Death and the Maenad

Robert Millard, *Yakima Valley College*

AFTER VISITING THE UFFIZI IN 1819, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) made the following observations regarding a marble relief (fig. 1) from the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio (1435–88): "[There is] . . . a woman who appears to be in the act of rushing in, with disheveled hair and violent gestures, and in one hand either a whip or a thunderbolt. She is probably some emblematic person whose personification would be a key to the whole. What they are all wailing at, I don't know; whether the lady is dying or the father has ordered the child to be exposed; but if the mother be not dead, such a tumult would kill a woman in the straw these days."[1] Both Shelley and the current opinion of his day were mistaken in assuming this relief was an ancient work. The poet was correct, however, in surmising that the tormented female figure storming onto the scene at the extreme right-hand side—gripping her hair, not a thunderbolt (fig. 2)[2]—provided a key to the understanding of the composition as a whole. With her swirling hair and equally roiling, windswept drapery, as well as her emphatically "antique" costume, this agitated embodiment of extreme grief or panic clearly derives from the familiar antique model of the Maenad. Ancient artists characteristically depicted these female followers of Dionysus as engaging in frenetic, ecstatic activity, signified by the turbulent motion of their hair and garments (see, e.g., figs. 3 and 4). Shelley was obviously familiar with the type, as we

Contact Robert Millard at South 16th Ave. and Nob Hill Blvd., Department of Arts and Sciences, Yakima Valley College, Yakima, WA 98902 (robertrmillard@aol.com).

1. Quoted in Frederic S. Colwell, "Shelley on Sculpture: The Uffizi Notes," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 28 (1979): 59–77, 65. As the article's title indicates, at the time Shelley viewed the work in question, it resided in the Uffizi; today it is in the Bargello (Inv. 41 Sculture). See also Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 6 vols. (New York, 1965), 6:312–13.

2. In Shelley's defense, the work had yet to undergo restoration; perhaps a layer of grime obscured the woman's tresses. In addition, the poet's misidentification of the work as being of ancient Roman vintage—"It is altogether an admirable piece quite in the spirit of the comedies of Terence," quoted in Colwell, "Shelley on Sculpture," 65—was shared by the guidebook he consulted; see *Catalogo generale della galleria di Firenze: Marme, pietri, e gessi*, IV, tome 1 (Florence, 1825).

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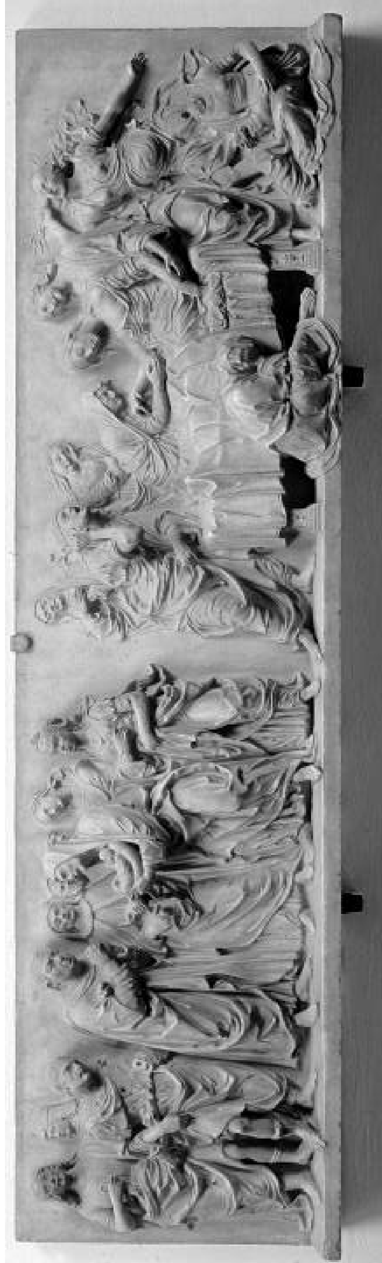

Figure 1. *Death of a Woman in Childbirth* (*Death of Francesca Pitti Tornabuoni?*), attributed to the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio, ca. 1480. Marble. 47 × 170 cm. (Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.) Photo credit: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY. Color version available as an online enhancement.

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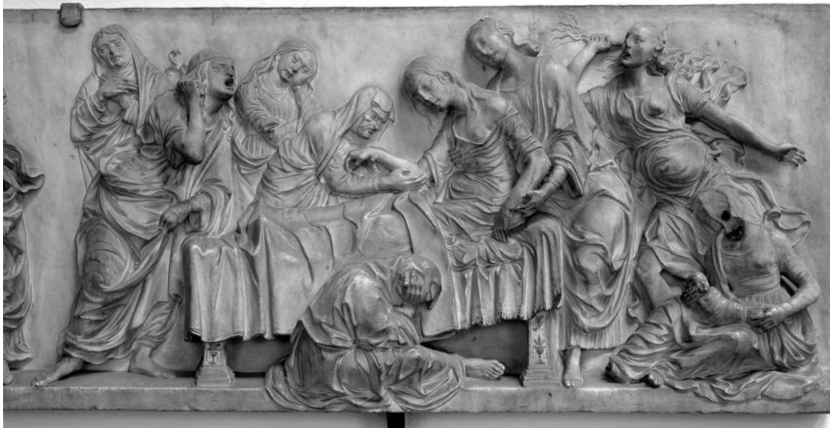

Figure 2. *Death of a Woman in Childbirth* (*Death of Francesca Pitti Tornabuoni*?), attributed to the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio, ca. 1480. Marble. Right half of relief. (Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.) Photo credit: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY. Color version available as an online enhancement.

see from his remarks elsewhere in his Uffizi notes, where he comments directly on representations of Maenads among the antique sculptures of the museum.[3]

The relief depicting childbirth is now on display on the second floor of the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, where it is identified as a work of the later quattrocento (ca. 1480), attributed to the workshop or general ambient of Verrocchio and surrounded by works of the same period.[4] As we shall see, further efforts to associate its unique and rather startling subject matter to a specific incident and/or patron have eluded, for the most part, any kind of consensus. The mere fact of its prior identification as an ancient work is testimony to its singularity, as well as its exceptionally *all'antica* visual qualities. The sculpture is noteworthy for employing a classically inspired figure in motion to express an acute state of extreme emotion. Such

3. At one point, Shelley observes the disconnect between a statue of Minerva that has been mounted on a base ornamented with Maenads, a subject that is in "a spirit wholly the reverse" of the figure above. See Colwell, "Shelley on Sculpture," 67. The poet also conjured the unsettled nature of the Maenad in describing a tempest at sea in his "Ode to the West Wind": "there are spread / On the blue surface of the airy surge, / Like the bright hair uplifted from the head / Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge / Of the horizon to the zenith's height, / The locks of the approaching storm"; see Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Shelley* (Ware, 1994), 402.

4. At some point between Shelley's day and our own, the sculpture was moved from the Uffizi to the Bargello. This move most likely took place between 1865 and 1870, when all of the sculptures previously housed in the Uffizi migrated to the former prison turned sculpture museum: the Bargello had housed inmates as recently as 1857. See Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi, *Museo Nazionale del Bargello: Official Guide* (Florence, 2014), 8–9.

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Figure 3. Relief with Maenad, part of a circular base from the Esquiline. Roman copy of a Greek original by Kallimachos (original: second half of fifth century BCE). Marble. 143 × 109 cm. (Musei capitolini, Rome.) Photo credit: Scala / Art Resource, NY. Color version available as an online enhancement.

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Figure 4. Relief with Maenads. Neo-Attic, ca. 100 BCE. Marble. 56 × 99 cm. (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.) Color version available as an online enhancement.

motifs were becoming quite common in early modern Italy, but this relief is unique, in that it inserts the emotional motif into a resolutely secular scene, that is, the portrayal of the untimely death, in childbirth, of a young Florentine noblewoman.

This motif of a furiously gesticulating bereft woman also appears in a similarly striking and dramatic relief from the same cultural milieu, albeit one with a religious import—namely, the 1475 *Crucifixion* (fig. 5) of Bertoldo di Giovanni (ca. 1430/40?–1491)—which is likewise displayed today at the Bargello.[5] The figure in question, which we may call a "grieving Maenad," is located at the foot of Christ's cross. The vigorous and erratic motions of this sorrowing figure are evident in her outflung arms and swirling hair.[6] The appearance of this figure in Bertoldo's *Crucifixion* is startling but not as strange as her inclusion in the *Childbirth* relief; amplified woeful expressions were far more common in religious contexts than in secular ones. In either case, a volatile, possibly intoxicated, adherent of Dionysus might seem a strange

5. The work is cataloged as Inv. 267 Bronzi.

6. On the strange inclusion of this figure in Bertoldo's *Crucifixion*, see Hugo von Tschudi, "Donatello e la critica moderna," *Rivista storica italiana* 4, no. 2 (1887): 193–228, 220–21; Edgar Wind, "The Maenad under the Cross: Comments on an Observation by Reynolds," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 1, no. 1 (July 1937): 70–71; and James David Draper, *Bertoldo di Giovanni, Sculptor of the Medici Household* (Columbia, MO, 1992), 122–32.

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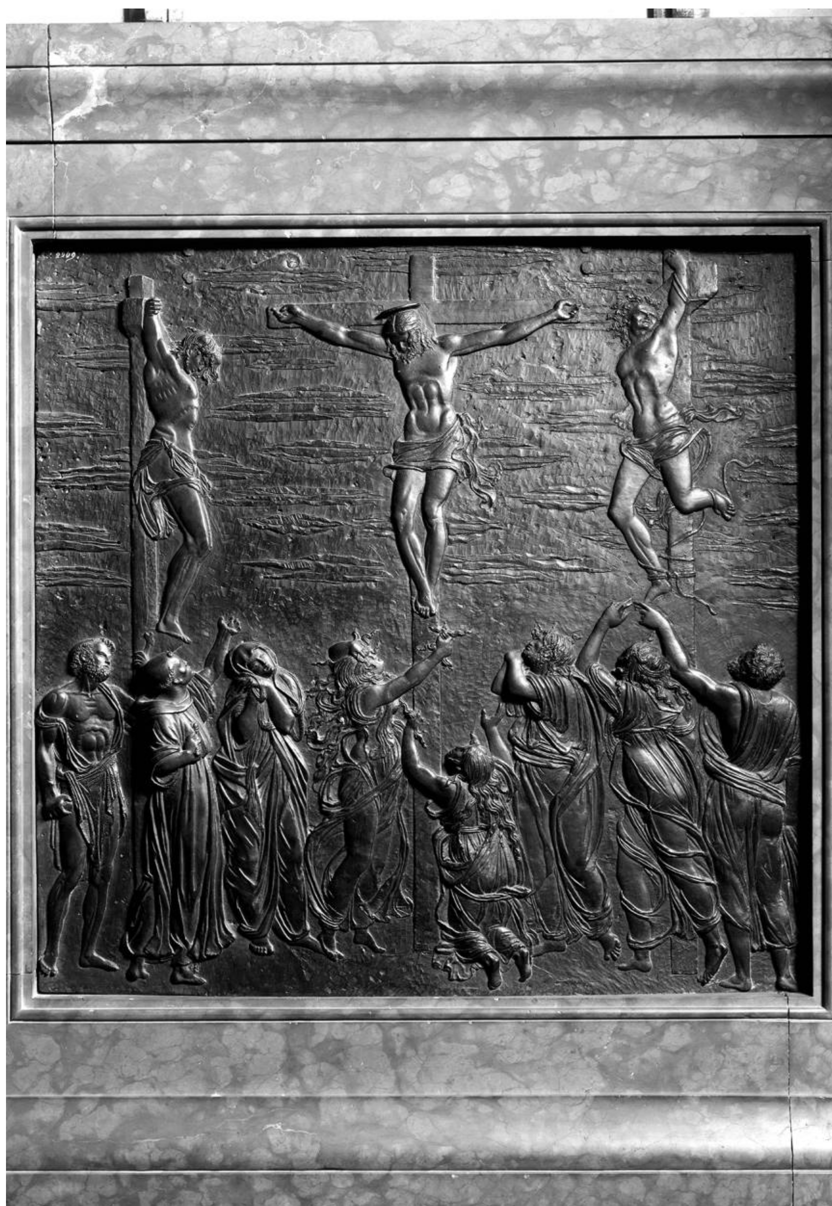

Figure 5. Bertoldo di Giovanni, *Crucifixion*, ca. 1475. Bronze. 75 × 67 cm. (Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.) Photo credit: Scala / Art Resource, NY. Color version available as an online enhancement.

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addition to a scene of mourning. The artists who deployed the "mourning Maenad" sought to express an overwhelming emotional state—namely, grief—that may have been inexpressible through other means. Only unbounded—even ungovernable—physical action could convey similarly wild feelings. Grief, for example, may cause a person to break the fetters of social decorum—weeping, wailing, screaming, rending her own hair. Such a display is akin to the drunken spontaneity of an ancient Dionysiac. Sculptors such as Verrocchio and Bertoldo used the Maenad trope to signify an emotional extreme. Apparently, no other motif had as strong an effect.

Both of these artists—Verrocchio, Bertoldo—likely derived the motif in question from the *oeuvre* of their most notable sculptural predecessor, Donatello (ca. 1386–1466). To cite one example of the "grieving Maenad" in Donatello's Florentine output, the sculptor included such a figure in the *Deposition of Christ* (ca. 1460–66) for the south pulpit in San Lorenzo (fig. 6). On this and several other occasions, Donatello presented standard scenes of mourning over the deceased Christ, peopled with the expected figures—the Virgin, St. John, Joseph of Arimathea and/or his servant Nicodemus, Mary Magdalene, and so on. The most striking addition to this traditional grouping is the presence, in each relief, of at least one woman—our Maenad—who expresses an outsized level of grief. This grief is exemplified by feverish motion and, usually, the woman's tearing of her own hair. In the San Lorenzo version, as many as four lamenting Maenads make an appearance, two on the viewer's right-hand side, two near the left-hand edge. All four women display the disarrayed coiffure and broad gestures of this trope.[7] Visually, the type plainly resembles the classical Maenad, but while the original figure's furious gesticulations signified intoxicated euphoria (figs. 3 and 4), Donatello used this same topos to denote a completely disparate emotional state: ardent bereavement. While the form—a wildly overwrought woman—is the same, the content is dramatically different. The "grieving Maenad" is an instance of what Aby Warburg (1866–1929) called a *pathosformel*, a motif that, superficially, consists of "an idealized antique

7. Other examples of the "mourning Maenad" in Donatello's work include the *Entombment* in the upper panel of the marble *Tabernacle* now in the Sagrestia dei Beneficiati, in St. Peter's Basilica, Rome (ca. 1432–33); a second *Entombment*, from the High Altar of the Basilica del Santo in Padua (1446–50); and a bronze *Lamentation* relief in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (ca. 1455–60). For this tendency in Donatello's sculptures, see Fritz Burger, "Donatello und die Antike," *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* 30 (1907): 1–13; H. W. Janson, *The Sculpture of Donatello* (Princeton, NJ, 1957), 95, 208, 217; Moshe Barasch, *Gestures of Despair in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art* (New York, 1976), 110–12; John Pope-Hennessy, *Donatello Sculptor* (New York, 1993), 129–32, 191–93, 219–23, 296–98, 302, 303–5, 338 n. 18, 350 n. 50; and Phyllis Pray Bober and Ruth Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture: A Handbook of Sources*, 2nd ed. (London, 2010), 146. On Renaissance images of the "grieving Maenad" in general, see Heather O'Leary McStay, "'Viva Bacco e viva Amore': Bacchic Imagery in the Renaissance" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2014), 148–55.

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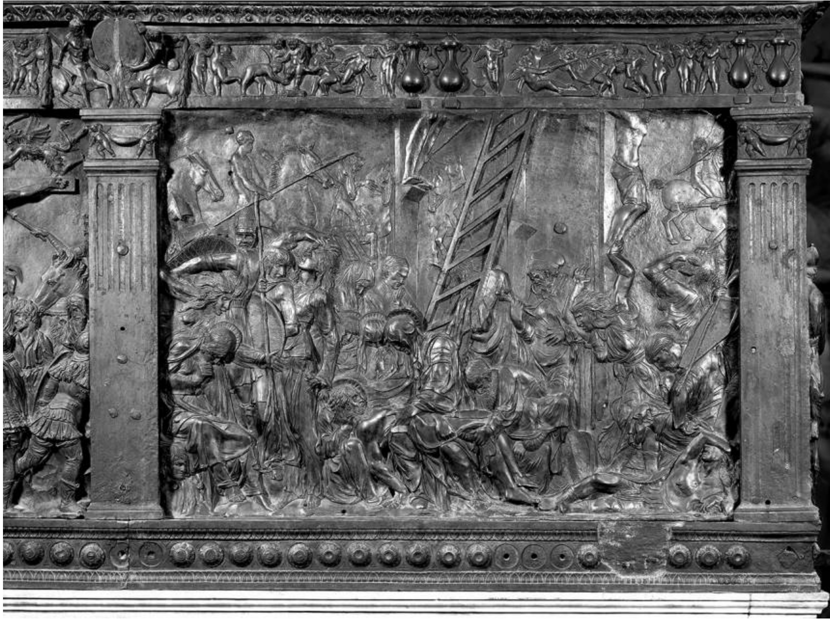

Figure 6. Donatello, *Deposition of Christ*, ca. 1460–66. Bronze. 137 × 280 cm. (South pulpit, San Lorenzo, Florence.) Photo credit: Scala / Art Resource, NY. Color version available as an online enhancement.

rendering of motion,"[8] but, on a more profound level, symbolizes a state of extreme emotion. Such a *pathosformel* expresses an urge that refuses suppression, even though the larger society may deem such an emotional display unseemly.[9]

The sculpture of the *Death of a Woman in Childbirth* is a perplexing work for several reasons, one of which concerns Verrocchio's supposed authorship of the relief. The master's connection to this project is still a topic of heated debate, one that I do not hope to resolve here. Verrocchio may have had a hand in its design, if not its execution: the latter option is somewhat doubtful, given the lack of technical assurance in some of the details—for instance, the daybed that is too short to accommodate the afflicted woman. Giorgio Vasari (1511–74), in his *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1550; rev. 1568), seems to refer to this piece, or

8. "idealische-antiker Beweglichkeit einzuflössen suchte"; see Aby Warburg, *Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike* (Leipzig, 1932), 157; see also Kurt W. Forster, introd. in Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles, 1999), 15 and 65 n. 63.

9. On Warburg and *pathosformeln*, see also Matthew Rampley, "From Symbol to Allegory: Aby Warburg's Theory of Art," *Art Bulletin* 79, no. 1 (March 1997): 41–55; Georges Didi-Huberman, "Dialektik des Monstrums: Aby Warburg and the Symptom Paradigm," *Art History* 24, no. 5 (2001): 621–45; Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA, 1999), 90.

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perhaps another work in the same general mode, twice: once in his life of Verrocchio himself, and again in his life of Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449–94). The former account is the more detailed:

> Now in those days the wife of Francesco Tornabuoni had died in childbirth, and her husband, who had loved her much, and wished to honor her in death, to the utmost of his power, entrusted the making of a tomb for her to Andrea [del Verrocchio], who carved on a slab over a sarcophagus of marble the lady herself, her delivery, and her passing to the other life; and beside this, he made three figures of Virtues, which were held very beautiful, for the first work that he had executed in marble; and this tomb was set up in the Minerva [S. Maria sopra Minerva, Rome].[10]

However, Vasari seems to have been either mistaken or confused in his identification. Alfred von Reumont was the first to point out that the deceased woman in question must have been Francesca Pitti Tornabuoni (d. September 23, 1477), the wife of Giovanni Tornabuoni (d. 1490), who was the uncle, on his mother's side, of Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–92). Perhaps Vasari confused the woman with her nephew, Giovanni Francesco Tornabuoni (d. 1480).[11] However, these suppositions do not account for all details, since the relief portrays a deceased mother and what may be a live, swaddled baby—presented to the older man at left, presumably the child's father—while Francesca Tornabuoni's child was stillborn after a Caesarean

10. "Onde essendo morta sopra parto in que'giorni la moglie di Francesco Tornabuoni, il marito, che molto amata l'aveva, e morta voleva quanto poteva il più onorarla, diede a fare la sepoltura ad Andrea; il quale sopra una cassa di marmo intagliò in una lapida la donna, il partorire, ed il passare all'altra vita; ed appresso in tre figure, fece tre Virtù, che furono tenute molto belle, per la prima opera che di marmo avesse lavorato: la quale sepoltura fu posta nella Minerva." See Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, trans. Gaston du C. de Vere, 2 vols. (New York, 1996), 1:550, and *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori scritte*, ed. Gaetano Milanesi, 9 vols. (Florence, 1906), 3:259–60. The account in Ghirlandaio's *Vita* reads thus: "There was living in Rome at this same time [that is, when Ghirlandaio was painting the walls of the Sistine Chapel] Francesco Tornabuoni, a rich and honored merchant, much the friend of Domenico. This man, whose wife had died in childbirth, as is told in the life of Andrea Verrocchio, desiring to honor her as became their noble station, had caused a tomb to be made for her in the Minerva; and he also wished Domenico to paint the whole wall against which this tomb stood, and likewise to make for it a little panel in distemper" (Era in questi tempi medesimi in Roma Francesco Tornabuoni, onorato e ricco mercante ed amicissimo di Domenico; al quale essendo morta la donna sopra parto, come s'è detto in Andrea Verrocchio, ed avendo, per onorarla come si conveniva alla nobiltà loro, fattole fare una sepoltura nella Minerva, volle anco che Domenico dipignesse tutta la faccia, dove ell'era sepolta, ed, oltre a questo, vi facesse una piccolo tavoletta a tempera); Vasari, *Lives of the Painters,* 1:519, and *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori*, 3:259–60. Ghirlandaio's frescoes for S. Maria sopra Minerva are no longer extant.

11. Alfred von Reumont, "Il monumento Tornabuoni del Verrocchio," *Giornale di Erudizione Artistica* 2 (1873): 167–68.

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delivery.[12] The relief in question reportedly adorned the tomb of Francesca Tornabuoni in the church of S. Maria sopra Minerva in Rome—perhaps as a pedestal-type base for the woman's sarcophagus[13]—unless, as some voices contend, the relief never made it to the Eternal City at all, and/or is not the object described by Vasari.[14] At this stage, the question arises: perhaps the tomb was never constructed in the first place? However, the testament of a Messer Leonardo Tornabuoni, bishop of Chianciano, provides proof of the tomb's existence inside the church during the seicento.[15]

At some point in the late 1500s, the Tornabuoni chapel passed into the hands of the Naro family, who removed—and, in all likelihood, dismantled—the tombs inside.[16] The relief, if it ever occupied the chapel in the first place, ended up in the Medici collection in Florence,[17] before moving to the Uffizi in 1805, finally finding a permanent home in the Bargello in the mid- to late nineteenth century.[18] To sum up, the relief may or may not depict the demise of Francesca Tornabuoni and may or may not have ornamented her tomb in S. Maria sopra Minerva. No matter whom the work represents, no matter who commissioned it, and no matter where it was originally scheduled to reside, one thing is clear: it represents the immediate aftermath of a woman's death in childbirth.[19] Perhaps the most perplexing feature of this work is the presence of the Maenad.

12. This detail was related by Giovanni Tornabuoni in a letter dated September 24, 1477, to Lorenzo de' Medici. The letter is in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Archivio Mediceo avanti il Principato, Filza XXXV, no. 746; repr. in Dario Covi, *Andrea del Verrocchio: Life and Work* (Florence, 2005), 343–44.

13. For this view, see Günter Passavant, *Verrocchio* (London, 1969), 24.

14. Enrico Ridolfi surmised that the tomb was constructed in Florence but never transported to Rome; see Enrico Ridolfi, "Giovanni Tornabuoni e Ginevra de' Benci nel Coro di S. Maria Novella," *Archivio storico italiano* 6, no. 180 (1890): 426–56, 429–35.

15. The testament, which was drawn up in Rome on September 6, 1540, can be found in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Conventi soppressi, 102 (Santa Maria Novella), 106, no. II, fols. 68r–72r; it is reproduced in Covi, *Andrea del Verrocchio*, 344.

16. Passavant, *Verrocchio*, 181.

17. The work appears in an inventory of Medici belongings dating to 1666; see Charles Seymour, *The Sculpture of Andrea del Verrocchio* (Greenwich, CT, 1971), 168. Francesco Caglioti and Andrea De Marchi disagree with Seymour's supposition, averring that the relief resided in the Strozzi collection. See Caglioti and De Marchi, *Verrocchio, il maestro di Leonardo* (Venice, 2019), 195.

18. Between 1666 and 1805, the work resided in the Bureau of the Royal Palace, Florence; see Maud Cruttwell, *Verrocchio* (London, 1904), 150.

19. For a breakdown of the scholarly opinions regarding the relief's authorship, see Andrew Butterfield, *The Sculptures of Andrea del Verrocchio* (New Haven, CT, 1997), 237–38. Most recently, Caglioti and De Marchi attributed the relief to a collaboration between Francesco di Simone Ferrucci (1437–93) and Mino da Fiesole (1429–84); see Caglioti and De Marchi, *Verrocchio, il maestro*, 194–95. In a way, it matters little whether Verrocchio himself or one of his pupils carved the work. The presence of the astonishing, Maenad-like figure is still intriguing whether or not it is the result of a caprice of genius—if Verrocchio himself executed it—or a standard motif from the Florentine ambience that a journeyman sculptor could reliably produce.

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The figure of the Maenad emerged in ancient Greece as a part of the mythology surrounding Dionysus. Whereas the trope of the "Nymph" described the relatively benign young woman who nurtured the infant wine god, "Maenads" were the volatile females (Greek *mainades* = "mad women") who marked the arrival of the adult Dionysus into towns and cities.[20] Evidently, these women held a distinct place in the Greek imagination. In the literature and art of the ancient Hellenic world, the Maenad represented all of the savage forces that Dionysus's influence could unleash. Numerous painted vases (both black- and red-figure) featured furiously gesticulating Maenads often accompanied by equally unpredictable satyrs.[21] The distinction between serene nymphs and wild Maenads continued with other visual depictions of the figures. Maenadic women came to represent that which resisted control: impulses, instincts, emotions.[22]

The female followers of the wine god could assume different aspects, and the moods they invoked were not always joyful ones. Not surprisingly, some could display a frightening sense of pure abandon. A widely known literary example is Agavë, the manic woman who decapitated her own son, Pentheus, in a Dionysiac spasm in Euripides's drama *The Bacchae* (ca. 410 BCE).[23]

The visual motif of the Maenad-as-mourner also has antique literary antecedents. Ancient Greek authors occasionally explored the Maenad as a simile for extremes of emotion, including grief.[24] The Romans inherited this conceit—along with much else—from the Greek tradition. In his recounting of the myth of Ceres and Persephone in the *Fasti* (ca. 17 CE), the poeticized Roman festival calendar,

20. Guy Hedreen, "Silens, Nymphs, and Maenads," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 114 (1994): 47–69, 50.

21. For studies of antique visual representations of Maenads, see Mark W. Edwards, "Representation of Maenads on Archaic Red-Figure Vases," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 80 (1960): 78–87; Eva C. Keuls, "Male-Female Interaction in Fifth-Century Dionysiac Ritual as Shown in Attic Vase Painting," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 55 (1984): 287–97; Sheila McNally, "The Maenad in Early Greek Art," in *Women in the Ancient World: The Arethusa Papers*, ed. John Peradotto and J. P. Sullivan (Albany, NY, 1984), 107–42.

22. On Maenads in ancient Greek culture, see also Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1908), 388–89; Walter Friedrich Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, trans. Robert B. Palmer (Bloomington, IN, 1965), 171–80; Barbara E. Goff, *Citizen Bacchae: Women's Ritual Practice in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, CA, 2004), 214–16, 271–79. On the survival of the Maenad in pagan Roman culture, see Martin P. Nilsson, "The Bacchic Mysteries of the Roman Age," *Harvard Theological Review* 46, no. 4 (October 1953): 175–202; John Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire* (Ithaca, NY, 1985), 139–41; Rabun Taylor, *The Moral Mirror of Roman Art* (Cambridge, 2008), 111–26.

23. This gruesome filicide was the god's own revenge on the antagonistic nonbeliever Pentheus. See Euripides, *Bacchae. Iphigenia at Aulis. Rhesus*, trans. David Kovacs (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 10–155.

24. On this literary device, see Hedreen, "Silens, Nymphs," 55–57; see also Renate Schlesier, "Mixture of Masks: Maenads as Tragic Models," in *Masks of Dionysus*, ed. Thomas Carpenter and Christopher A. Faraone (Ithaca, NY, 1993), 89–114.

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Ovid (43 BCE–17 CE) describes the grieving mother in Dionysiac terms when relating her extreme distress: "Distraught she hurried along, even as we hear that Thracian Maenads rush with streaming hair."[25] This theme resurfaced over a millennium later in two tragedies composed, in the antique mode, by Italian humanists: the *Achilles* (ca. 1390) of Antonio Loschi (ca. 1368–1441), in which the author compares the anguish of the Trojan queen Hecuba to "a raging Maenad, smitten by Bacchus . . . roused by her passion, her hair entwined with ivy";[26] and the *Procne* (ca. 1427–30) of Gregorio Correr (1409–64), where a grieving character is likened to "a Maenad on the raving mountaintop, driven by keen Bacchus . . . borne along with maddened step."[27] All three of these authors, therefore, used the Maenadic figure of uncontrollable agitation to convey extreme woe, not ecstatic transcendence. Donatello may have learned this tactic directly (from a humanistic advisor) or indirectly (through the quattrocento Italian milieu, in which the "grieving Maenad" trope could have cropped up, at least, in a verbal iteration) and employed it in his reliefs. The recurrence of this trope in the Bargello *Death of a Woman in Childbirth* is not surprising, since any serious fifteenth-century Italian sculptor would have been familiar with Donatello's innovative body of work.

While the Maenadic women in Bertoldo's *Crucifixion* and the *Death of a Woman in Childbirth* reliefs are similar, the context and purpose of each portrayal are rather different. As stated above, the Bertoldo image is somewhat more conventional—that is, presenting grief in a more familiar cultural context—therefore I will examine it first. The two "mourning Maenads"—one apparently playing the role of Mary Magdalene—occupying Bertoldo's *Crucifixion* stand in pointed contrast to the more traditional spectators at the foot of the cross. These last figures—the Virgin, St. John, Joseph of Arimathea, and others[28]—are more reserved in their reactions to the tragedy. The Maenads, however, have torn out hanks of their own hair. The standing woman is particularly dramatic, as her hair—both on her head and in her hand—and garments flail and flutter in all directions at once; her drapery clings to her legs as if wet or windblown. That this is not a gusty day is denoted by the kempt appearance of the hair and clothing of the other figures present—save the Bad Thief, who

25. "mentis inops rapitur, quales audire solemus / Threïcias fusis Maenadas ire comis"; Ovid, *Fasti* 4.456–57. See Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. J. G. Frazer (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 222–23.

26. "qualis aut Menas furens, / percussa Bacho, fronde pampinea comas / impressa fervet, auget atque iras dolor"; see Antonio Loschi, *Achilles*, in *Humanist Tragedies*, ed. Gary R. Grund (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 50–51.

27. "aut qualis acri concitis Maenas iugis / agente Baccho fertur insano gradu"; see Gregorio Correr, *Procne*, in Grund, *Humanist Tragedies*, 132–33.

28. For the identification of the figures in the relief, see Draper, *Bertoldo di Giovanni*, 125–26.

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writhes about in a final burst of petulance. The fluttering aspect of this Maenad-Magdalene's garb is, therefore, attributable to her own anxious movements.

Like an intoxicated follower of Dionysus, this woman's behavior may seem out of control. The spectator could even judge her emotional display to be gratuitous. Theology tells the believer, after all, that she should not mourn Christ's death too fervently, as it represents the sacrifice that will rescue all mortal souls from the clutches of Satan.[29] Moreover, on the third day after, Christ himself will rise from the dead; his demise on the cross is merely a temporary stage in the process of salvation. With these developments in mind, a profusion of grief is unwarranted. This woman marks the duress, the pain, the horror a person feels upon the death of a loved one. She personifies the sense of loss that a reassuring theological explanation can never fully assuage.

If anything, theology may be less helpful in a secular context. The tragedy depicted in the panel from Verrocchio's workshop is arguably bleaker than the *Crucifixion* scene, since it entails no promise of imminent resurrection. *The Death of a Woman in Childbirth* comprises two distinct scenes. The setting of both is limited to a simple ground plane, with no background details whatsoever. The figures stand before a blank void, the better to convey their movements, intimations, and reactions to the event. In the scene at right (fig. 2), the dying woman slumps on the daybed. A group of women surrounds her, a few of them already bursting into demonstrative anguish—one is crumpled on the floor before the bed, head in hand; another wails at the foot of the bed; the Maenad-like woman on the extreme right-hand edge yanks out her own hair as she seemingly propels herself onto the scene. Below the Maenad, a woman—unfortunately and, it appears, accidentally, headless, her cranium seeming to have broken off and gone missing at some undetermined time—cradles the swaddled newborn babe. A space in the center of the relief separates this all-female group from the huddle at the left (fig. 7). The most prominent personage in this left-hand cluster is a middle-aged, balding man; as a woman (the midwife?) presents the swaddled babe—appearing again via continuous narration—to him, his stoic appearance is slightly leavened by an upward gesture of his hands, which seem to be cupped in prayer.[30] The figures around him, male and female, are

29. Hebrews 9:15–28 (KJV).

30. Despite the claims of those—such as Andrew Butterfield (*Sculptures*, 238) and Maud Cruttwell (*Verrocchio*, 151–52)—who contend that the swaddled baby in the relief is alive and therefore could not represent the stillborn child of Francesca Pitti Tornabuoni, it is impossible to say whether the infant, who appears twice in the composition, is alive or dead. In both iterations, it seems that both of the child's eyes are shut, as is the child's mouth. The muted reaction of the supposed father reveals little—any joy he would feel at the sight of his child would be tempered by the gravity of his wife's recent death, and so on.

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Figure 7. *Death of a Woman in Childbirth* (*Death of Francesca Pitti Tornabuoni*?), attributed to the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio ca. 1480. Marble. Left half of relief. (Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.) Photo credit: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY. Color version available as an online enhancement.

rather subdued in their reactions: indeed, two young men at the extreme left-hand edge converse with only a mild air of interest, like two emblems of philosophical detachment. The stark deviation between the two halves of the composition has led some observers to conclude that two different hands crafted the work. In this case, the commentators argue that Verrocchio himself sculpted the "energetic" figures on the right, while an assistant or assistants carved the "phlegmatic" figures on the left.[31] While the difference in tone from one half of the relief to the other may simply reflect a division of labor, this difference in tone also represents two dramatically different reactions to a tragedy: stoic forbearance (impassive, philosophical) and outright distress (distraught, emotionally volatile).

In terms of style, the work has evident precursors in antique pagan art: Frida Schottmüller likened the composition to a Roman sarcophagus relief illustrating the death of Alcestis (fig. 8), which also features a mourner with outflung arms

31. The distinction (energetic/phlegmatic) is found in Covi, *Andrea del Verrocchio*, 147; the hypothesis (Verrocchio = right; shop work = left) is also found in Alberto Busignani, *Verrocchio* (Florence, 1966), 27. This supposition runs into trouble, however, when one considers the crudities in execution on the right-hand side, such as the aforementioned short daybed, which are hard to imagine coming from the chisel of a virtuoso such as Verrocchio. Perhaps two different apprentices of varying abilities carved the work, all from a sketch by the master?

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Figure 8. Roman sarcophagus with myth of Alcestis (the "Euhodus" sarcophagus), ca. 161–70. Marble. (Museo Chiaramonti, Vatican.) © Vanni Archive / Art Resource, NY. Color version available as an online enhancement.

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standing over a woman's deathbed.[32] Charles Seymour dubbed it a "clear imitation" of Roman relief procedures, citing the narrow, stagelike setting and the division of figures into two rows—important players in the foreground; secondary ones in the background.[33] Certainly the heartbroken Maenad serves, as she did in the works of Donatello and Bertoldo, as a quotation of an ancient pagan trope. However, this work represents an entirely new phenomenon: a funerary image that depicts a nonreligious, secular occurrence. That is to say, this commemoration of a departed late-fifteenth-century Florentine woman portrays the actual woman: her death is neither allegorized, as it would have been in ancient Roman practice,[34] nor likened to an unfortunate mythological personage, such as Alcestis, Hippolytus, Adonis, or Meleager.[35] Nor is the representation of intense sorrow limited to a religious scene such as Christ's Passion, as it was in the example from Donatello's body of work, and the image produced by Bertoldo. There was nothing new, of course, about including a likeness of the deceased on the tomb itself—for instance, witness the tomb effigy, carved by Jacopo della Quercia (ca. 1374–1438), of Ilaria del Carretto (1379–1405) in Lucca (fig. 9)[36]—but the delineation of unmitigated dejection over the departed in this relief is highly unorthodox. As in the Donatello

32. Frida Schottmüller, "Zwei Grabmäler der Renaissance und ihre Antiken Vorbilder," *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* 25 (1902): 401–8, 403–5. John Pope-Hennessy seconded the identification; see Pope-Hennessy, *The Study and Criticism of Italian Sculpture* (New York, 1980), 34. In the Greek tradition, Alcestis was the young wife of King Admetus of Pherae, who met an untimely end when she traded places with her doomed husband, allowing him to live. A depiction of her death, then, conveyed a tragic message: a young virtuous life prematurely snuffed out, etc. See Apollodorus, *The Library*, trans. J. G. Frazer, 2 vols. (London, 1921), 1:90–93. Euripides famously dramatized the myth: see *Cyclops. Alcestis. Medea*, trans. David Kovacs (Cambridge, MA, 1994), 151–284.

33. Seymour, *Sculpture of Andrea del Verrocchio*, 125.

34. To cite an example of this practice, the second-century CE sarcophagus of one C. Bellicus Natalis Tebanianus—found in Pisa's Camposanto Monumentale—portrayed scenes of Bacchus's conquest of India as allegories of Tebanianus's military service in Trajan's legions. See Robert Turcan, *Messages d'outre-tombe: L'iconographie des sarcophages romains* (Paris, 1999), 102.

35. Scenes of the respective deaths of Adonis and Meleager were quite common on ancient Roman sarcophagi; the passing of a beautiful youth (Adonis) or a promising hero (Meleager) would have struck Roman viewers as extremely poignant, particularly if the occupant of the sarcophagus had met with a premature death. See Michael Koortbojian, *Myth, Meaning, and Memory on Roman Sarcophagi* (Berkeley, CA, 1995), 23–62; Katharina Lorenz, "Image in Distress? The Death of Meleager on Roman Sarcophagi," in *Life, Death, and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi*, ed. Jaś Elsner and Janet Huskinson (New York, 2010), 309–36.

36. On the possible similarities between the long-lost tomb for Francesca Tornabuoni and that of Ilaria del Carretto, see Hermann Egger, *Francesca Tornabuoni und ihre Grabstätte in S. Maria sopra Minerva* (Vienna, 1934), 12–15, 20–21. Annamaria Giusti contends that the woman portrayed on Jacopo's tomb was another woman, not Ilaria del Carretto; see Giusti, "Queries and Reflections on the Tomb of Ilaria del Carretto," in *Encountering the Renaissance*, ed. Molly Bourne and A. Victor Coonin (Ramsey, NJ, 2016), 173–84. Ilaria or no, the effigy clearly portrays a deceased person. On instances of the decedent's likeness gracing the tomb, see the many examples in Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture: Four Lectures on Its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to Bernini* (New York, 1964).

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Figure 9. Jacopo della Quercia, Funerary Monument of Ilaria del Carretto, 1406–13. Marble. 250 × 112 cm. (Cattedrale di Lucca, Lucca, Italy.) Photo credit: Scala / Art Resource, NY. Color version available as an online enhancement.

and Bertoldo compositions, the agitated Maenad represents an unusual ferocity of feeling. While the other sorrowful women clearly express their emotions—weeping, head in hand, or openly wailing—the anguish of the Maenad at the right-hand edge verges on self-harm; that is, she is evidently tearing her hair out by the roots. In this extreme instance, this feeling is a reaction not to the death of the crucified Messiah but to the death of an ordinary Florentine woman—albeit one belonging to the higher echelons of society—and, perhaps, her stillborn child. This distinction between the sacred and profane, the biblical and the contemporary, is crucial to an understanding of the extraordinary quality of this relief.

In early modern Italy, and elsewhere in Europe, the death of a woman in childbirth was a depressingly common event. The circumstances of childbirth as a whole were somewhat mysterious, as the majority of men—who were able to contribute to the historical record far more often than women—were excluded from the process. Female midwives, not male doctors, presided over the birth;[37] often, male doctors

37. On the predominance of midwives, see Merry E. Wiesner, "Early Modern Midwifery: A Case Study," in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt (Bloomington, IN, 1986), 94–113; Monica Green, "Documenting Medieval Women's Medical Practice," in *Practical Medicine from Salerno to the Black Death*, ed. Luis Garcia-Ballester, Roger French, Jon Arrizabalaga, and Andrew Cunningham (Cambridge, 1994), 322–52, 338–40; Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven, CT, 1999), 22. Midwives often depended on the texts written by Trotula, a female physician from eleventh-century Salerno. See Trotula, *Sulle malattie delle*

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only arrived on the scene to perform an autopsy on the woman who had died in childbirth.[38] Mysterious or not, a death in childbirth was a familiar occurrence; David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber estimated that one-fifth of the recorded deaths of young, married women in early-quattrocento Florence were due to this sad phenomenon.[39] No woman was safe—this scourge struck all social classes.[40]

The high infant mortality rate of early modern Europe—half of all Florentine children, for example, died before their tenth birthday[41]—has led numerous commentators to speculate on the "affective ties" between parents and children. The brief notations of infant deaths in ledgers seem to point toward a stoic acceptance of a bleak reality: perhaps a father did not develop an emotional bond with the child until that child was certain to live past infancy? What is perhaps more likely is that the seemingly bloodless entries found in daybooks simply sublimate or conceal profound feelings of grief.[42] The dearth of written accounts of women dying in childbed, coupled with the relative scarcity of literary reactions to a child's demise, may indicate the limitations of the social setting more than an absence of genuine emotion. Visual representations of these tragic events are similarly scant.[43] In this

donne, ed. Pina Cavallo Boggi (Turin, 1979), and *Medieval Woman's Guide to Health*, ed. Beryl Rowland (Kent, 1981).

38. Musacchio, *Art and Ritual*, 22. See also Katharine Park, "The Criminal and Saintly Body: Autopsy and Dissection in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1994): 1–33.

39. See David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and Their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427* (New Haven, CT, 1985), 277. As I mentioned above, the situation was equally grim elsewhere: anticipating the worst, pregnant Venetian women wrote their wills before their due dates; see Stanley Chojnacki, "Dowries and Kinsmen in Early Renaissance Venice," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5, no. 4 (Spring 1975): 571–600, 587.

40. Musacchio, *Art and Ritual*, 25; Louis Haas, *The Renaissance Man and His Children: Childbirth and Early Childhood in Florence, 1300–1600* (New York, 1998), 54.

41. Ann G. Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge, 1986), 41. The flip side was duly awful: "a child in the premodern world had a 30% chance of losing a parent"; Haas, *Renaissance Man,* 72, citing Peter Laslett, "Parental Deprivation in the Past: A Note on Orphans and Stepparenthood in English History," in *Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations: Essays in Historical Sociology*, ed. Laslett (Cambridge, 1977), 160–73, 170.

42. Musacchio, *Art and Ritual*, 27.

43. The vast majority of artistic monuments honoring the departed were dedicated to men; see Musacchio, *Art and Ritual*, 28–29; Andrew Butterfield, "Monument and Memory in Early Renaissance Florence," in *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence*, ed. Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Rubin (Cambridge, 2000), 135–60; Debra Pincus, *The Tombs of the Doges of Venice: Venetian State Imagery in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 2000). Commemorations of deceased women often consisted of painted portraits; such images, e.g., Ghirlandaio's portrait of Giovanna degli Albizzi (ca. 1488) in Madrid's Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, depicted them with finery, giving no indication of the circumstances of their deaths—an unsuccessful childbirth, etc. See Maria DePrano, "At Home with the Dead: The Posthumous Remembrance of Women in the Domestic Interior in Renaissance Florence," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 29, no. 4 (2010): 21–28. As Adrian Randolph has pointed out, men also barred women from the social circles in which most private art was displayed and viewed—often, *deschi da parto* (birth trays) were the only private artworks designed specifically for

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way, the relief from the Verrocchio workshop is unique; in the words of Jacqueline Musacchio, "there seems to be no other contemporary Western representation of a death in childbed, whether in obstetrical texts, sacred or secular manuscripts, or monumental art."[44] This relief, then, is the strongest piece of visual evidence pertaining to what must have been an inescapably pervasive and indelibly painful experience in the era. It may have been the only mode available for expressing a profound emotional state.

Of course, the portrayal of lamentation in general was commonplace. The subject of despondency had long been a mainstay of Western culture, which seems natural enough considering the ubiquity of death in the human experience. However, attitudes toward death, as they manifested in social conventions, have not remained constant over time. A brief overview makes this evident: for our purposes, an examination of physical manifestations of grief—gestures and body language, which the visual arts could replicate—will suffice. In ancient Greece and Rome, at least, the expression of mournfulness could entail extreme gesticulations, such as the tearing of hair.[45] These gestures appear, aptly enough, on Roman sarcophagi depicting the deaths of Meleager and Hippolytus.[46] Generally, such extreme pantomimes would not seem out of place in a world familiar with the topos of the ecstatic Bacchante.[47]

It seems that this association aroused the distaste of at least some of the early Christian authorities, including St. John Chrysostom (ca. 347–407), who frowned upon the violent expression of grief.[48] The fifth-century monk Isidor Pelusiotes

a female viewership. See Adrian Randolph, "Gendering the Period Eye: *Deschi da Parto* and Renaissance Visual Culture," *Art History* 27, no. 4 (2004): 538–62, 545, 547.

44. Musacchio, *Art and Ritual*, 30. Musacchio knows whereof she speaks, as she has spent her career assiduously examining the art concerning childbirth in early modern Italy. See Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, "Pregnancy and Poultry in Renaissance Italy," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 16, no. 2 (Winter 1997): 3–9, "The Medici-Tornabuoni *Desco da Parto* in Context," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* (1998): 137–51, and "Weasels and Pregnancy in Renaissance Italy," *Renaissance Studies* 15, no. 2 (2001): 172–87.

45. For antique literary examples of this phenomenon, see Lucian, "On Funerals," in *Lucian*, trans. Austin Morris Harmon, 8 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 4:112–31; Nonnos, *Dionysiaca*, trans. W. H. D. Rouse, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1940), 2:237–39.

46. See Barasch, *Gestures of Despair*, 23–25.

47. The ancient attitude toward demonstrative grief was not uniformly positive, of course; Plato, for one—being a philosopher ever watchful against the mendacity of art—criticized tragic dramatists for encouraging "effeminate" outbreaks of emotion with their somber plays; see Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey, 2 vols. (London, 1935), 2:458–63.

48. Barasch, *Gestures of Despair*, 35. It is within the realm of possibility that the Christian outlook, which had a much clearer conception of an afterlife than nearly any pagan faith, held a commensurately lessened fear of death. Why tear your hair out over someone who is happily seated beside the Lord in Paradise? Why not tear your hair out for an unhappy shade occupying the nothingness that is Hades?

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(d. 450), for one, warned against bereavement that became "bacchantically frenzied."[49] Of course, the disapproval expressed by these authors did not always result in emotional composure; not everyone followed the dictates of these stern figures. Indeed, conspicuous grief has long occupied a crucial space in Christian iconography; witness the themes of the *Descent from the Cross*, the *Deposition*, the *Lamentation*, and the *Pietà*. To choose just one pertinent example from the multitude of "grief" images in earlier Italian art, we need only consider the portrayal of the onlookers in the *Lamentation* scene (ca. 1305) from the Scrovegni Chapel frescoes (fig. 10) by Giotto (ca. 1266–1337), where both humans and angels express sorrowful agony.[50] From the twelfth century onward, religious literature frequently displayed an acceptance of emotional representations of Christ's death. St. Bonaventure (ca. 1221–74), for one, approved of such emotionality in relation to the crucified Christ.[51] Nevertheless, the iconography of religious representation was one thing; the behavior of ordinary citizens in a funereal setting was another. Medieval attitudes toward "excessive" secular sorrow tend toward skepticism, even censoriousness—a woman who wailed too loudly for her deceased husband roused suspicion: mistrustful spectators assumed that such women were trying to either impress their neighbors or snare new mates with such performances.[52] An image of sorrow only appeared decorous if it revolved around the dead Christ. This outlook was continent-wide; early modern Florentines shared these misgivings about extravagant mourners, especially if the mourners were female. Sharon Strocchia has examined the phenomena of Renaissance funereal practices, principally as they related to

49. Cited in Georg Zappert, *Über den Ausdruck der geistigen Schmerzes im Mittelalter, Denkschriften der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, V* (Vienna, 1854), 76 n. 19. See also Barasch, *Gestures of Despair*, 35.

50. On this work, see Moshe Barasch, *Giotto and the Language of Gesture* (Cambridge, 1987), 40–49, 107–11; Andrew Ladis, *Giotto's O: Narrative, Figuration, and Pictorial Ingenuity in the Arena Chapel* (University Park, PA, 2008), 139–43; Andrea A. Begel, "Giotto's Demons," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 29, no. 4 (Summer 2010): 3–9. On traditional depictions of the *Lamentation*, see Osvald Sirén, *Toskanische Maler im XIII. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1922), 57, 187; Georg Swarzenski, "Italienische Quellen der deutschen *Pietà*," in *Festschrift Heinrich Wölfflin* (Munich, 1924), 127–34; Barasch, *Gestures of Despair*, 57–86. For other examples of artworks featuring the "new emotionalism" of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries—mourning angels, etc.—see Barasch, *Gestures of Despair*, 96–102, 152–53.

51. See Saint Cardinal Bonaventure, *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century*, trans. Isa Ragusa and Rosalie Green (Princeton, NJ, 1961), 342–48.

52. Barasch, *Gestures of Despair*, 36. On the medieval view of grief and gesticulation, see also Zappert, *Über den Ausdruck*, 73–136; Max Herrmann, *Forschungen zur deutschen Theater-Geschichte des Mittelalters und der Renaissance* (Berlin, 1914), 176–276; Erhard Lommatzsch, "Darstellung von Trauer und Schmerz in der altfranzösischen Literatur," *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 43 (1923): 20–67.

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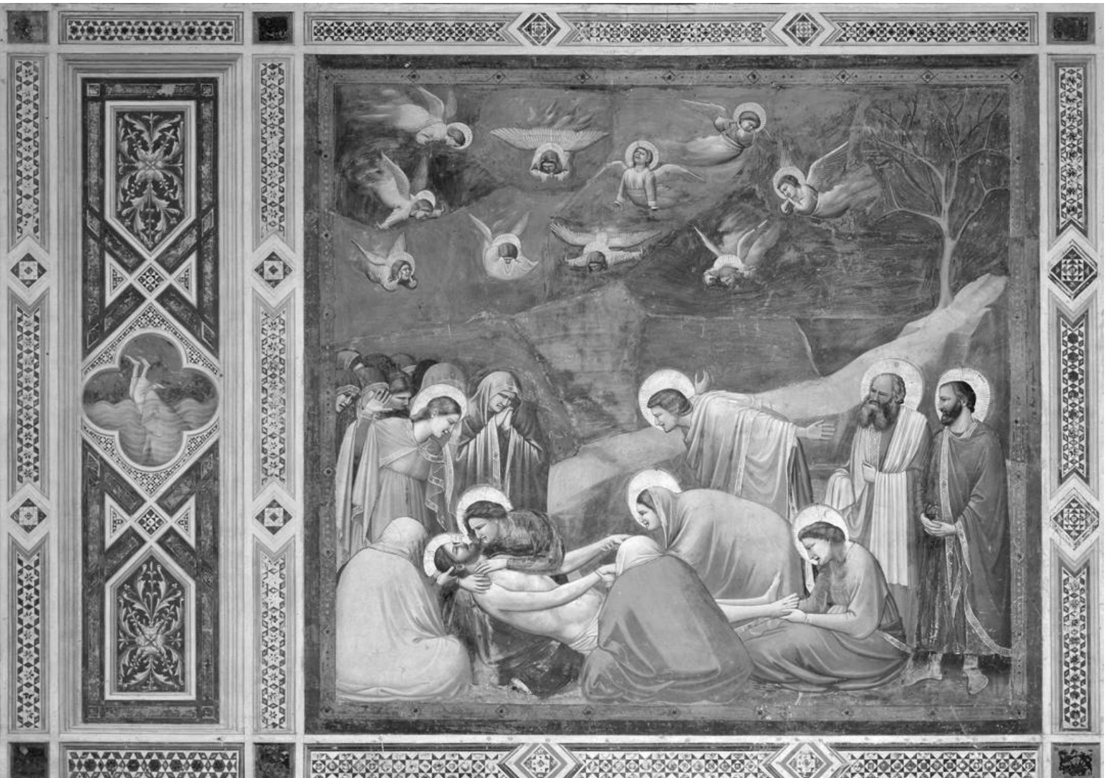

Figure 10. Giotto, *Lamentation*, ca. 1305. Fresco. From the north wall of the Cappella degli Scrovegni. 72 × 78 inches. (Padua, Italy.) Photo credit: Alinari / Art Resource, NY. Color version available as an online enhancement.

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gender concerns.[53] As with their other public rituals, Florentines segregated their funerals by sex and, often, excluded women altogether. While the funeral took place in the church, women had to mourn at home.[54] Such customs sequestered excessive emotion in the private realm—that is to say, in the home—from civic life.

In the public sphere, sumptuary laws sought to curb—among other things—excessive displays of mourning.[55] These customs could fluctuate, of course. For a time during the trecento, loud wailing from female mourners was common, even expected.[56] Still, some humanists—including Petrarch—disapproved of such elaborate exhibitions, preferring a more stoic acceptance of the fact of death, such as the reaction of the balding man in the Verrocchio relief. Other humanists naturally objected to these constrictions on emotion, as they sought to restore dignity to the grieving process; nevertheless, many still frowned upon inordinate displays of bereavement on the part of women.[57] By the quattrocento, sumptuary laws increasingly restricted immoderate sorrow.[58] As that century drew to a close, the authorities, at least, held the public presentation of grief in low regard. A man's impassive resignation in the presence of death was admirable; a woman's emotional abandon was deplorable. Of course, the fact that the powers-that-be passed so many laws against extravagant displays of despondency proves that, while certain figures disliked such behavior, these practices nevertheless persisted. The plurality of opinions is understandable; not everyone will agree on the "proper" way to express sorrow. Notions of decorum and taste aside, outsized emotional outbursts would have been a common sight in this period, given the high infant mortality rate and the

53. See Sharon T. Strocchia, *Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore, 1992). For additional views of the early modern approach to death, see Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. P. Ranum (Baltimore, 1974); Richard Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Ithaca, NY, 1980), 159–74.

54. Strocchia, *Death and Ritual*, 10.

55. Strocchia, *Death and Ritual*, 12, 174–75.

56. Strocchia, *Death and Ritual*, 116–17. Funeral organizers hired a group of women to attend the services for John Hawkwood (ca. 1320–94) for the specific purpose of lamenting emphatically. See Piero di Giovanni Minerbetti, *Cronica volgare di anonimo fiorentino dall'anno 1385 al 1409 già attribuita a Piero di Giovanni Minerbetti*, ed. E. Bellondi, 27 vols. (Città di Castello, 1915), 27:183.

57. Coluccio Salutati, in his correspondence with his friend Francesco Zabarella, favored a Christian view of grief over a Stoic one; Francesco Filelfo, in his treatise on consolation, *Oratio consolatoria ad Iacobum Antonium Marcellum de obitu Valerii filii* (1461), drew upon Christian, Peripatetic, and Epicurean remedies for sorrow, not just Stoic tactics. See George McClure, "The Art of Mourning: Autobiographical Writings on the Loss of a Son in Italian Humanist Thought (1400–1461)," *Renaissance Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (Autumn 1986): 440–75, 446–47, 461, 463.

58. Laws against undue mourning on the part of women were passed in Rome in 1471; see Strocchia, *Death and Ritual*, 212–13; Marco Antonio Altieri, *Li nuptiali di Marco Antonio Altieri*, ed. Enrico Narducci (Rome, 1873), xlviii.

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comparatively short average life expectancy.[59] However undignified demonstrative woe may appear, it was liable to erupt in times of duress. Preconceptions about private or public behavior—including gendered notions of emotion—could neither prevent nor repress spontaneous reactions to trauma. Different spectators could have viewed the presence of Maenad-like mourners in the works of Donatello, Bertoldo, and Verrocchio in a variety of ways. One could view these women as perspicuous echoes of classical antique motifs, testaments to the sculptor's erudition; or as the products of a startlingly gauche aesthetic choice, highlighting an embarrassing excess of emotion; or as a realistically raw and honest portrayal of the trauma of death; or other possibilities still.

The common denominator between the actual people who lamented effusively at funerals and the sculpted reliefs of distraught Maenads is a refusal to accept the situation impassively, as I suggested earlier. Demonstrative grief is an impulse that refuses repression; it is an intense feeling that is liable to burst through the bonds of propriety. Whether the volatile woman—the "mourning Maenad"—weeps for the crucified Son of Man or for a Florentine matron who died during labor, the import is the same. The fact of death is an inescapably painful one, a wound that any number of soothing platitudes or theological sophistries cannot heal. Conventional early modern prejudices about bereavement—for example, that women should be subdued in their emotional reactions or else be excluded from the funereal proceedings altogether—could not suppress the production of such images, either. Clearly, these "Maenads" will not inhibit themselves in the name of Stoic resignation. The spiritually edifying spectacle of the Messiah's sacrifice, or the similarly ennobling tableau of a young woman meeting her premature demise with grace and understatement, clashes, within the same image, with an evocation of devastated suffering on the part of the survivors. What might have begun as exhibitions of commendable decorum—sculpted reliefs exemplifying well-constructed, morally edifying narratives, and so on—ended up as near-transgressive eruptions of unmitigated pain.

59. On the subject of life expectancy, see Creighton Gilbert, "When Did a Man in the Renaissance Grow Old?" *Studies in the Renaissance* 14 (1967): 7–32; Albrecht Classen, introduction to *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic*, ed. Classen (Berlin, 2007), 1–84.

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