's grief with others (Stevanović 2009, 150–151). Women even encourage one another to – instead of just crying – lament: to share their story and pain, to let others (the living, the present, and also the dead, mentioned) participate in it. Through this sharing, women gradually calm down, wounds begin to heal, and something that started as impulsive, unrestrained cry ends up as a structured lament... at times remembered, memorized, written down or recorded. Therapeutic aspect refers not only to a performer, but also to the family of the deceased and wider to the whole group of people that came to say goodbye. Also, it is comforting for the family of the deceased to know that their beloved one has gone with a proper send-off: in numerous cultures it was considered a great misfortune to go to the Underworld “without being cried over”.

What is it that brings consolation to the family of a late man, to his kin and wider to a whole community? A deceased is hence properly sent-off via lament, but also not forgotten. Namely, by his/her death the usual course of private and social life is interrupted and the restoration of that course is required; under restoration goes remembering, recalling, engraving in memory, in order to reestablish individual and collective sense of the permanent and ever-lasting, that are indisputably essential to the Man and to the mankind. How do women lamenters keep save their dead from oblivion? By praising physical and psychical distinctions of deceased, by letting some specific life circumstances of deceased be known to everyone, and deliberately by massing proper names. Firstly, apart from the deceased's name, those are proper names of the living ones that are in mourning, and those of previously deceased, those who will welcome the new-comer (close relatives and friends, and if the lamenter doesn't belong to the same family, she will mention and “say hello” to her own family members that had passed away). Further, those are geographical names, characteristic of the one that has died and of his community: not only the names of the place where he was born, raised and where he died, but also the name of a mountain, a river, of a path that he used to walk along or a tree that he liked to rest under. Consequently, a very detailed and unique social and topographic map is being created; a map due to which this elusive, evanescent, treacherous existence of the deceased is put in frames of concrete surrounding of the living ones (Holst-

Warhaft 1995, 36). Besides, by using and repeating proper names a woman-creator transforms general conventional formulaic expressions into something personal, distinct, unique and inimitable.

Let us turn for a moment to that dark side. Death of someone beloved, as we know, provokes a complex of emotions in which, apart from sorrow, anger prevails. Death is caused by something or someone (in the other case, anger is more transparent) and death itself causes tears, bitterness, rage... a desire for vengeance, possible or not. The cause of death is not always obvious, but it seems that there is always a need for a concrete blame. If death appeared after a disease or some misfortune, God or Fate could be blamed as a cause. If death was caused by a human being (indirectly or even directly), then the funeral dirge mentions this person, without fail and exception, cursing⁴ him and often encouraging present male relatives to take revenge. Giving vent to a spectrum of fierce emotions, laments can quickly and easily transform from sorrowful to vengeful songs, songs that call for vengeance or even describe already preformed one. Accordingly, in the same narrative sorrow and anger, pain of loss and call for revenge often interchange and intertwine, and distinct limit between these feelings fades away. This *vengeful aspect* in not so distant past was characteristic of those areas (Greece, Albania, Sicilia, Montenegro, Herzegovina...) in which a horrific tradition of vendetta was alive for a long time. That is where we meet another contradiction, suggests Holst-Warhaft (Holst-Warhaft 1995, 73–4), which contains the mentioned destructive and therapeutic potentials of lamenting. The lament that calls for revenge unquestionably externalizes pain which is to be transformed into rage and reciprocal violence; it denies any authority that directly caused the end of life (a state or a sovereign that sent a deceased to the army, or even God that took someone's life). On the other hand, building the pain into a mourning song is already letting out one's pain, externalizing one's sufferings, releasing from them, organizing emotional impressions, and controlling them. Through a lament, the pain is being shared, and its centre of gravity shifts from individual to collective; furthermore, stigmatizing the one that caused death shifts focus from pain of loss to rage directed to the culprit; the pain passes away, scatters, withdrawing in front of another feeling. In both cases the intimate, private suffering breaks out from one single soul to public, to community, and it finds solace either in shedding tears with those who empathize, or in focusing on the culprit.

Ancient Greek Tradition: Lament as a Part of Ritual

As Erwin Rhode says, "the first obligation of the living concerning the dead is to bury the body in an accustomed way" (Rhode 1991, 136). Funeral rites and lamentation in its frame were "privileges of the dead". Namely, the lament as a part of the ancient Greek ritual wasn't just a spontaneous outpouring of grief (although there had to be some spontaneity, since it was all about one of the basic feel-

⁴ "Curse is, after all, primarily "weapon" of those deprived and weak... Hence it is a common belief that "God hears" curse of widows, orphans and weak, caused by injustice." Đapović 2009, 15.

ings and events for a human), but a significant and carefully deliberate element of funeral ritual.

As soon as the process of soul leaving the body (*ψυχορραγεῖν*) was finished, the body was being prepared for a wake, a disposition of the corpse (*πρόθεσις*).⁵ The closest relative would close eyes and mouth of the deceased, and female relatives would bath and dress his the body, adorning it with leaves and garlands of herbs that were believed to have apotropaic powers, casting evil spirits away; at the doors a ball with water taken from outside the house was held for ritual cleansing of everything that came into contact with death – especially women and house objects. After the wake (its duration varied, but it was stabilized from the classical period), usually on the third day, the burial with funeral procession took place (*ἐκφορά*). On certain dates offerings were made on grave (*ἐναγίσματα*), always followed by a prayer: firstly a lock of hair (as *pars pro toto*, instead of a human sacrifice), then wine, oil, milk and honey libations; scents, spices, first fruits, meat of an animal slaughtered right there on the grave, so that blood dripped directly to the ground and to the dead; apart from drink and food, also pipes, lyre, candles and lamps. Namely, these offerings had two relevant and mutually connected aspects: one was the need to satisfy the dead by the offerings, so that they wouldn't become aggressive for not having been respected, thus harming the living; another is was the need to offer a retribution (in fruits, grains, flowers and blood as well) to the earth, that gives life and takes it back, thus providing universal fertility. With necessary ritual cleaning, eventually the ritual meal followed (*καθέδρα, περίδειπνον*) that was shared by the closest relatives at the hearth. We possess detailed knowledge on funeral rites in ancient Greece thanks to the painted Attic and Athenian pottery. (Rhode 1991, 136–143; Alexiou 2002, 4–15; Burkert 2007, 67–76, Stevanović 2009, 91–114).

The lament began during the wake (*πρόθεσις*); Rhode even says that the meaning of the wake, the very aim of it was to ensure the place and time for lamenting (Rhode 1991, 138). Around the bier stood female cousins with the main mourner (mother, wife, sister or daughter) in front, who would embrace the dead man's head with her both hands; other female cousins would put their right hands over the corpse, often self-mutilating themselves (chest-beating and pulling the loosened hair was usual). Other women, non-relatives (possibly professional mourners) were sometimes grouped on the other side. The lament was followed by dirge, wail and sound of a pipe (*αὐλός*), so the scene had to resemble a sort of dance. During the funeral procession (*ἐκφορά*), the next stage of the ritual, mourning didn't imply a chanted lament – it rather consisted of less articulated form of wailing and crying. Offerings on the grave (*ἐναγίσματα*) were not made in silence, but in dirge. A woman would come closer to the grave (followed by a man on horse or next to it); she would hold out her offerings and she would start her lament, standing or kneeling, stretching out her right hand and pulling her hair (loosened and revealed during

⁵ In earlier, archaic period this part of ritual was public and took place outdoors; after restrictive laws of VI and V century BC a wake took place inside at home or in yard.

the lamentation). Compared to the previous public lamentation during the wake, lamenting on the grave was more intimate and a more family part of the ritual – the lament on the grave was more intensive and more passionate not only for the reason of pure piety and grief, but also because of its deeply ritual nature, believes Alexiou (Alexiou 2002, 8). In order to make offerings successful and spirit of a deceased satisfied, he or she has to be cried over with passionate expressions of pain, with cries and gestures.⁶ Again it should be kept in mind that restrictive laws (Solon's in Athens and other laws of VI and V century BC) manifoldly succeeded in limiting the existing pompousness and excessiveness referred to the cult of the dead. That is why only the closest female relatives had the right to participate (a rule that didn't pass for male relatives), strong expressions of pain were suppressed (like face-scratching, head- and chest-beating), as well as expansion of lament to other, formerly deceased, to luxurious processions etc. (Alexiou 2002, 4–15; Stevanović 2009, 91–114; Rode 1991, 136–143) Legislation was hence oriented against female voice and against the voice of her pain; suffocating her voice in the single opportunity in which it could have been listened to, in the only expanse where it could be heard, at the place that traditionally belongs to her; polis – state of the men – was removing the woman from public space.

Terminology: γόος and θρήνος

Let us cast a glance at the terminology.⁷ Two terms designate ancient Greek lament – γόος and θρήνος. The term γόος primarily denotes the kind of lament that is performed by a woman from the closest family and it is rather an improvisation inspired by pain of loss; it was more personal, intimate, spontaneous, more spoken than sung, and it tended to develop into a narrative rather than into a musical form. On the other hand, the other kind of lament was identified with the term θρήνος: the one that was sung by non-relatives, professional mourners paid or forced female strangers; this lament was prepared and deliberately touching, composed with musical accompaniment, so the musical element in it was dominant. Induced distinction relates to the pre-classical period and it lessened with time, so that in classical period and onwards the terms γόος and θρήνος were mostly equally used as syn-

⁶ Lada Stevanović notices that even today, among atheists and people completely removed from traditional rituals and beliefs, there is a sort of respect, awe and reverence towards the dead and related to this a custom of never speaking ill about deceased. She considers this custom a residue of former fear from the dead, and further an idea about reciprocal benevolence (if we speak well about the dead, they will be inclined to us) (Stevanović 2009, 56). In that case, *do ut des* principle is still valid in a way.

⁷ On reach Serbian terminology for lament and woman that laments see RKT 1985 under *tužbalica* and *narikača*, as well as Popović 2007 under *tužbalica*. In this paper I didn't study Serbian lament and funeral rites; while writing the paper I certainly used precious and inspiring literature on it and gathered laments (Šaulić 1929; Karadžić 1957, 144–197; Nenadović 1997, 117–132; Đurić 1940, Ljubiša 1988, 174–185; Zečević 2008, 381–397; RKT 1985, under *tužbalica/lament*, *narikača/lamenter*) as well as material that I recorded myself in Montenegro (the laments and interviews with lamenters).

onyms. But this old distinction points out to the origin of lamenting in antiphonal singing of two groups of women and to the dichotomy relatives: non-relatives or female kin: female strangers. Two groups lamented in alternation and in strophes (one woman could sing a strophe as a soloist), each strophe was followed by a refrain sung in unison by all the lamenters.

Κομμός, Tragic Lament

Precisely these ancient elements – antiphonal character, dialogue form and role of soloist, as well as primarily different forms of wailing – tragedy will revive⁸, emphasize and develop in a specific part of drama called κομμός. Κομμός originally defines wailing followed by wild gestures and it is connected with Asiatic ecstasy and exaggeration. It was thus a very *dramatic* kind of ritual lament and its literary survival and adaptation is κομμός in tragedy, where a choir and actor(s) lament in a form of dialogue. Reviewing quantitative parts of tragedy, Aristotle says on *commos*:

κομμός δὲ θρῆνος κοινὸς χοροῦ
καὶ ἀπὸ σκηνῆς.

A *commos* is a song of lament shared
by the chorus and the actors on the
stage.⁹

Alexiou thinks (Alexiou 2002, 12–14, 102–103) that *commos* could have developed as a dramatic form of ritual antiphonal lament in which a group of female non-relatives sings in a choir on the one side, and one woman, a closest relative, laments solo in a narrative on the other. Although tragedy belongs to literary tradition, it can be considered a reliable source for ancient Greek every-day ritual practice; the same way *commos* in tragedy is taken as a credible source for lamenting in every-day life in ancient Greece.¹⁰ Accordingly, the *commos* is considered as ritual and not strictly literary lament.

Previously examined aspect of lament, its therapeutic potential, is mentioned by many characters of tragedy. They consider tears, wails and words directed to the deceased as joyful service, enjoyment, music, song precious and indispensable. Orestes in Aeschylus' tragedy *Libation Bearers* names lamentation *joyous service*:

⁸ In Homer this, otherwise very important antiphonal element is obscure, while refrain is reduced and rather formal. In archaic period lyric poets used and developed especially θρῆνος at the expense of soloist and dialogue.

⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452b. Greek text Aristotle 1996, translation in English Aristotle 1932.

¹⁰ Arguments on this attitude see Loraux 1998 and 1987.

Ὀρέστης

χάριτες δ' ὁμοίως
κέκληνται γόος εὐκλειῆς
προσθοδόμοις Ἀτρείδαις.

In Euripides' drama *Electra* this heroine encourages herself to lament and incites her tears finding enjoyment, *ἡδονή* in them:

Ἥλέκτρα

ἴθι τὸν αὐτὸν ἔγειρε γόον,
ἀναγε πολὺδακρυν ἄδονάν.

For choir in Euripides' *Trojan Women*, lamenting is a *sweet relief* for those who suffer:

Χορός

ὥς ἡδὺ δάκρυα τοῖς κακῶς πεπραγόσι
θρήνων τ' ὀδυρμοὶ μοῦσά θ' ἡ λύπας
ἔχει.

Orestes

Yet a lament in honor of the Atreidae
who once possessed our house is none
the less a joyous service.¹¹

Electra

Come, waken the same lament, take up
the enjoyment of long weeping.¹²

Chorus Leader

What sweet relief to sufferers it is to
weep, to
mourn, lament, and chant the dirge that
tells of grief!¹³

The heroine of the same play, Trojan queen Hecuba pleads for lamenting which will ease her pain, even that which is somatic; in her manifold maternal grief and inconceivable misfortune, she calls lament *μουσα* – thus she calls it a song and music for those wretched like her:

Ἑκάβη

οἴμοι κεφαλῆς, οἴμοι κροτάφων
πλευρῶν θ', ὥς μοι πόθος εἰλίζαι
καὶ διαδοῦναι νῶτον ἄκανθάν τ'
εἰς ἀμφοτέρους τοίχους, μελέων
ἐπὶ τοὺς αἰεὶ δακρύων ἐλέγους.
μουσα δὲ χαῦτη τοῖς δυστήνοις
ἄτας κελαδεῖν ἀχορευτούς.

Hecuba

O my head, my temples, my side!
How I long to turn over,
and lie now on this, now on that,
to rest my back and spine,
while ceaselessly my tearful wail as-
cends.
For even this is music to the wretched,
to chant their cheerless dirge of sor-
row.¹⁴

¹¹ Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers*, 320–322. Greek text and translation in English Aeschylus 1926.

¹² Euripides, *Electra*, 125–126. Greek text Euripides 1913a, translation in English Euripides 1938a.

¹³ Euripides, *The Trojan Women*, 608–609. Greek text Euripides 1913b, translation in English Euripides 1891.

¹⁴ Ibidem, 115–121. Greek text Euripides 1913b, translation in English Euripides 1891.

With its grace and poignancy, the beginning of the lament in Euripides' *Helen* imposes itself. In this lament, choir calls for a nightingale to come and help in lamenting: nightingale's sophisticated singing, gentle voice and painful sound creates a beautiful lament. This singer above singers that dwells the temple of the Muses (patronesses of arts) is excellent in *creating* and *performing* lament – a song that soothes sores and pleases the soul, but also a song that is a skill and an art. Creative and therapeutic aspects of lament always complement each other:

Χορός

σὲ τὰν ἐναύλοις ὑπὸ δενδροκόμοις
μουσεῖα καὶ θάκους ἐνί-
ζουσιν ἀναβοάσω,
σὲ τὰν αἰδοτάταν ὄρνιθα μελωδὸν
ἀηδόνα δακρυόεσσαν,
ἔλθ' ὦ διὰ ξουθᾶν
γενύων ἐλελιζομένα
θρήνων ἐμοὶ ξυνεργός.

Chorus

Let me call on you,
beneath leafy haunts,
sitting in your place of song,
you, the most sweetly singing bird,
tearful nightingale, oh, come,
trilling through your tawny throat,
to aid me in my lament.¹⁵

Conclusion

Preserving archaic elements of ritual lament, Greek tragedy gives extremely precious and reliable testimonies about ancient funeral rites and about the way ancient Greeks used to deal with their beloved's death. It says a lot on the role of woman in funeral ritual, on the power that traditionally belonged to her and was controlled by laws of many poleis. Lament is, even if it calls for revenge, a structured answer to death, an answer of a community, and furthermore an attitude of the same community towards life. This building of suffering into a song eases sores of the woman that laments, of a bereaved family, and wider of a whole community. Lamenting has different aspects, among them creative-therapeutic as a very important and interesting one. This art offers solace, it shapes the pain.

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¹⁵ Euripides, *Helen*, 1107–1113. Greek text Euripides 1913c, translation in English Euripides 1938b.

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