

ABOUT LAMENT

v.tr.

1. To express grief for or about; mourn: *lament a death.*
2. To regret deeply; deplore: *He lamented his thoughtless acts.*

v.intr.

1. To grieve audibly; wail.
2. To express sorrow or regret.

n.

1. A feeling or an expression of grief; a lamentation.
2. A song or poem expressing deep grief or mourning.

(<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/lament>)

History (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lament>)

Many of the oldest and most lasting poems in human history have been laments.^[1] Laments are present in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and laments continued to be sung in elegiacs accompanied by the aulis in classical and Hellenistic Greece.^[2] Lament elements figure in *Beowulf*, in the Hindu Vedas, and in ancient Near Eastern religious texts, including the Mesopotamian city laments such as the Lament for Ur and the Jewish Tanakh, (which would later become the Christian Old Testament).

In many oral traditions, both early and modern, the lament has been a genre usually performed by women:^[3] Batya Weinbaum made a case for the spontaneous lament of women chanters in the creation of the oral tradition that resulted in the *Iliad*.^[4] The material of lament, the "sound of trauma" is as much an element in the Book of Job as in the genre of pastoral elegy, such as Shelley's "Adonais" or Matthew Arnold's "Thyrsis".^[5]

The Book of Lamentations or *Lamentations of Jeremiah* figures in the Old Testament. In art the *Lamentation of Christ* (under many closely variant terms) is a common subject from the *Life of Christ*, showing his dead body being mourned after the Crucifixion.

A Lament in The Book of Lamentations or in the Book of the Psalms (in the particular Lament/Complaint Psalms of the Tanakh), may be looked at as "a cry of need in a context of crisis when Israel lacks the resources to fend for itself."^[6] Another way of looking at it is all the more basic: laments simply being "appeals for divine help in distress".^[7] These laments, too, often have a set format: an address to God, description of the suffering/anguish which one seeks relief, a petition for help and deliverance, a curse towards one's enemies, an expression of the belief of ones innocence or a confession of the lack thereof, a vow corresponding to an expected divine response, and lastly, a song of

thanksgiving. ^[8]Examples of a general format of this, both in the individual and communal laments, can be seen in Psalm 3 and Psalm 44 respectively.^[9]

The *Lament of Edward II*, if it is actually written by Edward II of England, is the sole surviving composition of his.

A heroine's lament is a conventional fixture of baroque opera seria, accompanied usually by strings alone, in descending tetrachords.^[10] Because of their plangent cantabile melodic lines, evocatively free, non-strophic construction and adagio pace, operatic laments have remained vividly memorable soprano or mezzo-soprano arias even when separated from the emotional pathos of their operatic contexts. An early example is Ariadne's "Lasciatemi morire", which is the only survivor of Claudio Monteverdi's lost *Arianna*. Francesco Cavalli's operas extended the *lamento* formula, in numerous exemplars, of which Ciriaco's "Negatemi respiri" from *Ciriaco* is notable.^[11] Other examples include Dido's lament, "When I am laid" (Henry Purcell, *Dido and Aeneas*), "Lascia ch'io pianga" (Georg Friedrich Handel, *Rinaldo*), "Cara mio ben" (Tommaso or Giuseppe Giordani). The lament continued to represent a musico-dramatic high point. In the context of opera buffa, the Countess's lament, "Dove sono" comes as a surprise to the audience of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, and in Gioachino Rossini's *Barber of Seville*, Rosina's plaintive words at her apparent abandonment are followed, not by the expected lament aria, but by a vivid orchestral interlude of storm music. The heroine's lament remained a fixture in romantic opera, and the Marschallin's monologue in Act I of *Der Rosenkavalier* can be understood as a penetrating psychological lament.^[12]

The purely instrumental lament is a common form in Pìobaireachd music for the Scottish bagpipes

READING

Walter Brueggeman, *An Unsettling God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009

Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*. Westminster: John Knox Press, 1981.

(Wikipedia)

THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

The Book of Lamentations is a collection of five poems lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, and its aftermath of ruin and exile. Three of the five poems are acrostics (ie each verse starts, in order, with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet – A, B, C etc).

This indicates that the Book of Lamentations was written carefully to be memorised for recitation. In fact it is read annually at the Jewish Festival which commemorates the national disaster of 586 BC.

Psychologically, the poetic structure of the book indicates that for the Jewish people, grief is not something to be repressed, but faced and “gone through”.