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Rebecca Shaw
Western University Canada

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Abstract

Perhaps the best known English lutenist of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, John Dowland (1563? – 1626) wrote numerous pieces for the lute, as a solo and ensemble instrument, including *Lachrimae, or Seaven Teares* figured in *Seaven Passionate Pavans*. Written in 1604, this piece was his final exploration of the popular melody that he had previously used in the lute pavan, “*Lachrimae*” (1596), and the lute song, “Flow my teares” (1600). *Seaven Teares*, for five viols and lute, is a series of seven variations whose provocative Latin titles, like *Lachrimae Gementes* and *Lachrimae Verae*, have caused some scholars to speculate that the music symbolizes either Elizabethan melancholy or the Fall of Man. However, as seventeenth-century scholarship suggests, the Elizabethan concept of melancholy was intrinsically connected to their perception of the Fall, and a close examination of Dowland’s *Seaven Teares* corroborates their relationship.

Keywords

John Dowland, Elizabethan Melancholy, Fall of Man, *Lachrimae*, Renaissance Music

***Lachrimae, or Seaven Teares* by John Dowland:
Tears of Lost Innocence**

**Rebecca Shaw
Year II – Western University**

Tears often symbolize lost innocence and sorrow, a connection that John Dowland (1563?–1626) explored over eight years with three successive elaborations of one melody. In 1596, he wrote the lute pavan, “*Lachrimae*,” which is Latin for “tears”; he added text to this piece in 1600, creating the lute song, “Flow my tears.” His work culminated in 1604, when he wrote the theme and variations suite for five viols and lute, *Lachrimae, or Seaven Teares figvred in Seaven Passionate Pavans*, dedicated to England’s newly crowned Queen Anne.¹ The revival of Dowland’s music in the twentieth century has led some scholars—notably Peter Holman and Peter Hauge—to closely examine the significance of *Seaven Teares*, interpreting it as either an allegory for the Fall of Man or a product of Elizabethan melancholy.² However, just as the loss

1. Peter Hauge, “Dowland’s Seven Tears, or the Art of Concealing the Art,” *Danish Yearbook of Musicology* 29 (2001): 9–10, http://www.dym.dk/dym_pdf_files/volume_29/volume_29_009_036.pdf.

2. Diana Poulton, “Dowland Rehabilitated,” *The Musical Times* 118, no. 1607 (January 1977): 28, doi:10.2307/960542.

of innocence is connected to sorrow, so too was the seventeenth-century understanding of the Fall related to the Elizabethan perception of melancholy. Categorizing *Seaven Teares* as representative of only one of these concepts isolates it from contemporaneous philosophy and offers a misleading interpretation of its musical symbolism.

Before considering the music, it is important to note that scholarship of the Elizabethan era indicates an innate connection between melancholy and the Fall. Both issues were associated with educated society. Melancholy was perceived as a fashionable malady that simultaneously intrigued and afflicted intellectuals—particularly writers, philosophers, and scholars.³ As Gail Thain Parker states in “Jonathan Edwards and Melancholy”: “a melancholy[ic] temper was frequently commended as productive of the noblest of musings.”⁴ This instinctive association of deep study with melancholy indicates that too much thinking was undesirable; to Elizabethans, the continuous pursuit of knowledge was not the natural state of man. Likewise, the Fall is an allegory where excessive knowledge resulted in man’s ruin, “which for the Elizabethan intellectual conveyed the whole meaning of life.”⁵ Essentially, English intellectuals in the seventeenth century believed that the purpose of human life was to repent for the sin of man’s initial thirst for

3. Peter Holman, *Dowland: Lachrimae (1604)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 50–51.

4. Gail Thain Parker, “Jonathan Edwards and Melancholy,” *The New England Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (June 1968): 195, doi:10.2307/363360. See also Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady: A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1951).

5. Hauge, “Dowland’s Seven Tears,” 35.

knowledge. Any attempts to gain more knowledge would only result in further despair.

This belief is included in scholarly writings from this time period. For instance, in *Histrion-Mastix: The Players Scourge or Actors Tragaedie* (1633), William Prynne condemns any actions not related to repentance. Life was not for personal enjoyment, but rather the punishment for the selfish pursuit of knowledge. Specifically, it condemns the actors and spectators of stage-plays as sinful and immoral, because they were engaging in a self-gratifying activity. In Prynne's view, the only way to reach heaven was by acknowledging one's sins and the sins of mankind, not by amusing oneself and pretending that sin did not exist:

Alas there are *but few that finde the narrow way* [or, the road to Heaven]...and those few what are they? Not dancens, but *mourners*: not laughers, but *weepers*; whose tune is *Lachrymae*, whose musicke *sighs for sinne*; who know no other Cinqua-pace but this to Heaven, *to goe mourning all the day long for their inequities; to mourne in secret like Doves, to chatter like Cranes for their owne and others sinnes*.⁶

Prynne recognises that melancholy is not only one's punishment, but also one's salvation from sin. Knowledge of sin results in melancholy, which in turn causes repentance and

6. William Prynne, *Histrion-Mastix: The Players Scourge or Actors Tragaedie* (London: E. A. and W. I. for Michael Sparke, 1633), 244, *Early English Books Online*, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99850535.

leads to redemption; the Fall—a sin for which all humans are punished—makes humans susceptible to melancholy, but also grants them a chance at salvation. Significantly, Prynne mentions Dowland's *Lachrimae* by name, indicating not only the popularity of this work, but that it was closely connected to the seventeenth-century understanding of earthly life. It was *the* song of melancholy and repentance.

Through musical and contextual evidence, Holman and Hauge make their respective and seemingly contradictory explanations of *Seaven Teares* plausible. Holman speculates that the pavans' Latin titles are evocative of the types of melancholy defined in Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621): the pavans take "the listener from conventional, non-specific sadness through religious melancholy, grief and despair, alienation and revenge, heroic and virtuous love, to enlightenment and wisdom."⁷ Essentially, he understands the pavans as sonic depictions of melancholy. However, Hauge argues that a religious interpretation of *Seaven Teares* is more appropriate:

From a state of complete tranquillity in the celestial spheres (pavans 1–3: near static, archaic), man was expelled (pavan 4: irregular characteristics begin to appear) and through a painful learning process (pavans 5–6: full blown experiments), it was possible to regain the previous state of happiness (pavan 7: the coalescence of old and new devices).⁸

7. Holman, *Dowland*, 60.

8. Hauge, "Dowland's Seven Tears," 35–36.

Hauge demonstrates that *Seaven Teares* can be construed as a musical allegory of the Fall by comparing the changes in harmony, musical devices, Latin titles,⁹ and—most importantly—Dowland’s treatment of the theme. Instead of an audible representation of melancholy, Hauge hears man’s fall from, and subsequent return to, his celestial state.

In their interpretations of *Seaven Teares*, both Holman and Hauge associate each variation with comparable extra-musical ideas. The subject of their extra-musical analysis is presented within the first two or three pavans—sorrow and tranquility respectively; the critical emotional event occurs in the fourth pavan—despair and expulsion; and, through a series of developments, happiness and enlightenment are achieved in the final pavan. In short, Holman and Hauge hear the same musical events but adjust their interpretations to suit the portion of Elizabethan philosophy that they deem most significant. Their explanations can coexist because they describe the same philosophy with separate terminology.

It is possible that Dowland was not aware of the philosophy that connected melancholy to the Fall, and therefore his music cannot be representative of their interdependency; however, musical and contextual evidence makes this unlikely. In *Seaven Teares*, Dowland uses untraditional musical devices, indicating that in order to convey a particular idea he was forced to explore new territory. Among other innovations, it was the first suite based solely on one dance form, and it uses techniques traditionally

9. Latin titles of the variations and their translations: *Lachrimae Antiquae* (old/original tears); *Lachrimae Antiquae Novae* (new old/original tears); *Lachrimae Gementes* (groaning tears); *Lachrimae Tristes* (grave or bitter tears); *Lachrimae Coactae* (mixed tears); *Lachrimae Amantis* (lover’s tears); *Lachrimae Verae* (true tears). Hauge, “Dowland’s Seven Tears,” 33–35.

used in vocal music for word painting—particularly “continual momentary dissonance.” Suspensions, false relations, and other temporary dissonances, used in vocal music to express pain and anguish, are employed throughout this piece to heighten the emotional intensity of the music.¹⁰ Also, it was the first English composition written specifically for five viols and a nine-course lute in low tunings—a register suggestive both of a fallen state and of melancholy.¹¹ Dowland’s use of the low register and word painting techniques is compatible with the suggestion that *Seaven Teares* was written with an extra-musical program—that of the Fall, melancholy, and redemption.

Although Dowland did not include a program as some Romantic composers were wont to do two centuries later, his intentions are clear in his note “To the Reader” and the text that he associated with the melody in “Flow my Teares.” In the publication of *Seaven Teares*, he stresses that the music should inspire studious listening and skilled playing¹²:

My labours...[have] receiv[ed] their last foile
and polishment; for which consideration I

10. Diana Poulton, “*Lachrimae* or *Seaven Teares* and other consort music,” in *John Dowland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 347.

11. Anthony Rooley, “New Light on John Dowland’s Songs of Darkness,” *Early Music* 11, no. 1 (January 1983): 9, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3137501>.

12. Christopher D. S. Field, review of *Lachrimae, or Seaven Teares* by The Dowland Consort, directed by Jakob Lindberg, *Early Music* 5, no. 2, Plucked String Issue (May 1987): 285, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3127503>.

haue undergone this long and troublesome worke, wherein I haue mixed new songs with olde, graue with light, that euery eare may receiue his seuerall content....I do likewise hope that the peruser will gratefully entertaine my endeouours.¹³

Even his designation of *Seaven Teares* as a “troublesome worke” resonates with the philosophy of melancholy and the Fall, as if by endeavouring to convey this idea he was ensnared by melancholy himself. This could be an over-analytical approach; Dowland might only be referring to difficulties he encountered while composing. Nevertheless, this note is a direct appeal to the educated class of Elizabethan society, “the peruser,” and Dowland indisputably gave this composition much importance, intending it as a work of reflection, not just a sensational experience. “Flow my Teares” also proves Dowland’s knowledge of the Fall’s connection to melancholy, as it blames knowledge of man’s earthly condition as the sole reason for melancholy.¹⁴ It condemns knowledge—“light”—as the cause of man’s fall “from the highest spire of contentment” and the source of melancholy—“all ioyes...deprived.”¹⁵ The authorship of this

13. John Dowland, “To the Reader,” in *Lachrimae, or Seaven Teares figyred in seaven passionate Pauans, with diuers other Pauans, Galiards, and Almands* (London: 1604). Facsimile reproduced with permission of Lincoln Cathedral Library in John Dowland, *Lachrimae*, ed. Lynda Sayce and David Pinto (London: Fretwork Editions, 2004), xviii.

14. Rooley, “New Light,” 7.

15. See Appendix for full text. John Dowland, “Flow my teares,” in *Second Booke of Songes or Ayres* (London, 1600), ii, *Early English Books*

text—which summarizes the Elizabethan perception of the consequences of knowledge—is uncertain, but many attribute it to Dowland.¹⁶ Even if he was not the author, by associating it with the *Lachrimae* melody, he exhibits, at minimum, an appreciation for this philosophy.

The musical symbolism in *Seaven Teares* further demonstrates Dowland's understanding of the Elizabethan connection between knowledge and sin. In this piece, melancholy is established through word painting techniques. These are defined by Thomas Morley (1557–1602), an English contemporary of Dowland, in *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke*, a book of enormous popularity both during and after his lifetime. He states, “When you would expresse a lamentable passion, then you must use motions proceeding by halfe notes. Flat thirds, and flat sixths, which of their nature are sweet...[and] accidentall motions [semitones] may fitly express the passions of griefe, weeping, sighes, sorrowes, sobs, and suchlike.”¹⁷ In *Seaven Teares*, Dowland introduces all three of these melancholic intervals within the first three measures: the semitone, G-sharp to A, appears in measure two; the minor sixth between E and C in measure one; and, the interval of a minor third in measure three (see ex. 1). Thus, Dowland establishes a melancholic sentiment, as understood by the compositional practises of his time.

Online, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99842401.

16. Poulton, *John Dowland*, 255–257.

17. Thomas Morley, *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (London: Imprinted at London by Peter Short, 1597), 177, *Early English Books Online*, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99847107.

EXAMPLE 1. Word Painting Techniques used to Express Melancholy in John Dowland, *Lachrimae, order Sieben Tränen*, mm. 1–3

Furthermore, Dowland includes a lute in the ensemble, an instrument repeatedly associated with Elizabethan melancholy. This is evident in Elizabethan dramas like Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII*: "Take thy lute, wench; my soul grows sad with troubles; / Sing and disperse 'em if thou canst."¹⁸ Some viol players¹⁹ have argued that the lute part is superfluous to the ensemble as it merely doubles the viols; however, Dowland clearly integrated the lute into the ensemble. In the initial publication, the lute part is not separated from the others; all six parts are written so that the players could sit around a table and perform the work together.²⁰ The lute is not an extraneous or optional part in *Seaven Teares*; just as the music's intervallic content evokes sorrow, the lute is an integral part of the ensemble, reminding the listener of melancholy.

18. William Shakespeare, *King Henry VIII*, ed. Gordon McMullan (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2000), 3.1.1–2. For other examples see Doris Silbert, "Melancholy and Music in the Renaissance," *Notes*, Second Series 4, no. 4 (September 1947): 414, doi:10.2307/889745.

19. Poulton, *John Dowland*, 344.

20. See Dowland, *Lachrimae*, ed. Lynda Sayce and David Pinto, xx–xxi.

EXAMPLE 2. Sacred End Figure in Dowland, *Lachrimae*, mm. 19–25

Seaven Teares is equally infused with religious symbolism through the use of a recurrent contrapuntal idea that Holman named the “Sacred End” (see ex. 2). The motif is made up of the intervals of a fourth—representing the elemental world (earth, fire, air, and water)—and a third, representative of the Holy Trinity;²¹ in three notes, the idea of man’s terrestrial state and his celestial origins is summarized. The Sacred End was used in various contemporaneous sacred works, including the anthems “Give Ear, O Lord” by Thomas Weelkes and “O Jesu meeke” by Thomas Morley, where it is set to refrains that ask God for mercy (see ex. 3a and 3b).²² Similarly, in “Flow my Teares,” the text that accompanies the Sacred End figure repents man’s sin and implores mankind to shun knowledge:

Harke you shadowes that in darcknesse dwell,
Learne to contemne light,
Happie, happie they that in hell

21. Hauge, “Dowland’s Seven Tears,” 13.

22. Holman, *Dowland*, 47–48.

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EXAMPLE 3B. Sacred End Figure in Thomas Morley, “O Jesu Meeke,” mm. 51–58

M
— thy will, have mer - cy now on me, — have mer-cy now.

C1
— thy will, have mer - cy now on — me,

C2
— thy — will, have mer - cy now

T
— thy will, have mer - cy now on me, have mer - cy — now on me,

B
— thy will, have mer - cy now on —

55

M *on me, have mer - cy now on me, have mer -*

C1 *have mer - cy now on me, have mer -*

C2 *on me, have mer - cy now on*

T *have mer - cy now, have mer - cy now on me,*

B *me, have mer - cy now on me, have mer - cy now on*

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The pervasive descending tetrachord, A–G–F–E, underlies the motives that suggest melancholy and the Fall individually, and makes them inseparable. The motif itself has a dual interpretation: that Dowland borrowed this tetrachord motif from Orlando de Lasso's *Seven Penitential Psalms* (1584), whose texts express grief and repentance for sin; or, that it is indicative of melancholy as a descending tetrachord ground bass was often used in laments.²⁴ If one combines these two understandings, the tetrachord would convey an image of sorrowful penitence parallel to the scholarly connection of melancholy and the Fall in Elizabethan times. More importantly, when one examines the three main motifs in *Seaven Teares* together—minor sixths, thirds and semitones denoting melancholy; the Sacred End figure representing the Fall; and, the descending tetrachord that symbolizes both—at least one is present at all times (see ex. 4). They interlock with one another to create an unrelenting depiction of the Elizabethan philosophy. *Seaven Teares* combines melancholic and religious musical gestures in an allegory of lost innocence; it is a musical reminder of man's innate melancholy as a consequence of the Fall.

24. Holman, *Dowland*, 40.

EXAMPLE 4. Interlocking Nature of the Three Prominent Motifs in *Seaven Teares*, Dowland, *Lachrimae*, mm. 19–25

20

= minor thirds, minor sixths, and semitones
 = descending tetrachord

= Sacred End figure (fourth + third)

Dowland also provides his “perusers” with redemption in “*Lachrimae verae*,” just as Elizabethan scholars reasoned that melancholy was both man’s punishment and his repentance for sin. The first six pavans of *Seaven Teares* are tears of penitence, and “*Lachrimae Verae*” is the “true tears of the transcendent soul”²⁵ whereby man returns to his celestial state, all sins forgiven. Musically, this ascension to heaven is portrayed in the ascending tetrachord that dominates “*Lachrimae Verae*.” It retains the same intervallic relationships as the tear motif (M2–M2–m2), but now ascends (see ex. 5). Through his music, Dowland conveys the hope that melancholy and tears are not in vain, and that sins can be forgiven. As Prynne succinctly summarized in *Histrion-Mastix*,

25. Rooley, “New Light,” 20.

earthly life is humanity's punishment for the Fall; melancholy is one's repentance; and, tears will allow one to re-enter heaven: "No other dance but these sad tunes will bring men to the place of endlesse ioy...all Christians should doe well to turne this *dancing into mourning*...that *so sowing thus in tears, they may reape a harvest of eternall ioy*."²⁶ "Lachrimae Verae" is the musical salvation that Dowland imparts upon his listener; after acknowledging man's vulnerability to melancholy, the last pavan expresses hope for salvation.

EXAMPLE 5: Ascending Tetrachord in "Lachrimae Verae,"
Dowland, *Lachrimae*, mm. 9–16

The musical symbolism in Dowland's *Seaven Teares* illustrates Elizabethan scholars' instinctive connection between melancholy and the Fall. Dowland's awareness of their interdependence demands not only a reinterpretation of the symbolism in *Seaven Teares*, but also of other allegorical Elizabethan compositions. Further research could reveal a more widespread connection between the philosophy of lost innocence and the music of the time. Elizabethan scholarship warns of the inevitable anguish that accompanies knowledge,

26. Prynne, *Histrio-Mastix*, 244–45.

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and encourages the preservation of innocence; this is an astute understanding of the ease with which knowledge—and subsequently humanity—is corrupted. At a time when mankind was seen as predisposed to both sin and melancholy because of the Fall, it is appealing to believe that John Dowland's *Seaven Teares* were meant as cathartic gifts; music that mirrored the tears, melancholy, repentance, and redemption of life.

Appendix

Text for “Flow my Teares” by John Dowland²⁷

Flow my teares fall from your springs,
Exilde for euer: Let mee morne
Where nights black bird his sad infamy sings,
There let mee liue forlorne.

Downe vain lights shine you no more,
No nights are dark enough for those
That in despaire their last fortunes deplore
Light doth but shame disclose.

Neuer may my woes be relieued,
Since pittie is fled,
And teares, and sighes, and grones my wearied ayes,
Of all ioyes have deprived.

From the highest spire of contentment,
My fortune is throwne,
And feare, and griefe, and paine for my deserts,
Are my hopes since hope is gone.

Harke you shadowes that in darcknesse dwell,
Learne to contemne light,
Happie, happie they that in hell
Feele not the worlds despite.

27. Dowland, “Flow my teares,” ii.

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