

The Social Function of the Funeral of and Elegies upon Sir Philip Sidney*

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Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586) is considered one of the greatest Elizabethan poets and a talented courtier. Sidney's image is so mythicised that some legends show Sidney's greatness, such as the water bottle story in the battlefield told by Fulke Greville (1554–1628).¹ However, almost all of such anecdotes are dubious. He rose to fame after his death. This study will clarify how and why Sidney's fame was utilised by those who prepared his funeral and wrote elegies upon him.

Sidney came from a reputable family. He was born on 30 November 1554 at Penshurst. His father was Sir Henry Sidney (1529–1586), Lord Deputy of Ireland and courtier, and his mother was Mary Sidney (1530–1586), a daughter of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland. Mary's brothers were Guildford Dudley, who married Lady Jane Grey, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick. Both Leicester and Warwick did not have any male children, so Sidney was a major candidate as an heir to each. As the expectations that people around Sidney held for him were great, he had to be an ideal gentleman whose virtue would be highly respected so that he could meet such expectations. However, in his formative years, when he went to Shrewsbury School, he was not a mild boy. He was irritable to his friends and servants, and his father even wrote a letter which admonished Sidney not to be so hot-tempered.² Such a temperament was not completely

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¹ Fulke Greville, *The Life of the Renowned Sir Philip Sidney* (London, 1651), p. 145. 'In which sad progress, passing along by the rest of the Army, where his Uncle the General was, and being thirstie with excess of bleeding, he called for drink, which was presently brought him; but as he was putting the bottle to his mouth, he saw a poor Souldier carryed along, who had eaten his last at the same Feast, gastly casting up his eyes at the bottle. Which Sir Philip perceiving, took it from his head, before he drank, and delivered it to the poor man, with these words, Thy necessity is yet greater than mine. And when he had pledged this poor souldier, he was presently carried to Arnheim.' This story is widely known and had been believed to be true, but now this is recognized as a complete fiction by Greville.

² Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991) I could not get the original one. In the translated version, by Toshiko Oshio, Mariko Kawai, and Aiko Negishi (Fukuoka: Kyushu University Press, 2010), description about his irritableness is shown in pp. 33–34.

gone after he had grown up. For example, he had a quarrel with Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, who was one of the Queen's favourites, upon the Queen's marriage to a French prince.³ Sidney's tour of the European continent started in 1572. He met many people and learned diplomacy well, and he was highly esteemed in foreign countries. After coming back to the court in 1575, Sidney was eager to take an active part in the court. It was his ambition to form a Protestant League in Europe that could stop the power of Spain.⁴ However, he could not gain any important office because Elizabeth was unwilling to give him some office. It sprang from a variety of reasons: 'he was irascible, ambitious, proud, and perhaps unreliable; his religious faith may not have been certain; he behaved and was received as a powerful figure abroad; it may therefore have seemed best to keep his power base at home as narrow as possible.'⁵ The first main mission he was given in 1577 was as an ambassador, particularly to condole the death of Emperor Maximilian II. He was knighted on 13 January 1583. Nevertheless, it was not a reward for his own achievement, but a token dictated by chivalric practice.⁶ In the same year, he married Frances Walsingham, a daughter of Sir Francis Walsingham (1567–1633), who was one of the aggressive Protestants. In 1585, Sidney was allowed to accompany Leicester on the Low Countries expedition to oppose the Spanish forces. This ended in tragedy. On 22 September 1586, during a skirmish at Zutphen, he was shot on his left thigh. Although his condition got better once, he died on 17 October at the age of 31. Needless to say, Sidney was also a talented writer. He wrote his works during his absence from court, but he would not publish them whilst he was alive. Therefore, his works were read and circulated in manuscript form among his acquaintances. Thus, Sidney could not achieve political success and was a short-tempered man. He was in no ways a perfect man, but he became a paragon of England after his death. It is even said that 'The central event of his career had been his death.'⁷

As such, turning our attention closely to how Sidney's funeral was held is important to understand his fame. Sidney's body was carried to London on 5 November 1586, whereas the

³ Malcolm William Wallas, *The Life of Sir Philip Sidney*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), pp. 213–16. Sidney opposed to the marriage, and it brought queen's anger.

⁴ W. A. Ringler, 'Sir Philip Sidney: The Myth and the Man', *Sir Philip Sidney: 1586 and the Creation of a Legend*, ed. by Jan Van Dorsten (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 1986), p. 5.

⁵ *Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB).

⁶ Roger Howell, *Sir Philip Sidney: The Shepherd Knight* (London: Hutchinson, 1968), p. 93.

⁷ Michael G. Brennan, *Literary Patronage in the English Renaissance: the Pembroke family* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 52.

funeral for him was not held soon. It was held on 16 February 1587, about four months after his death, at St Paul's Cathedral. The funeral was too grand for Sidney whose rank was not a nobleman but a knight or, strictly speaking, a commoner. It was rather like a baron's funeral.⁸ At that time, heraldic funerals were managed by the College of Arms. Many rules were followed in heraldic funerals; the number of principal mourners varied according to the social class of the deceased—dukes and marquesses had to have eleven; earls and viscounts, nine; and barons, seven; they had to be of the same status as the deceased, and the mourners had to be of the same sex as the deceased.⁹ People whose title were greater than that of the deceased should not be allowed to attend funeral processions.¹⁰

However, Sidney's funeral was an unconventional one. Thomas Lant (1554/5–1600/1) drew the funeral procession in detail. Lant was a servant of Sidney, and he even accompanied him to the Low Countries in 1585.¹¹ The presence of this kind of drawing is rare, so it is one of the notable features of Sidney's funeral. According to Lant's drawing, the upper-class attendants in Sidney's funeral were as follows: earls and barons of his kindred and friends—Comes Huntingdon, Comes Leicester, Comes Pembroke, Comes Essex, Baron de Willoughby and Baron de North. These noblemen rode on horsebacks, wearing black robes and black hats.¹² Thus, some barons and earls unconventionally participated in the funeral of a knight. Some musicians were also present, such as trumpeters, drummers and fifers in the procession.¹³ Trumpeters appeared in the funerals of the higher nobility and were a symbol of resurrection. Fifes and drums were a distinguishing feature of military funerals, so they did not appear in civilian funeral processions, including those of royalty.¹⁴ In other words, Sidney was treated as a nobleman of high position, whereas he was just a knight, and his figure as a soldier was emphasised in his funeral.

⁸ J. F. R. Day, 'Death be Very Proud: Sidney Subversion, and Elizabethan Heraldic Funerals', *Tudor Political Culture*, ed. by Dale Hoak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 191.

⁹ Clare Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England*, (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 175.

¹⁰ William Sugar, *Honor, Military, and Ciuill* (London, 1602), p. 253. Sugar said this in the context that people should not hold too grand funeral not to waste family's money.

¹¹ DNB.

¹² Thomas Lant, *Sequitur Celebritas & Pompa Funeris* (London, 1588), plate. 18. Look at the Figure 1 in the end which was taken from EEBO.

¹³ Lant, plates. 4–5.

¹⁴ Jennifer Woodward, *The Theatre of Death: The Ritual Management of Royal Funerals in Renaissance England 1570-1625* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997), p. 18.

Although during Sidney's time, preparing funerals took some time, a four-month delay was unusual, as other funerals were commonly held within a month after one's death, as we can see in Table 1. Table 1 compares seven funerals showing each deceased's class, the date he/she died, the date of the funeral, the number of participants and the main attendants whose ranks are high. We can also see that the gap in class between the defunct and the participants of Sidney's funeral (that is, the gap in class between a knight and earls) is greater than those of the others in the table.

Table 1: Elizabethan funerals¹⁵

	William Herbert ¹⁶	Edward Stanley ¹⁷	Matthew Parker ¹⁸	Margaret Douglas ¹⁹
Class	Earl of Pembroke	Earl of Derby	Archbishop	Countess of Lenox
Died	1570.3.17	1572.10.24	1575.5.17	1578.3.9
Funeral	1570.4.18	1572.12.4	1575.6.6	1578.4.3
Participants		900	200–300	
Upper-class attendants	Earl of Leicester, Baron of Burghley	Baron of Stourton, Knights	Bishops	Earl of Leicester

	Philip Sidney	William Cecil ²⁰	Elizabeth I ²¹
Class	Knight	Baron of Burghley	Queen
Died	1586.10.17	1598.8.4	1603.3.24
Funeral	1587.2.16	1598.8.29	1603.4.28
Participants	700		1600
Upper-class attendants	Earl of Leicester, Huntingdon, Essex	Earl of Essex, Nottingham	Earl of Salisbury, Worcester

¹⁵ The ideal information for comparison to Sidney's funeral is a funeral of a knight, whose social position is the same as Sidney, but I have not found such an ideal record so far.

¹⁶ The National Archives of the UK: SP 12/67 f.153.

¹⁷ Arthur Collins, *The Peerage of England*, vol. 3 (London, 1779), pp. 55–62.

¹⁸ BL: Lansdowne Vol/21 f.7.

¹⁹ The National Archives of the UK: SP 52/27 f.30.

²⁰ The National Archives of the UK: SP 12/268 f.52.

²¹ Woodward, pp. 210–213.

The delay in Sidney's funeral was attributed to several reasons. It was Sir Francis Walsingham, Sidney's father-in-law, who prepared the funeral. When Sidney died, Walsingham wrote to Leicester in November 1586, explaining that he had no choice but to delay the funeral because he had to deal with Sidney's debts: 'I doe not see howe the same can be performed with that solempnytye that apperteyneth without the utter undoing of his credytors.'²² However, a Protestant propaganda motive—to unite the country—has been suggested as the underlying reason for the grand funeral for Sidney.²³ He died in the war against the Catholic power of Spain, so his death could be regarded as a kind of martyrdom as a Protestant. The people who would plan the funeral, such as Walsingham and Leicester, were aggressive Protestants. They utilised his image as an icon of Protestantism. As another reason, we have to pay attention to the fact that Sidney's funeral was scheduled just eight days after the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots. Such a conspicuous public event would have provided Elizabeth with a convenient means of distracting the minds of London citizens from the controversial execution of the Catholic queen.²⁴ Sidney's image was exaggerated in his funeral and used for political and religious purposes in this way.

Not only funerals but also elegies are the devices used to bring fame to the deceased. Numerous works, such as elegies, epitaphs and biographies, were published at that time to commemorate the life of Sidney. Volumes of elegiac tributes were also produced by the universities of Cambridge, Oxford and Leiden. This is also a distinctive feature of Sidney's death because no other people, except royalty, had been written such a large number of elegies. By examining how Sidney is described in each work, we can clarify the image of Sidney to people at that time. Before going to the content of each work, we should focus on each author's circumstances, especially his relationship with Sidney. I will deal with the verses written by Thomas Churchyard (1523?–1604) and George Whetstone (1550?–87).

Thomas Churchyard had two occupations—a writer and a soldier. He was an aggressive Protestant, so he fought in European protestant causes as a soldier.²⁵ At first, Churchyard

²² Richard Greaves, *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), p. 716.

²³ Ronald Strickland, 'Pageantry and Poetry as Discourse: The Production of Subjectivity in Sir Philip Sidney's Funeral', *English Literary History* 57.1 (1990), p. 29. According to Strickland, the presence of Earls and Barons at Sidney's funeral undermined the social hierarchy.

²⁴ Brennan, pp. 53–54.

²⁵ DNB.

served under Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, who was an important English Renaissance poet. He also served in Ireland under Henry Sidney, Sidney's father, in 1575 and 1576. Churchyard's patron was Christopher Hatton, a courtier and politician who had a close relationship with Elizabeth I. By the end of his life, Churchyard was labouring under the weight of many years of frustrated attempts to gain recognition for his work.²⁶ Before the funeral of Sidney, he published his epitaph upon him, *The epitaph of Sir Philip Sidney Knight, lately Lord Governour of Flossing*,²⁷ in 1586, and dedicated it to Sidney's wife. In the dedicatory message, Churchyard clearly said that he wrote the work with the expectation that Sidney's fame give him a reputation: 'Trusting that your Ladship will giue good countenance to my labor, and doubting no whit but the world enbraseth my trauaile' (sig. A3r). From this dedication, he probably did not have any personal relationship with Sidney. In the elegy, he referred to Sidney's greatness as a writer:

Well seen and read in diuers Ares his works they shewe the same:
Well trauayld to, in sondrie partes to purchase péerelesse Fame,
Brought home both language lawde and lore & might y^e Lawrell weare,
And crownd with Garland be therefore and style of Honor beare. (sig. A4r)

On the other hand, Sidney's talent as a soldier was praised only a little, being described as 'Ranne faire at Tilt, like Mars.' (sig. A4 r) As Churchyard wanted to be appreciated as a writer and he emphasised the power of the pen in the dedicatory message of his work for precisely such a purpose, placing importance on Sidney's image as a poet rather than as a soldier was natural for him. In lamenting Sidney's death, he mentioned that it brought him renown:

For Sidneis sake (O wicked Shot) our natiue Countrey cries:
Yea though his death great glorie got and Fame thereby doth rise,
In wretched earth and Tombe God wot his worthie bode lyes:
Who left behinde by heauie lot a world of weeping eyes. (sig. A4r)

This suggests that Sidney already gained fame before the funeral was held, and English citizens might be aware of the vital meaning of Sidney's death. Of course, Sidney was praised throughout the epitaph, but the expressions Churchyard used were rather subdued.

²⁶ *Literature Online Biography*.

²⁷ Thomas Churchyard, *The epitaph of Sir Philip Sidney Knight, lately Lord Governour of Flossing* (London, 1586).

Next, I will compare Churchyard's elegy to that of George Whetstone, which was written after the funeral. He was better known as an elegist, moralist and patriotic writer among his contemporaries.²⁸ He began his career as an elegist with George Gascoigne's death, and he composed many elegies. The patriotic Protestant strain underlay most of his work. Whetstone went to the Netherlands with his brother Barnard Whetstone from 1585 to 1586. In his writing of Sidney's life and death, Whetstone may have heard from Barnard about Sidney's death at Zutphen. Whether Whetstone knew Sidney personally was uncertain, but he claimed that he ascertains detailed information about the subjects of his elegies and that he is considered the first professional biographer.²⁹ His elegy upon Sidney was published in 1587, after Sidney's funeral. It contains two main parts, 'Of the life, death, and Noble vertues of the most Aduenturous Knight Sir Phillip Sydney, &c.' and 'A commemoration of the generall mone, the honourable and solemne funerall made for and of the most worthy Sir Phillip Sidney Knight by B. W. esquire'. The former part is mainly about the life of Sidney, particularly the last years of his life, whereas the latter part focuses on his funeral. The long title of the elegy seems rather exaggerated:

*Sir Phillip Sidney, his honorable life, his valiant death, and true vertues. A perfect myrror for the followers both of Mars and Mercury, who (in the right hardie breaking vpon the enemie, by a few of the English, being for the most part gentlemen of honor and name) receiued his deathes wound, nere vnto Sutphen the 22. of September last past, dyed at Aruam the 16. of October following: and with much honor and all possible mone, was solemnely buried in Paules the 16. of February 1586. By G.W. gent.*³⁰

Using both 'Mars' and 'Mercury' signifies that Whetstone commended Sidney both for his talent for battles and his writings. When we compare this title upon Sidney with the titles in the two elegies written by Whetstone—upon Sir Nicholas Bacon and Thomas Radclyffe, 3rd earl of Sussex—we can see clear differences:

A remembraunce, of the woorthie and well employed life, of the right honorable Sir Nicholas Bacon Knight, Lorde keper of the greate Seale of Englande, and one

²⁸ *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (DLB).

²⁹ DNB, DLB.

³⁰ George Whetstone, *Sir Phillip Sidney, his honorable life, his valiant death...* (London, 1587).

*of the Queenes Maiesties most honorable Priiue Counsell, who deceased, the 20 daye of Februarie 1578.*³¹

*A remembraunce of the life, death, and vertues, of the most noble and honourable Lord Thomas late Erle of Sussex Vicount Fitz-water, Lord of Egremount and Burnell, iustice of an ayer, of all her Maiesties forrestes, parkes, chaces, and warrantes, on the south side of Trent, Captaine of the pensioners & gentlemen at armes, Lord Chamberlaine of her Maiesties honorable household, Knight of the noble Order of the Garter, and of her Highnesse most gracious and prudente Pryuy Councill, VVho deceased at Barmesey the 11. of Iune 1583.*³²

Compared with the title for Sidney, these two titles just show the service of the deceased with some words of praise, which are typical of elegies. The degree of praise expressed in the elegy upon Sidney and those upon others is clearly different, and Whetstone's words in the title for Sidney seem to be overblown.

In his work, Whetstone described Sidney as 'the rising sunne' repeatedly. In 'Of the life', he wrote that 'And to be short, the rising sonne he was:/ That comforted and shinde in eu'ry place' (sig. B3r). In 'A commemoration', he highly commended him using the same words:

He was the rising sunne that made all England glad,
He was the life, and light, of those that any vertues had.
He was the muses ioy, he was Bellonas sheilde,
With in the Towne he was a Lambe, a Lion in the Field. (sig. C3r)

This expression is ostentatious when we recognise the fact that Sidney did not make any achievements in court. From the quotation above, Whetstone clearly praised Sidney both as a soldier and a poet. We can also find similar praise in other parts, placing martial items along with literary items:

Whom to reuiue, *Mars and the Muses* meete,
In Armors faire, his hearse, the haue arayde:
And on the same, a robe downe to the feete,
About his Healme, a Lawrell wreath is brayde,
And by his Swoord a Siluer penne is layd, (sig. B1v)

³¹ *ibid.*, *A remembraunce, of the woorthie and well employed life...* (London, 1579).

³² *ibid.*, *A remembraunce of the life, death, and vertues...* (London, 1583).

Churchyard and Whetstone vary in how they praise Sidney. Churchyard set importance on Sidney's image as a poet rather than as a soldier, whereas Whetstone commended Sidney as both. As Churchyard wrote his elegy before the funeral of Sidney and Whetstone wrote his after, the funeral which treated Sidney as an important nobleman and soldier might have influenced Whetstone to praise Sidney as a great soldier. According to Churchyard and Whetstone, Sidney did not fear death; he wanted to live longer for the country and the Commonwealth, and he was also kind to the poor. Thus, they took an objective view of the late Sidney and greatly praised him. When the purpose is only to mourn the death of one's friends, elegies do not need to be published. However, by publishing elegies and dedicating them to important people who had a close relationship with Sidney, the authors might be able to gain patronage and reputation, as Churchyard expected so. Praising Sidney exaggeratedly was natural for them so that they can please their patrons. Sidney's image was also exaggerated in elegies and utilised for the authors' own interests in this way.

However, one elegy had an obviously different character. It was written by Fulke Greville, who was Sidney's close friend. In 1564, at the age of 10, Greville was sent to join Sidney at Shrewsbury School. They studied together for three years. They went to different colleges, and on Sidney's return to England in 1575, Greville joined him in court. Greville attached himself to the radical protestant faction of Sidney's uncle, the Earl of Leicester. Like Sidney's, Greville's political ambitions were usually met with frustration.³³ In 1577, when Sidney was sent as an ambassador to the German Emperor, Greville accompanied him. However, when Sidney was allowed to accompany the Earl of Leicester to Netherland, Greville was ordered to remain in England. We can also find Greville in Sidney's funeral procession.³⁴ The loss of his friend largely conditioned everything else in Greville's later life. His work about Sidney's life,³⁵ published in 1651, contains some anecdotes about Sidney. We cannot call it a biography of Sidney, but it is rather a panegyric. Now, we are going to see his elegy upon Sidney.³⁶ In all 40 lines, Greville excessively lamented for his friend's death

³³ DNB.

³⁴ Lant, plate. 16.

³⁵ Fulke Greville, *The life of the renowned Sr Philip Sidney. with the true interest of England as it then stood in relation to all forrain princes: and particularly for suppressing the power of Spain stated by him. His principall actions, counsels, designes, and death. Together with a short account of the maximes and policies used by Queen Elizabeth in her government* (London, 1651). Though it had been a main source about Sidney's real life, most of anecdotes were considered not to be true.

³⁶ R. S., of the Inner Temple, *The phoenix nest Built vp with the most rare and refined workes of noble men, woorthy knights, gallant gentlemen, masters of arts, and braue schollers. Full of varietie, excellent*

in a variety of phrases. Now, we will see three stanzas which particularly show his deep grief. Here, he described Sidney as a perfect man and as the world's delight:

Hard harted mindes relent, and Rigor's teares abound,
And Enuie strangely rues his end, in whom no fault she found.
Knowledge his light hath lost, Valor hath slaine her knight,
Sidney is dead, dead is my friend, dead is the world's delight. (sig. C1v)

It seems that Greville could not accept the loss of Sidney; using the past tense—was—only brought him more woe:

He was—wo worth that word—to ech well thinking minde,
A spotlesse friend, a matchles man, whose vertue euer shinde,
Declaring in his thoughts, his life, and that he writ,
Highest conceits, longest foresights, and deepest works of wit. (sig. C2r)

He did not mention any special ability nor character of Sidney, but he showed his own deeply depressed feeling:

Now sinke of sorow I, who liue, the more the wrong,
Who wishing death, whom death denies, whose thred is al to long,
Who tied to wretched life, who lookes for no reliefe,
Must spend my euer dying daies, in neuer ending grieffe. (sig. C2r)

He moaned for his lost friend repeatedly, but he did not mention any wonderful talents of Sidney. What we can learn from his elegy is that Greville and Sidney were close friends, Greville's grief was great and Sidney's presence was important for England. Greville did not intend to publish the elegy, so he might have composed it only to express his deep grief, not to earn fame. He did not have to praise his friend on his particular merits. Thus, this elegy has a far different character from those of the others.

In conclusion, Sidney's death brought him fame, and it was utilised in many ways. Although the original purpose of funerals and elegies should be to mourn the dead, such as that done by Greville, heraldic funerals and elegies at that time had the function to show the power of the deceased and his/her family, and to use the dead's fame for some purpose. Particularly, Sidney's death was used at the national level, and he was overvalued both in his

invention, and singular delight. Neuer before this time published (London, 1593), pp. 10–11. It does not have own title and when it was composed is uncertain.

funeral and in the elegies upon him. In his funeral, the image of Sidney as an ideal Protestant to unite the country was exploited by some aggressive Protestants, including Walsingham. By composing elegies whose content was filled with eulogies on Sidney, contemporary poets also used Sidney's fame to boost their own reputation. This was how Sidney's image as an ideal and perfect man was created. To make the peculiarity of mourning upon Sidney clear, I will continue to examine other heraldic funerals and elegies.

tes and Barons of his kindred and friends . . .

Huntingdonia .
Comes Leicestria .

Comes Pembrocia .
Comes Essexia .

Baro : de Willowby .
Baro : de North .

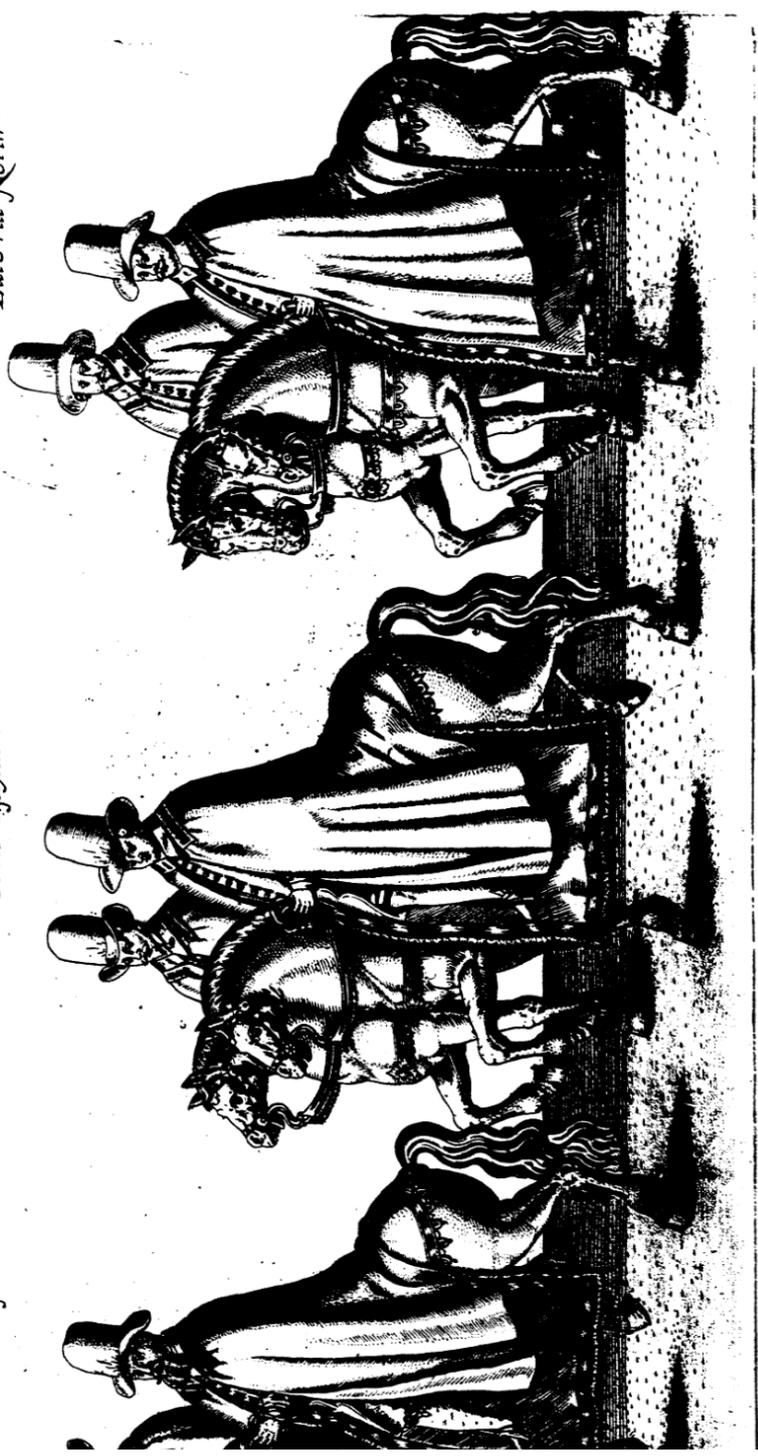


Figure 1. Thomas Lant, *Sequitur Celebritas & Pompa Funeris* (London, 1588) plate. 18.