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Performing Gender Normativity and Queerness in the Roman Funeral: An Analysis of Historical Sources and Iconographic Evidence

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This article contributes to the emerging field of Queer Death Studies by offering a queer analysis of the gendered performances of mourners during the Roman funeral through an examination of subversions of normative gender expression and the collapsing of binaries like masculine/feminine, decorum/dishevelment and life/death. The practices of Roman mourners were simultaneously codified and socially transgressive as a means of facilitating the transitional apparatus of the funeral. 'Queerness' is a method and a process that aids in reconciling the duality in which Roman mourners operated. Using literary references to gendered mourning behaviors and iconographic evidence from sarcophagi depicting embodied, subversive gender performances, such as imagery of mourners tearing at disheveled, dirtied hair and exposing their breasts, this article emphasizes the mutability of Roman gender performance within specific spatial and temporal contexts like the funeral.

Introduction

A marble sarcophagus of the second century AD, currently in the Louvre, depicts a deceased individual lying-in-state, surrounded by mourners engaged in various acts (**Figure 1**). On either end of the deceased, a man and a woman rest their chin on their hands in a mirrored gesture. Above the deceased, a woman tears at her hair while another raises her hands in lament and a third woman with her breasts fully exposed leans over the chest of the dead figure. In the actions of these mourners, the complexity and fluidity of embodied gender expression is visible. Through an examination of visual iconography from sarcophagi and funerary stelae and from ancient literary references to mourning behavior, this article applies theoretical considerations of gender performativity, embodiment and queerness to emphasize how Roman gender expression was non-stagnant and the funeral served as a queer space in which normativities and seemingly fixed binaries were intentionally subverted. This article begins with a discussion of the growing application of gender and queer studies to the Roman world and, by extension, Roman funerary practices. The article then outlines the duties of mourners at funerals within the context of gender performance. This is followed by a queer analysis of how such duties both reinforce and subvert gender norms.

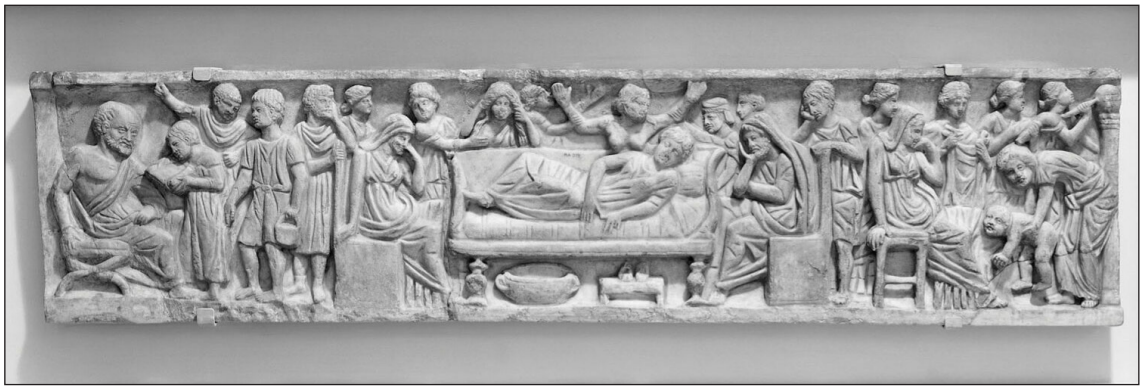

Figure 1: Sarcophagus D'enfante. Second century AD. Musee du Louvre MA 319, Paris, France. (Louvre Terms of Use: 4.1.1).

Funerals in the Roman world from the Republic through the Imperial Period functioned as productions, subversions and reproductions of various identities of the living. Ancient literary sources which describe funerary and mourning practices perpetuated idealized, fixed perceptions of norms around intersecting identities like gender, status and age (Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 3.48.8; Seneca, *Epistulae* 99). Ancient authors presented binary expectations of acceptable displays of masculinity and femininity, almost exclusively within an elite cultural framework, and disparaged what they deemed to be excessive, transgressive performances of grief (Cicero, *Tusculanae*

Disputationes 3.62; Tacitus, *Agricola* 29; Foxhall and Salmon 1998; Olson 2014; Surtees and Dyer 2020). It is through these transgressions of norms by mourners, visible in both the literary and material record, that we can complicate and queer understandings of gender performance in ancient Rome to better understand the nuances and fluidity of gender identity and expression in antiquity.

Despite the moralizing of ancient authors, the intentional subversion of normative gendered behavior was a requisite for the funeral. The apparatus of the funeral demanded the transgression of norms to help the newly deceased transition from the world of the living to that of the dead and protect the living as they participated in the liminal space between worlds. The textual and visual depictions of Roman men and women engaged in mourning at the funeral provide a lens through which to understand gender performance as contextually dependent and mutable. Queer theory, first introduced in 1991 by Teresa de Lauretis, helps highlight how gender is always in a state of 'becoming' and is not a stagnant identity. A queer reading of gendered mourning practices challenges a monolithic reading of ancient gender identity and allows for a more complex understanding of the transgression of norms that occurred during Roman funerals.

Literary evidence and funerary reliefs demonstrate how mourners undermined fixed binaries of life/death, past/future, decorum/dishevelment and masculinity/femininity. The lived experience of the embodiment of grief was not defined by a fixed gender divide and the engagement with the materiality of the funeral was dependent on intersecting identities beyond just gender. The queer timescape of the Roman funeral collapsed binaries, such as the undermining of the divide between past and future and normative linearity of time, discernable in the mirrored preparation of newly born and newly deceased bodies by women with childbirth experience and the death mask and eulogy performances of young men. During the funeral, the norms and expectations of daily life also became intentionally inversed, not only for the purpose of emotional catharsis, but also for the social and religious function of the funeral. This is particularly visible in the acts of unbinding performed by women, explored in this article, in which women disheveled and dirtied their hair and exposed and tore at their breasts. Mourners both reinforced binary gender performance and subverted normative gender expression. Through consideration of the queerness of mourning practices and the fluidity of identity performance, it is evident that an inflexible, binary reading of gender roles in the Roman world (Foxhall and Salmon 1998; Barnett 2012) is insufficient for interpreting the multiple expressions of gender identity in antiquity.

Gender Studies and Queer Theory

Roman gender studies of the last few decades is a dynamic field of study informed by feminist and queer theories (Rabinowitz and Richlin 1993; Koloski-Ostrow and Lyons, eds. 1997; McClure 2002; Harich-Schwarzbauer and Späth 2005; Carroll 2013; Allison 2015; Rantala 2019; Moore 2023). Since the 1990s, scholars of ancient gender have leaned on Judith Butler's work (1990), which challenges the conflation of gender and sex and argues that gender is maintained, created, or perpetuated through repeated performances. Drawing upon the concept of 'intersectionality' (Crenshaw 1989), Butler also stresses that the construction and expression of gender is contingent upon the ways gender intersects with other identities like class, ethnicity, and sexuality. Informed by these arguments, archaeologists and literary scholars complicate the seemingly fixed gender binary previously assumed.

Questions about the lived experience of individuals and how their gender identity intersected with other identities have been among the most explored queries by scholars of antiquity and gender. Emphasis on materiality and embodiment of experience, informed by considering the material record in conversation with the literary record, has helped further understanding of lived experience around gender performance. Mary Louise Stig Sørenson (2000: 72) proposed that the material world was an active agent in structuring gender and that materiality directly affected experiences of gender. The emphasis on material and identity formation extended to the body itself (Joyce 2005). In treating the physical body as a material to be considered (Sofaer 2006: 85), archaeologists can analyse and deconstruct cultural ideas that can be difficult to deduce from other extant objects. For instance, there have been increased efforts to understand the material and social implications of skeletal remains by challenging the erroneous conflation of sex and gender and the dismissal of evidence for nonbinary and intersex individuals (Stratton 2016; Power 2020). Examining sex and gender expression through consideration of the body itself and the embodiment of identity by individuals offers useful insights.

The iconography of mourners in the sarcophagus and stelae examples provided in this article affords a way to examine bodies depicted in motion and performing gendered behaviors. Butler (1988: 519) asserted that, 'gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and hence must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self'. This emphasis on embodiment in the discussion of gendered performativity and the lived experience underscores the importance of analyzing gestures, movement and repeated behaviors. Building on previous scholarship on gender and body language (Corbeill 2004; Davies 2018; Barrow 2018), this article considers gendered body language specifically in the context of the funeral.

Debates of the effectiveness of gauging questions of identity and status through funerary practice have been ongoing in archaeology and anthropology largely inspired by the work of V. Gordon Childe (1945) (Binford 1971; Saxe 1970; Parker Pearson 1999; Gowland and Knüsel 2009). Scholarship on materiality, embodiment and gender, in particular, during funerals in the Roman world has been productive (cf. Graham 2011; Hope 2025). Graham (2011) identified the ways in which the materiality of a dead body and engagement with the corpse were not stagnant across the different stages of the funeral, and that those interacting with it would have varied experiences. This lack of a fixed experience offers space for further inquiry. The transitional apparatus of the funeral meant that the embodied experience of the event shifted throughout its course, the fluidity of experience creating a space in which there was also allocation for fluid identity expression and performance. The embodied performances of identity in the Roman funeral were complex in the variation of experience and, through the performances, norms were reinforced, transgressed and reinforced again.

The recognition that performances and experiences around gender were non-stagnant and, at times, transgressive has stimulated an expanding interest in deconstructing a fixed gender binary in Classical Antiquity (Ivleva and Collins 2020; Surtees and Dyer 2020). Kirk Ormand (2023: 16), following Butler, proposed that if gender is performative and it is performed with our bodies, then 'queerness becomes a way of being in the world', with queerness not a matter of sexuality but of being deliberately non-normative. In the recent volume on 'Queer Theory and Classics', Ella Haselwerdt et al. (2023: 2) present 'queer' as a resistance to norms and queer theory as series of questions which seek to deconstruct dichotomies, binaries and seemingly fixed/stagnant identities. Scholars of queer theory often emphasize the fluidity and lack of stability of identity (Halberstam 1998; Barad 2017: 65–69; Ormand 2023: 16; Moral 2016). 'Queering' is ultimately a process of transgressing and subverting 'universalized' expectations and norms in a way that highlights ever-shifting constructions of socio-cultural institutions (Surtees and Dyer 2020: 3). Considering that the material record leaves us with only snapshots of the past, queer theory promotes a more flexible reading of seemingly fixed evidence (Matić 2024). This is especially useful for interpreting cultural processes that may leave behind little material evidence, such as funerals and mourning, which has resulted in the development of Queer Death Studies.

Queer Death Studies is a field currently emerging from queer theory that builds on anthropological and sociological discussions in Death Studies, established in the 1970s (Radomska et al. 2020: 89; MacCormack 2025). The field of Queer Death Studies has developed to challenge normativities around death, dying, and mourning. This is done

by deconstructing binaries like the life/death divide, engaging with intersectionality of race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality more critically than traditional Death Studies, and incorporating dialogues of posthumanism and postcolonialism in the context of death, including social death (MacCormack 2025: 4–6). The term 'queer' in Queer Death Studies carries a multiplicity of meanings, as it does in queer theory scholarship writ large. Marietta Radomska et al. (2020: 89) in their introduction to the first volume on Queer Death Studies defined the duality of the term 'queer' in Queer Death Studies as referring to:

> '(1) a noun/adjective employed when researching and narrating death, dying and mourning in the context of queer bonds and communities where the subjects involved, studied or interviewed and the relations they are involved in are recognised as 'queer'; and (2) a verb/adverb that describes the processes of going beyond and unsettling (subverting, exceeding) the existing binaries and given norms and normativities'.

The authors argued that 'queer' becomes both a process and a methodology.

The framing of queerness as articulated in Queer Death Studies is the approach taken here as applied to the Roman funeral and mourning. In this article, the Roman funeral is articulated as a queer process in which norms and binaries are intentionally subverted by mourners. Through application of 'queer' as a method and process, we can observe how societal expectations around gender are queered within the temporal and spatial context of the funeral, identities like class, status and age contribute to embodied performance of gender, the life/death binary is challenged, binaries of masculinity and femininity as defined by ancient authors do not reflect lived experience of mourning, and the transgression/subversion of gendered normativities is a key ritual function of the Roman funeral. Considering the funeral as a process of transition, the queering of norms by mourners occurs in a moment of in-betweenness, in which the deceased has not yet left the world of the living nor entered the world of the dead. It is the queerness of the mourners at the funeral, an event which exists outside of the binary of life and death, which facilitates the transition of the deceased and protects the living from the dangers posed by their proximity to death.

Gendering the Roman Funeral

The evidence for the Roman funeral and related mourning practices largely derives from literary sources, as many of the actions and materials were ephemeral in nature. Phenomenological considerations of the senses, such as the soundscape and smellscape of the funeral, for example, are largely theoretical (Hope 2017; Clancy 2019; Derrick

2024). Archaeological evidence consists mainly of detritus from activities such as the funerary meal that was held on the ninth day of mourning (*cena novendialis*), extant remains of cremation pyres, cultic objects like altars for sacrifices to the dead, and architectural features in tombs and cemeteries like dining benches used during the funerary meal and subsequent anniversaries and festivals such as the *Parentalia* (Pearce and Weekes 2017). Material evidence also includes visual iconography of funeral and mourning scenes in funerary stelae and sarcophagi, the material considered in the present study. To best reconstruct the embodied experience of the funeral and analyse how intersectional identities such as gender, status and age may have contributed to that experience, it is useful to consult ancient literary sources to supplement, complement and challenge the material evidence, and vice versa.

Through consideration of both literary and material evidence, we can better understand and simultaneously trouble the processes and performances around death, dying and mourning. The limitations of the ancient written sources are significant, but through a critical use of queer theory they can also prove useful. Ancient authors who wrote on funeral practices and mourning through a gendered lens did so through parameters defined by the social norms of elite culture in Rome. The literature features a substantial class bias, with authors from the Late Republic through the Imperial Period writing from the perspective of what was deemed acceptable, normative behavior for men and women of the middle to higher classes. It is possible to deduce that expectations around gendered behavior were less stringent for more marginalized individuals like members of the lower class and enslaved persons. Poorer men and women would have more than likely engaged differently with the materiality of the corpse and were socially 'allowed' to express grief with less restraint. Additionally, gendered performance around mourning and duties at the funeral likely looked different beyond Rome itself. Moreover, elite attitudes towards gendered behavior related to the funeral may have changed significantly over time, though this is difficult to determine based on available evidence. By applying queer analysis to both the literature and visual iconography of mourners, even considering the limitations of the evidence, non-stagnant, fluid presentations of gender are visible. Further, queer theory aids in the deconstruction of normativities that have been assumed about Roman cultural attitudes towards gender, emotional expression, and life and death itself. Examining the ways in which the funeral was a queer space also helps reconcile how gender identity and norms were simultaneously reinforced and transgressed in codified, functional ways.

A 'proper' Roman funeral entailed several rites required to ensure a good death, that the dead stayed appeased, and that spiritual pollution was mitigated. For mourning of

the dead, the process took nine days, and this period of rest/mourning was referred to as the *ferias denicales*. According to Cicero's *de Legibus* (2.55), at this time the family was said to be *funesti*, polluted by death, and could not be in public. While there has been much discussion on Greek religious pollution, largely stemming from Robert Parker's work (1983), there has been markedly less focus on it in the Roman world. Hugh Lindsay (2000: 152–153) defines death pollution in the following way: '...it is held that the corpse has the power to contaminate those who, in various ways, come close. It can be a spiritual pollution related to the need for the soul of the deceased to be placated through appropriate funerary rites, but it may have a physical dimension'. Recently, the concept of death pollution has been debated by Jack Lennon (2022) and Allison Emmerson (2020), with the former arguing that it was a verifiable concern and the latter proposing that funerary practices were more a matter of familial obligation. In either case, the *familia funesta* would have united those affected by the caring of the dead and served to reinforce familial community and endurance through the combined efforts to achieve renewed purification, *familia pura.* Most of the procedures around the funeral would have been done by family members (Hope 2009: 86), though some processes might have been carried out by hired professionals or enslaved individuals (Bodel 2000). In most instances, engagement with the body of the deceased depended on a variety of factors like gender, age, life stage and relationship to the deceased.

Feminist theorists Joan Gero and Margaret Conkey (1991) posited that the purpose of a gendered social structure was the division of labor in society. In Roman literature, the idea of a gendered division of labor was evident, with work separated along a strict gender binary. This extended to the funerary sphere, where various duties were deemed as either for men or women, as presented by ancient authors (Polybius, *Historiae* 6.53; Plutarch, *Moralia* 267A). Women are most associated with the preparation of the body and men are associated with the processing of the body to the place of rest. Nevertheless, there was likely more crossover with respect to these roles than suggested by the literary sources. The binary division of funerary duties was in some cases likely not as strict, with men and women of varying ages, classes and life experiences engaging with the materiality of the funeral, performing prescribed acts and expressing grief. In the instances in which duties were gendered, the actions provide evidentiary support for the idea that gender was a performance that was maintained through both reinforcement and subversion of norms.

According to ancient writers (Lucan, *Pharsalia* 2, 23; Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica* 1.13), following a death, after a woman has called out the name of the deceased (*conclamatio*) there would be the process of *depositio*. It is possible that both men and women were

involved in this process. During this step, the body was moved to its knees and then to the ground and this would have required the aid of several people. In her study of materiality and embodiment in the Roman funeral, Graham (2011: 29) described how in such a practice both men and women would have had 'direct contact with the materiality of the body' and that they would have experienced it 'through the medium of touch, sight, and probably smell'. Graham's emphasis on the materiality of the corpse is compelling here as it illustrates a shared physical practice that challenges the perspective that men and women had dichotomized experiences at funerals solely based on gender. Once the body was positioned, women of the family were responsible for confirming that the deceased was truly dead. This was followed by the washing, anointing and clothing of the deceased. The women performing these acts touched and smelled the cold, decaying flesh in addition to the myrrh, incense and other masking scents, thereby experiencing the materiality of the corpse quite vividly. It is necessary to note that in some aristocratic families, enslaved persons would most likely have been tasked with these steps and that the women in the family would have overseen the preparation by these individuals.

The steps following the *depositio* paralleled the activities around the birth of a child. The similarities between rites of the dead and the processes around childbirth represent a phenomenon not just observed in the Roman world, and a larger discussion can be found in Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry's 1982 volume. Childbirth was a markedly gendered process in the Roman world, and many women, if they were old enough and/or married, may have participated in the rites around the birth which entailed checking for life and the viability of the infant on the bare ground following the birth, followed by the washing and clothing of the newborn. These actions paralleled the process of placing the corpse on the ground, determining it to be lifeless, and then washing and clothing it (Corbeill 2004: 91; Graham 2011: 31). It is reasonable to assume that such a vivid parallel and mirroring of action would have been recognizable to many of the women preparing the corpse who had been involved in childbirth, as even ancient authors like Artemidorus (*O.* 1.13) comment on the similarities. The women taking care of the deceased may even have been given the responsibility of these duties due to their experience with childbirth, highlighting the importance of intersectionality in understanding gendered funerary practice. The embodiment of female-specific memories through mirrored behaviors around birth and death demonstrates the gendered nature of funerals, and how female identity can be constructed through such a process. The placing of a body (whether newly born or newly dead) on the ground, confirming whether they were alive or dead, and clothing and washing recalls similar and repeated bodily performance of gender.

While this process may have reinforced normative constructions of gender, in some respects the collapse of time between birth and death in the actions performed by women queers what is known as 'straight time'. 'Straight time' is a concept developed by queer theorists of a life path in which there is a strict progression of temporal milestones (birth, childhood, adulthood, marriage, children and death) (Muñoz 2019; Haselswerdt et al. 2023: 5). Straight time suggests a 'chrononormative' linear progression. 'Queer time', conversely, challenges this linearity. Queer temporality, as defined by Haselswerdt et al. (2023: 4–6) is 'a model of temporal interconnection and collapse, a model that develops aslant from chrononormativity, as past, present, and/or future collide and intermingle through recirculation, repetition, delay, detour, and asynchrony'. Queer time examines the interconnection between the past and present, present and future, and the past and future. The parallels of women's engagement with newly born bodies and newly deceased bodies elucidate how the funeral was a moment of queered time, even if the actions themselves reinforced a normative gender binary. These actions were rooted in lived practice and promulgated a sense of shared connection amongst women through a shared embodied experience, supporting the argument proposed by Teagan Bradway and Elizabeth Freeman (2022: 1) that 'queer theory has always been a theory of kinship'. The funeral duties strictly reserved for men can be argued to also highlight the funeral as a queer time and space, while also reinforcing gender identity and simultaneously strengthening kinship ties through shared embodied experiences.

The most common role for men at funerals was that of the pallbearer. Close male relatives of the deceased were responsible for carrying the corpse in the funeral procession, as seen in a first century AD funerary relief from Amiternum (**Figure 2**). Through this practice, men would have had close proximity to the body of the deceased. These men would have engaged directly with the materiality of the corpse, such as the smell of both the decaying flesh and the various perfumes used to counteract the smell in addition to the physical weight of the deceased's body. The men therefore would have been seen as being polluted by death through this contact, in addition to the women who cared for the dead body earlier in the process. Darja Šterbenc Erker (2011: 47) posited that men kept their distance from the corpse due to the pollution, but the gendered role of pallbearer suggests that this was not necessarily the case. In addition to being the pallbearers, men were responsible for several funeral performances designed to express the future continuity of the family by drawing on the past. These performances included the procession of death masks and the deliverance of the eulogy, which each complicated the idea of linear life. There was a definitive function for the queering of time in the context of the funeral, and that was the negotiation of a family's status in the past, present and future.

Figure 2: Funerary relief from Amiternum. First century BC. Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, L'Aquila, Italy (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

Elite Roman funerals highlighted high-status lineage and therefore the ascribed status of the deceased individual, while also lauding the accomplishments of the deceased, i.e., the achieved status the individual may have acquired throughout their life. In both cases, the goal was to advance the prestige and status of the living who were in close social proximity to the deceased and use the deceased's social capital to bolster their own and secure a sense of continuity for the family or community. Social capital, an idea conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu in 1980, is a key concept tied to status and funerary customs. In Robert Putnam's (1993: 173–174) discussion of social capital, he emphasized that it is based around moral obligations and norms, social values and social networks. Putnam's concept centers on communal vitality, with voluntary associations fostering 'robust norms of reciprocity'. Putnam focuses less on conflict than Bourdieu, but both communicate the importance of established norms, communal relationships, recognition, and the general sociological need for social capital. Social capital was negotiated through the reinforcement and challenging of status at funerals and funerary display. There were other forms of status that could be stressed as well through Roman funerary customs, such as citizenship and freedom for formerly enslaved peoples and newly acquired higher economic status for working class Romans. These negotiations of status and social capital therefore were not just the realm of elites. The performances of men, specifically younger men, were socially impactful and underscore the importance of men's participation at a Roman funeral. The intersectionality of class, age and gender was fundamental to these performances, and many of these identities were reinforced through the funeral. Men played critical roles in the funeral with respect to the maintenance and advancement of familial continuity through performances which promoted the intersections of the past, present and future, especially in the context of more elite funerals where the *imagines* and *laudatio funebris* were central.

During public funerals, reserved for the upper echelon of society, a procession of ancestral masks, *imagines*, followed the deceased (always, except in very rare cases, male), establishing the joining of the recently dead with reverential past men in the family (Polybius, *Hist.* 6.3–9; Bettini 2005: 191–202; Mustakallio 2005: 186). Pliny (*Naturalis Historia* 3.129) informs us that these were wax images normally stored in wooden shrines in the *atrium* of the house and an inscription with the name and a biographical summary of the successes and merits of the deceased (*elogium*) was placed under each picture of the ancestor. They were worn by men who would dress up as the deceased and process with the *imago* of the dead during family funerals, and the annual festivals such as the *Parentalia*. The *imagines* were regarded as one of the most prominent parts of a Roman aristocratic funeral, marking the transition of a male relative from a living man to a worshipped ancestor. The more distinguished the deceased was, the greater number of *imagines* around the coffin there would be. The parading of the masks encouraged the young male descendants to aspire to be as great. Plutarch (*Mor.* 14) wrote that sons would cover their heads because fathers should be honored as gods by their male offspring. Polybius (*Hist.* 8.3) claimed that 'the greatest result is that the young men are encouraged to undergo anything for the common cause in the hope of gaining the good reputation which follows upon the brave deeds of men'. Young men preserved the status of the family and promulgated its continuity through the treatment of the newly deceased as a deified ancestor and the advertisement of the next generation. The *imagines* represent another way that Romans, in this case men, engaged with the materiality of death while also collapsing 'chrononormativity', therein queering the funeral.

Following this procession of the body and *imagines*, there was the eulogy, which also underscored the queer temporality of funerary practices. The funeral eulogy, *laudatio funebris,* was given by a young man, typically the son of the deceased, and it detailed the accomplishments of the dead man. In these listed visual and vocal performances, those performing were all male, but, just as importantly, they were young. Whether they were adolescents or young adults, it was their youth that served the function of performing the continuity of the family in the community. During the funeral procession, a transition from present to past and present to future occurred. The deceased became an ancestor and a part of the family's legacy, and the young man was tasked with the continued worship as well as the proliferation of that legacy. Through the act of voicing the deeds of the deceased, the young man positioned himself to follow in those footsteps, demonstrating to the larger community that the family would continue to thrive under a new generation, while also perpetuating the memory of the dead.

The above discussion demonstrates how duties around the preparation and procession of a deceased individual were, at least according to the literature, divided along the gender binary in some capacity. These divisions may have depended upon gendered (and sexed) Roman social constructs like those around childbirth and expectations for continued familial success. It cannot be ignored that gender, along with other intersecting identities like status, age and relationship to the deceased, was a determining factor in one's engagement with the dead during the process of the funeral. While normative gender identity was in some cases reinforced through funerary practices, these practices also complicated prescriptive conceptions of linear time. Queer theory in this respect allows us to add greater nuance to discussions of the roles of men and women in the funeral to better understand how Romans conceptualized death and dying. Further, we can also use queer theory to complicate the seemingly strict gender binary presented in the above funerary practices when we turn to literary and artistic representations of grief and mourning. While ancient literary evidence disparagingly present grief as the purview of women, stressing that it was not the norm for men to display grief and that women did so excessively, evidence supports a less binary expression of mourning.

A False Binary of Mourning

The gendering of funerary practices in Roman literature went beyond the act of laying the dead to rest and extended to the embodied expression of grief. Ancient writers were largely disparaging of public displays of mourning and framed grief as a feminine trait. Both literary and visual evidence presented in this article suggest, however, that mourning behavior was not strictly defined by universalizing constructions of masculinity and femininity. Men and women both cried, sang laments, and expressed their grief through shared gestures of mourning. Examination of both literary and artistic representations of mourning demonstrates how the expression and/or performance of grief was not just the ambit of women, despite the moralizing of some ancient authors as described below. We can, and arguably should, understand mourning in the Roman world beyond the gender binary that much of the literature insists upon.

The tears and wailing at funerals were among the duties of mourners to the deceased, carried out by men and women of various ages and classes. Literary evidence (Varro, *De Lingua Latina* 7.70) suggests that in some early cases women unrelated to the deceased were even hired as professional mourners (*praeficae*) to perform the codified laments of wailing (*neniae*) and tearing at their hair, a practice banned in Table X of the Twelve Tables, the earliest written law code of Rome (Bodel 2024). This served a social

capital function through the advertisement of a family's status, as the more people mourning the deceased, the more beloved in society they appeared to be. Alternatively, a large presence of *praeficae*, or more likely enslaved women during the later Republic and Empire, could also have indicated higher economic status as it showed the family had the discretionary funds to hire mourners. The tears and wailing of mourners, in addition to other transgressive behavior detailed below, also served a religious function, as they were *supplicationes* to the gods and spirits of the dead. Funerary wails were believed to be apotropaic, protecting the mourners who were polluted by death and therefore vulnerable to harmful spirits.

While tears are shed by both men and women in Roman literature, emotional display was contextually dependent in literary contexts, with funerals being regarded as an arena for women's tears, perhaps reinforced by hired mourners always being women (Rey 2015: 243–263). In the social parameters framed by ancient authors, the tears or other visual and vocal expressions of grief by men could be regarded as queer and not in line with standards of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987; Connell 2005). The gendering of mourning is highlighted by Lucian (*De Luctu* 11), who wrote in his description of the funeral that, 'Next come cries of distress, wailing women, weeping everywhere, the beating of breasts, tearing of hair and blood marked cheeks'. Livy (*A.u.c.* 3.48.8) was critical of women for their weak spirit ('*imbellicus animus*'), claiming that they are more physically susceptible to tears. In praise of Agricola, Tacitus (*Agr.* 29) used the phrase 'womanish tears and grief' ('*lamenta rursus ac maerorem muliebriter*') to describe how Agricola properly responded to the death of his son. Conversely, Seneca the Younger (*Ep.* 99) made disparaging comments of his friend Marullus' response to the death of his son by saying he should be criticized for being womanish in his grief ('*molliter ferre misi tibi*'). Seneca (*Ep.* 12.16.7) argued elsewhere that 'Despite suffering the same bereavement women are wounded more deeply than men, barbarians more than the civilized, and the uneducated more than the learned'. Seneca contrasted the grief displayed by women, barbarians and the uneducated with that of admirable men and how they responded to death, naming examples such as the priest Pulvillus who continued his duties upon hearing of the death of his son and Caesar who returned to his post as general three days after the death of Julia. Cicero (*Tusc.* 3.62), too, claimed that the only reason that he felt the grief of his daughter so strongly was that he was also mourning the fall of the Republic. Hope (2009: 127) asserted that such literary emphasis on the 'ideal' behavior of grieving men suggests that this was not, in fact, the norm, hence the need to stress how these men differed from lesser men. Despite the literature suggesting otherwise, both men and women expressed their grief through vocalization and gesture, accentuating how lived experience around death was not as binary as ancient writers presented.

Gestures of both men and women in funerary art provide visual evidence of the lack of gendered division in the lived experience of death. In some cases, deceased couples are represented in almost identical fashion, such as the second century AD stelae honoring couples from Poros and Aegina (**Figures 3** and **4**). The mirroring of gesture regardless of gender is even more striking in depictions of mourners. For example, the gestures of resting one's chin on their hand and the gesture of clasping one's knee are enacted by mourners of different genders. Both gestures are performed in the 'Death of a Young Girl' relief from Musée du Moyen Age in Paris, with women performing the gestures to the left side of the deceased and men performing the gestures to the right (**Figure 5**). The well-known 'lying-in-state' relief from the Tomb of the Haterii, dated to the early second century AD, also depicts the clasping of one's knee in grief (**Figure 6**). The gesture of resting a hand on one's chin appears frequently and is performed by men and women. In a funerary stele from Aegina at the Kolonna Archaeological Museum, a man performs the pose while seated next to a woman lying on her death bed (**Figure 7**). Other examples include an early third century AD sarcophagus at the British Museum which shows a young girl's parents both adopting the pose (**Figure 8**) as well as the sarcophagus from the Louvre discussed at the start of the article, which also shows a man and a woman on either side of the corpse in mirrored pose (**Figure 1**). This same mirroring of the resting-chin gesture by both a man and a woman is present on a second century AD child's sarcophagus from Agrigento (**Figure 9**). Anthony Corbeill (2004: 77–84) in his analysis of gesture observed that there is no distinction between men and women engaged in these poses. This mirroring of the gestures shows a visualization of grief not determined by gender. While ancient authors purport that men are not as touched by grief as women, physical displays of mourning extant in the material record demonstrate how this was an idealized, gendered response to death that was not pervasive throughout all Roman culture. Some funerary art even depicts men alone responding physically to overwhelming grief, such as the mid-second century AD 'Death of Meleager' sarcophagus relief in the Metropolitan Museum of Art which shows men covering their faces with the folds of their clothing (**Figure 10**). This is a gesture also performed by women, as seen in the second century AD 'Death of Meleager' relief from the Louvre (**Figure 11**). Through the gestures of mourning represented in funerary art, it can be argued that men and women embody their grief in ways not defined by gender, despite multiple ancient authors insisting on a stark differentiation of how men and women express grief. The shared gestures presented above emphasize how, despite men and women's funeral participation being discussed in binary terms, reality was not always so polarized.

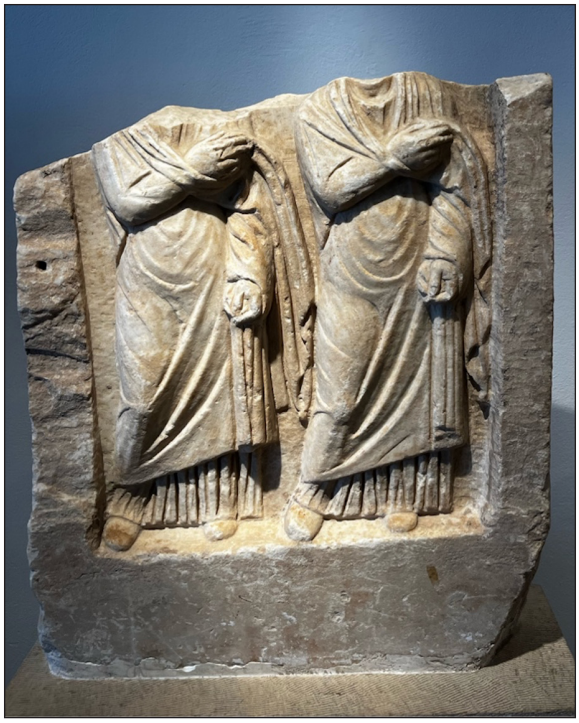

Figure 3: Funerary stelae of couple from Troizen. Second century AD. Poros Archaeological Museum (Author's photo 2025).

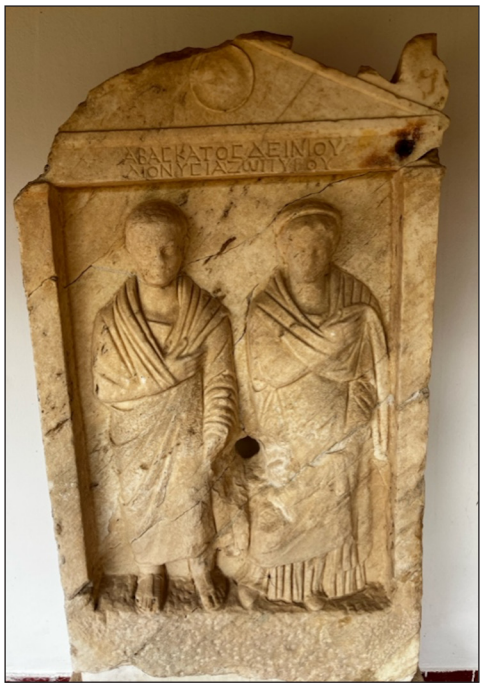

Figure 4: Funerary stelae of couple. Second century AD. Kolonna Archaeological Museum (Author's photo 2025).

Figure 5: 'Death of a Young Girl' sarcophagus. Second century AD. Musée du Moyen Age (Photo: Caroline Rose, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0).

Figure 6: 'Lying-in-state.' Tomb of the Haterii, AD 80. Vatican Museums (Photo: Erin Taylor, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0).

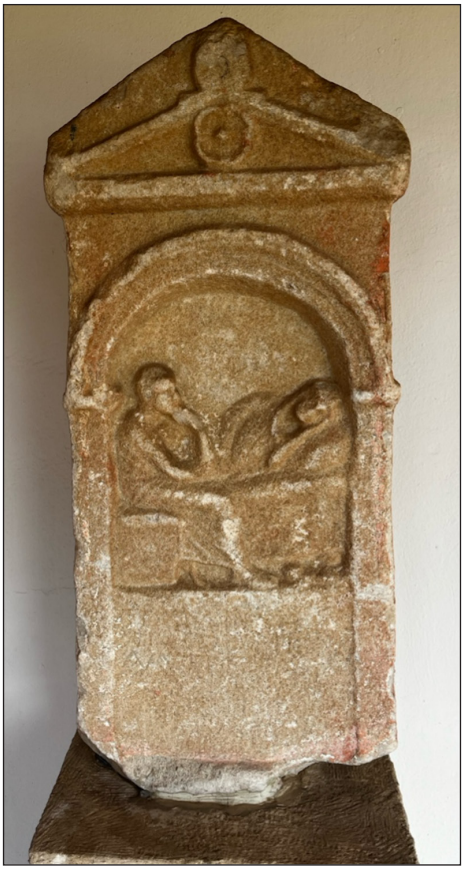

Figure 7: Funerary stelae from Aegina. Second century AD. Kolonna Archaeological Museum (Author's photo 2025).

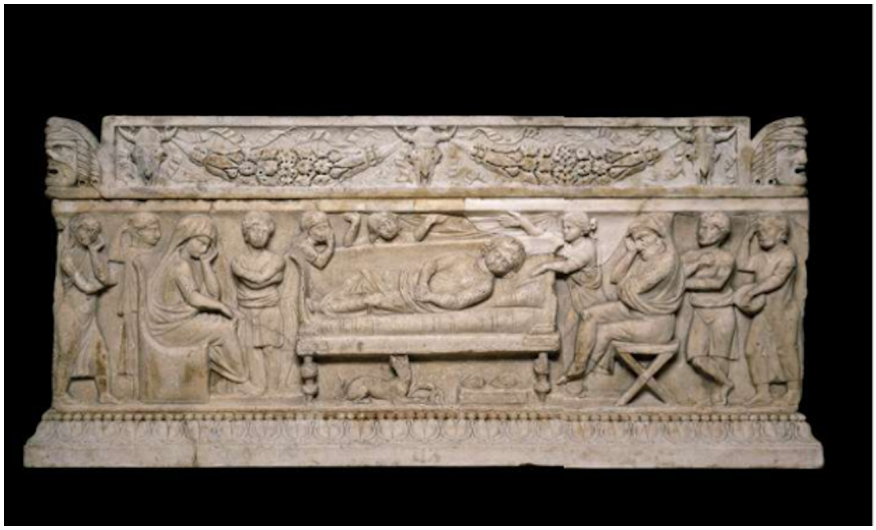

Figure 8: Sarcophagus of girl. Third century AD, British Museum, number 1805,0703.144 (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

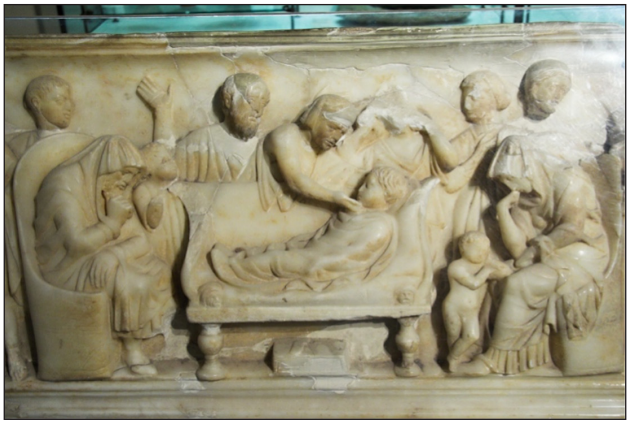

Figure 9: Death of a young child. Second century AD. Archaeological Museum of Agrigento (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0).

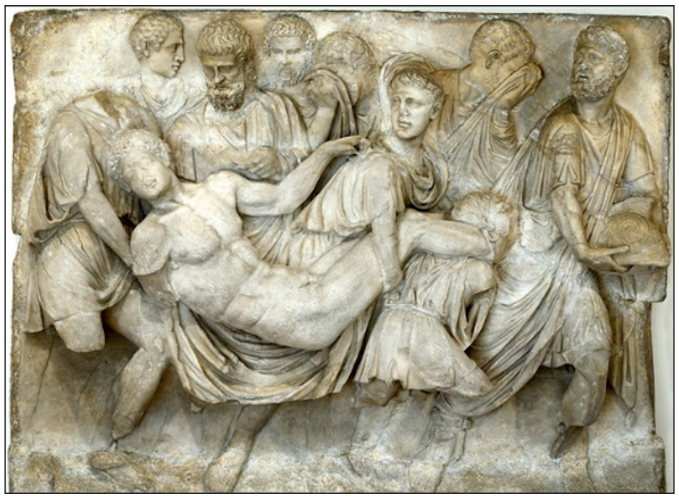

Figure 10: Death of Meleager. Second century AD. The Metropolitan Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

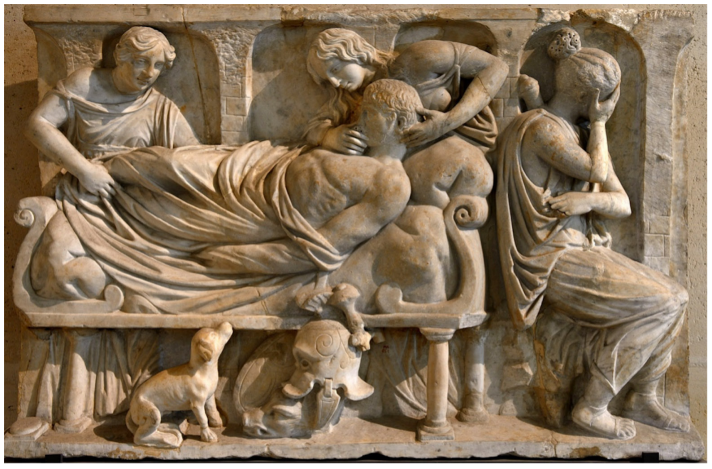

Figure 11: Death of Meleager. Second century AD. Musee du Louvre (Louvre Terms of Use: 4.1.1).

In addition to artistic depictions of shared gestures of grief, both men and women also vocally expressed their grief, though the diction of these vocalizations was gendered. At the funeral, people of various genders and ages performed songs. Women sang dirges (*neniae*) and male youths were required to sing hymns, with the youth of the boys considered to be symbolic representation of the future (Mustakallio 2005: 183; Erker 2009: 44). The latter demonstrates the role of intersectional identity in mourning, as age, in addition to gender, was fundamental to the hymns sung by male youths in honor of the deceased. The most predominant vocalization of grief by mourners was through non-verbal sounds. In literature, the diction used for such vocalization by women was *femineo ululate* (womanly wailing). Cicero (*Tusc.* 3.62) condemned such show of mourning by women as worthy of contempt and contended that one should not let grief touch their soul. Conversely, men are described as groaning, *gemitus*, which is not framed with the derision applied to *femineo ululate.* The different vocabulary carried distinct moralistic connotations, but the performance was largely the same. Though semantically differentiated, men and women both shared this embodied aspect of dealing with death and in practice it likely would not have been differentiable. Tacitus (*Annales* 3.1.5) noted in his description of Romans mourning Germanicus that one could not distinguish the difference in laments between men and women. While this anecdote can be read as a possible exception to the norm and therefore demanding mention, the description of the indistinguishable sounds of mourning can be treated as evidence of how Roman men were not somehow immune from vocal demonstrations of mourning. While ancient writers wrote of lament in binary terms, the vocalization of grief was not strictly a feminine or masculine behavior. Mourners, regardless of gender, took part in transgressively emotional acts. Further, performance of grief that transcended normative emotional display served critical religious, as well as social, functions for the transition of the deceased to the afterlife. Such 'queering' of emotional expression by individuals, regardless of gender identity, facilitated the liminal apparatus of the funeral.

Transgressive Grief: Codified Performance

The displays of grief described above subverted the Roman social norm of *aurea mediocritas*, defined as maintaining a sense of self-control and decorum (Gorostidi Pi 2019: 72–73). Public display of unmitigated emotions was frowned upon for both men and women, as illustrated by the examples of disparaging comments against public grief. The acts of mourning, however, were not random and uncontrolled but were in fact codified (Erker 2009: 138). In her analysis of the soundscape of the Roman funeral, Hope (2019: 61–76) argued that the vocalization of grief was an orchestrated

performance designed to appease the dead and was determined by the status and gender of the deceased and mourners. The duties of mourners to aid the transition of the deceased to the afterlife and purify the family of the related death pollution demanded the subversion of the fixed societal norm of decorum and controlled self-presentation, thereby making the funeral a fundamentally queer space.

Queerness has been defined in queer theory as emerging 'only in oppositional relation to specific, local norms or set or norms' (Halperin 2019: 418). The Roman funeral was a setting in which the transgression of norms was not only performed out of spontaneous emotional expression, but compulsory for the ritual function of laying the deceased to rest. Servius (*In Vergilii* Aeneidem *Commentarii* 11.93) claimed that mourners inversed everything, commenting on how they changed their dress, diet, and stopped proper *cultus* of hair and hygiene. Following a death, the family covered their hair with ashes, did not bathe, and wore darkened mourning gowns. In Vergil's *Aeneid* (12.608–611), the mourning Latinus is said to 'rent his robes' (*it scissa veste*) and 'soil his grey hair with foul dust' (*canitiem immundo perfusam pulvere turpans*). Servius asserted that by submitting oneself to squalor through intentionally dirtying normally clean hair and clothes, the well-dressed, washed, and perfumed corpse seemed to transcend death by the contrast. The self-dirtying also signaled the metaphysical pollution attached to those in contact with death (Cleland et al. 2007: 48; Lennon 2022: 140). The self-dirtying of mourners serves as an example of queer funeral behavior due to the inversion of normative practice and illustrates how queerness was instrumental in the transitional apparatus of the funeral.

Women, in particular, were associated with and responsible for the arguably more subversive transgressions. While much of this article has stressed how we need to reconsider the false binary of grief presented by ancient authors, with emphasis placed on how men also participated in both the materiality of the funeral and the expression of mourning, it is important to not erase the critical role women played through queered behavior. Corbeill (2004: 77) in his investigation of gendered gesture argued that the gestures of grief, like the grasping of the knee and the resting of the chin, are represented as static and self-directed whereas the wilder displays are still restricted to women, such as the tearing of cheeks and hair (**Figures 1, 8** and **11**). Despite the literary sources labelling this behavior as uncivilized and embarrassing, it was through the queering of normative behavior through performance that women fulfilled their duties of caring for the dead and the family. While authors like Cicero (*Tusc.* 3.62) and Seneca (*Ep.* 99) described the acts of mourning done by women such as the wailing, tearing at loosened hair, and exposure and beating of breasts as excessive, it was the break from normative practice that made the acts effective. Erker (2009: 143) argued that ancient

authors were so contemptuous of the mourning behavior of women because it was incompatible, if not dangerous, to the ideal, quiet life of a citizen. The transgression from daily life practice enacted by women mourners enabled a safe transition for the deceased from the land of the living to that of the dead. Following a death, the family of the deceased was thought to momentarily join the realm of the dead and it was the performance of mourning rites that ensured the family would be progressively and securely restored among the living (Panoussi 2019: 85–86; for more on the debate of death pollution (*funesta*) see Emmerson 2020; Lennon 2022). Women protected the polluted family in the spiritually liminal space of the funeral through their non-normative, apotropaic behavior.

In addition to the aforementioned wailing, tears and laments, performed by both men and women, the tearing at and dirtying of one's hair and the tearing at and bloodying of one's cheeks were prescribed apotropaic acts of self-violence in the funerary performance that were subversive in other contexts. These acts are illustrated in the second century AD Death of Meleager sarcophagus relief in the Louvre in which one woman is seen tearing at her hair and another has visible scratch marks gouged on her face (**Figure 11**). In the queer space of the funeral, women also transgressed gender specific norms through acts of unbinding that would have been unacceptable for women in other public contexts: the unbinding of hair, resulting in wild and unmaintained locks, the unbinding of shoes, resulting in bare feet, and the unbinding of clothes, resulting in the exposure of breasts. Plutarch (*Mor.* 267A) specifically emphasized that men do not do this. The act of unbinding all knots has often been interpreted as the exposure of women to religious pollution, an idea seen also in descriptions of witches in Roman literature (Tilley forthcoming). Corbeill (2004: 93) disagreed, proposing another explanation for the unbinding by connecting the act to the undoing of all bindings by pregnant women. This is a convincing parallel as in both cases unbinding is associated with a moment of precarious transition.

The two theories around the act of unbinding by women at funerals can be reconciled when one considers that pregnant women also were associated with religious pollution. The time around both a birth and a death indicated a liminal period in which involved parties were vulnerable to spiritual harm (Lennon 2012: 46; Lennon 2022: 140). Pregnant women were regarded as particularly susceptible to pollution and could not enter temples for the first forty days of pregnancy (Pliny the Elder, *HN* 7.41); those in the household were also believed to be polluted for the first few days following a birth (Censorinus, *De die natali* 11.7). This therefore suggests that the non-normative acts of untying one's hair, going barefoot and exposing one's breasts were gendered societal transgressions related to women's role of shepherding souls on either side of

the threshold of life, mitigating the spiritual danger in the process. In this case, the mourning behavior shows how women mourners both subverted standard gender norms, in that women were not supposed to walk around with unmaintained coiffures and exposed breasts, and also reinforced the performance of gender.

Considering the lack of composure and maintained appearance exhibited by women during the mourning process, the funeral was a queering of normative gender practices. Geller (2005: 597–609), in her analysis of the Mayan practice of gender bending within a funeral context, highlighted the fluidity of gender performance as well as the emphasis on how certain performances of gender can be 'short-lived role playing and not sustained enactment'. The funeral was a specific temporal and spatial context in which performance of gender was altered, supporting the conclusion that gender in ancient Rome was not a stagnant, fixed construct. Further examination of the material record for the inversion of norms by mourners mentioned by Servius (*Ad* Aen. 11.93), specifically with respect to unbindings related to gendered hair *cultus* and dress/nudity, underscores the funeral as a 'queerspace' and also provides evidentiary support for conceptualizing 'queertime' in antiquity.

Both the literary and material evidence demonstrate the more subversive, but codified, examples of mourning by women. Varro (*De Re Rustica* 3, 110) wrote that at funerals women acted 'with disheveled hair and hands raised to beat their breasts'. The former behavior has several implications as hair presentation was a gender performance that signaled varying degrees of femininity and masculinity. Regarding hair with respect to Servius's description of mourners inversing everything, women would unbind their hair and men would veil theirs.

Hair maintenance was a performance of femininity and masculinity, executed often in a genderfluid way (Olson 2014; 2017). For instance, Bartman (2002) evaluated how long, loosened hair on male deities like Apollo, Bacchus and Eros was understood as an indication of the gods' heightened femininity. Bartman (2001: 104) contended elsewhere that, in the Roman world, a woman's maintained coiffure was indicative of her passivity, with hairpins and nets ensuring that there was little movement. This contrasts with a man's undressed, unconfined hair which was free to be disorderly and indicative of a more active role. As a result of this social perception around hair, women's loosening of hair often was met with conflicting interpretations and attitudes.

There were four contexts in which one could expect to see a woman with loosened hair: worship of a divinity, childbirth, funeral mourning and sex. Thus, it would have been somewhat rare to have seen a woman without her hair done, adding significance and an association of intimacy to the visual. In each of the listed scenarios in which loosened hair is encountered there seems to be an aspect of transgression or liminality,

as noted above, in which the undoing of the acceptable and expected, i.e. a maintained coiffure, allows for an exchange across an otherwise established barrier. In a study of hair as it appears in Latin elegy, Jane Burkowski (2012: 182–183) argued that 'letting one's hair down represents the removal of inhibitions and societal restraints'. Unbound hair could be associated with being more aligned with nature than society and representative of a madness or frenzy that defied normalcy, like that exhibited by maenads, as described in Ovid's *Amores* (1.9.37–38) in which he painted Priam's daughters as 'Maenad-like with streaming hair' ('*Maenadis effusis obstipuisse comis'*). With the standard expectation of women in society to have bound and maintained hair, the unbound, disheveled hair of women mourners subverted typical performances of respectable femininity. Like the other contexts in which unbound hair is seen, such as the worship of a divinity and in childbirth, mourners' disheveled hair that was torn at and dirtied signified that the funeral represented a time and space in-between. The inversion of norms around acceptable appearance for women through the unbinding and tearing of hair facilitated the spiritual liminality present at the funeral in its transgression, indicated the pollutive nature of the space, and served as a non-normative gender performance.

Iconographic examples of women with unbound and disheveled hair are seen in both the Republic and the Empire, predominantly from sarcophagi. In the second century Louvre sarcophagus, all women are engaged in different forms of gesture, resting one's hand on one's cheek, exposing one's breasts, ripping at one's hair, but the shared characteristic is unbound and disheveled hair (**Figure 1**). The sarcophagus relief from Amiternum shows a funerary bed being carried by men on which the corpse is shown reclining as if at a banquet (**Figure 2**). To the right of the corpse two women are again shown with hair down in different gestures of mourning, one is tearing at her hair and the other has hands lifted to the sky. These representations all feature women in varying performances, but they all have their hair down, indicating the normativity and expectation of this otherwise non-normative, unexpected practice. The transgressiveness of the gendered presentation is what gave the behavior its significance. Similar to the beating of the breasts, unbound hair at Roman funerals served as a performance of gender in a way that solidifies the idea that conceptions of gender were not stagnant, and the funeral was a queerspace in which subversion of norms was a codified expectation.

The exposure of breasts was perhaps more of a transgression of societal norms than any other mourning act discussed in the literature and depicted in funerary art; it was also gendered, or in this case, sexed. This act is another case of unbinding, in which garments were unbound so that breasts were accessible for beating at, an act

considered among the apotropaic duties of mourners that was non-normative in other contexts but standard at funerals. A literary example of mourners beating at their breasts is Lucan's metaphorical description of a funeral scene in the *Pharsalia* (2.23–25): 'As when death knocks at some door…before the mother with unbound hair demands the savage beating of the breasts of her maidens.' An example of this performance in funerary art is seen in the Tomb of the Haterii lying-in-state relief in which two women positioned near the corpse are shown grasping at their breasts (**Figure 6**). There is debate over whether these women represented hired mourners or if they were relatives, the latter argued by William Jensen (1978: 46–47) who supports the claim that these are in fact women close to the deceased. The act of unbinding clothing and exposing breasts was also sometimes followed by women placing their breasts over the deceased, in a gesture evocative of breastfeeding (Corbeill 2004: 88). Such behavior is recorded in Psuedo Quintilian (*Declamationes maiores* 8.5): 'Now we are calling back the heat to his cold chest by placing our breasts over him'. This description of the act denotes the life-giving properties of breasts. Seen in the Louvre's second century sarcophagus discussed above (**Figure 1**), and even more evocatively indicative of breastfeeding in the scene from a sarcophagus from Ostia in which a woman puts her breast directly to the mouth of the deceased Meleager (**Figure 12**), these images parallel the text from above and provide a visual for the connection between breasts and life-force. Both **Figures 1** and **12** are reliefs from sarcophagi identified as belonging to children, which further enforces the likelihood that the imagery is a direct allusion to nursing. Through this act, women mourners disrupt the linearity of traditional life by essentially collapsing the time between birth and death, therein essentially subverting 'straight time,' defined above (Muñoz 2019), and the life/death binary.

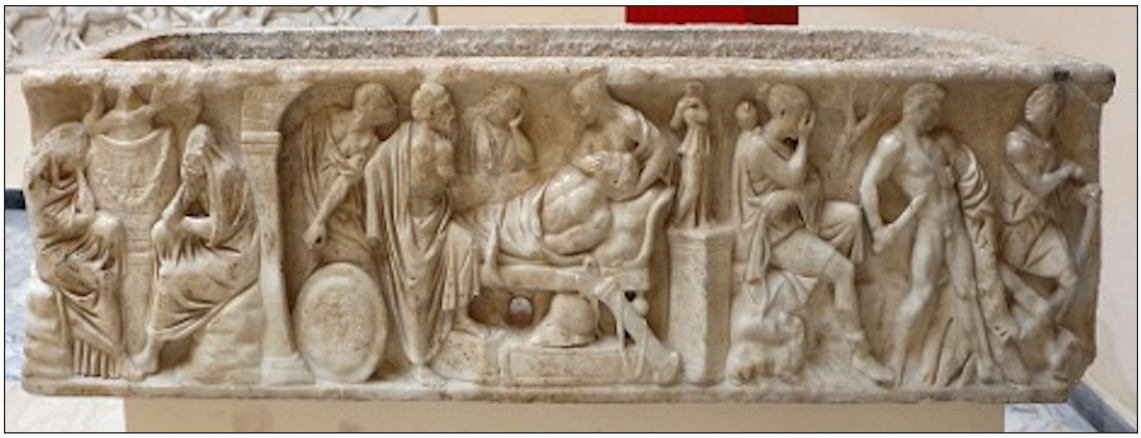

Figure 12: Sarcophagus of a child with the myth of Meleager. Second century AD. Museo di Ostia antica (Photo: Sailko, CC BY-SA 3.0).

Through unbinding and disheveling their hair and unbinding their clothing and exposing their breasts as evidenced in the literary and material records, women mourners subverted normative behavior that was expected in public. While ancient authors like Cicero and Seneca chastised these acts, along with the tearing at one's cheeks and wailing, as being excessive expressions of grief, the queering of socially acceptable emotional display was an intentional, even systematized performance. What was transgressive and queer in other public contexts was arguably normative, expected, and obligatory within the queer space and time of the funeral. Such an inversion therefore solidifies the notion of gender performance in the Roman world as fluid and unfixed.

Conclusion

While the duties and behaviors of mourners at the Roman funeral may have been gendered in varying capacities and ultimately reinforced the gender identity of the mourner through the embodiment of the performances, the transgression of norms and inversion of accepted practices challenges the idea that gender was stagnant and binary. Moreover, many of the gendered roles of mourners were designated to individuals based on identity markers that extended beyond gender. These intersecting identities included age, relationship to the deceased, life experience, class and more. Both men and women engaged in similar embodiment of grief expression and performance when it came to vocalizations and gestures; both men and women engaged in the materiality of the deceased's body and other senses present at the funeral. Though ancient elite authors spoke about men and women in binary terms, the lived, embodied experiences of men and women at funerals helped shape varying aspects of their identities that included but was not solely defined by gender or gender norms. The destabilization of those norms through transgressive acts also troubles a fixed perception of gender identity. Women tearing at and dirtying hair that 'ought' to be bound and controlled and unbinding their clothing to expose their breasts, whether to beat at them or mirror the act of breastfeeding, underscore not only codified subversions but also a functional mutability of gender performance more generally.

The examinations of the intersection of various identities, the deconstruction of a strict binary of mourning, and the subversion of norms are just some routes for complicating a monolithic understanding of gender in the context of the Roman funeral. The above discussion offers a starting point for using queer theory to problematize normative framings of gender performance and embodiment of identity during the Roman funeral. The present analysis as it stands can be queered further. While troubling the strictness of a binary performance of gender and the subversion

of normativities, this article maintained a two-gender system of Roman gender expression that is necessary to complicate. Deconstructing the two-gender narrative, along with the conflation of 'biological sex' and 'constructed gender,' are among a handful of prospective points for future queer analysis in relation to Roman funerary behaviors. Susan Stratton's 2016 article and Miller Power's 2020 article both raise this issue with respect to the identification of non-binary and intersex individuals in the archaeological record. Both Stratton and Power emphasized the gendering of grave goods, noting how the genders assigned to grave goods do not always align with the sexing of the skeletal remains and often reflect modern projections of a strict gender binary. Power (2020: 2) also stressed that those burying the deceased may not have perceived the gender identity of the deceased in the same way as the deceased themselves; therefore, the accompanying burial assemblages and the sexing of remains need to be more critically considered. In addition to applying these approaches to the deceased and the burial, such an analysis can be applied to the funeral itself and embodiment of identity by mourners that would enrich our perspective on non-binary gender expression. Further inquiry that expands or refocuses the geographic, temporal, and class scopes presented in this article is also necessary. Looking beyond Rome to consider the evidence from the provinces, as was done in the volume *Un-Roman Sex* (Ivleva and Collins 2020), can help decolonize the analysis and inform how cultural plurality affected the various non-stagnant gender performances of mourners. How the queering of mourning practices may have changed over time or looked different across class boundaries are also important avenues of further discussion.

The queering of Roman mourning and funerary practices offers scholars of Roman antiquity an opportunity to partake in developing conversations in Queer Death Studies while problematizing the limiting assumptions around gender expression in antiquity. This article serves as an invitation to continue challenging perceptions around fixed binaries and further explore the ways in which processes around death help illuminate the mutability and dynamism of gender in the Roman world.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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