

"The Wounds Become Him": Sacrifice, Honor and the Hazard
of Much Blood in Shakespeare's Roman Plays

by

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Abstract

"THE WOUNDS BECOME HIM": SACRIFICE, HONOR AND THE HAZARD
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My project centers around representations of the martyred body in Shakespeare's Roman plays, and focuses on the ambiguous nature of ceremony, to consider the way ritualized presentations of the body complicate, undermine, or oppose the language used to represent the body. For Shakespeare's sources, dying in the high Roman fashion was valorized as a deed strengthening the social body of Rome, but for Shakespeare, such a manner of death acquires a Catholic, Eucharistic aspect that is exposed as grotesque and bathetic. What emerges in each play is a struggle between the visual spectacle of onstage violence and refining speech. In Shakespeare's Rome, violence elicits an expectation of social purification, and

Shakespeare's refusal to provide this redemption makes the violence that we do see all the more repulsive.

By looking at Shakespeare's depiction of Rome in these tragedies, we can trace a loss of confidence in the efficacy of sacrifice in the wake of its growing politicization within the early modern English community. The grisly accounts found in John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* illustrate the contradiction that Shakespeare strives to expose in his Roman plays: that, following their public deaths, martyrs were assigned a voice that was startlingly similar to the role of the saints in Catholic iconography. Characters who assume that they alone can define the meaning of their own sacrifices are exposed by Shakespeare as naive and foolish because their deaths and injuries are exploited by canny survivors and opportunists with greater theatrical skill. Shakespeare is skeptical about the glory awarded to Roman "martyrs" and the facility with which opportunists turn them into "the noblest Roman[s] of them all" (*Julius Caesar* 5.5.68). In spite of the fact that the spectacular violence inflicted upon Lucrece, Lavinia, Caesar, Cleopatra and Coriolanus renders these characters figures of public veneration, the plays destabilize the control

of what they create through an emphasis on the ambiguities of visual interpretation. The image of bloodied flesh onstage is found to be disturbingly powerful, and "speaks" to the audience in a manner that paradoxically transcends spoken language, denying the victims the right to control the interpretation of their death, and turning religious death into a political commodity.

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**Introduction: Standing Least in Thy Control: Spectacles
of Martyrdom and the Early Modern English Stage**

In Shakespeare's enigmatic "sacrificial sonnets," 124 and 125, the speaker's love "fears not policy, that heretic" (124, 9).¹ His love is blasphemous, because it refuses to recognize the power that changing circumstances can hold over it, even as it stands alone, "hugely politic" (11). In his essay, "Love's Martyrs: Shakespeare's *Phoenix and Turtle* and the Sacrificial Sonnets" Richard C. McCoy suggests that these sonnets represent Shakespeare's "characteristically equivocal" (198) view on human sacrifice and martyrdom. The sonnets, he suggests, contrasts the theological sense with the death's politique absurdity. Indeed, Sonnet 124,

¹ All quotations are from *The Arden Shakespeare, Complete Works*. Third edition.

which calls "the fools of time"(13) as witness to the futility of submitting love to external pressures in many ways can be seen to comment on the increasing politicization of sixteenth and seventeenth-century martyrdom. A soul, McCoy suggests, is like a martyr, standing most independent when "most impeached" (125, 14).

Yet, these figures are the very fools of time who find the validity of their testimonies subject to changing circumstances. These sonnets question the premise of sacrifice, as McCoy notes, highlighting that "neither immortality nor transcendence are guaranteed" (199) by the gesture. McCoy goes further, suggesting that the sonnets present a "volatile mixture of violence and the sacred, of cruelty and altruism, of annihilation and redemptive sacrifice that lurks just beneath the surface of Eucharistic imagery – and the Eucharist itself – blows up in our faces" (201 – 2). I would like to propose that the same dangerous cocktail exists within the Roman plays. In many ways, the fools of time that the sonnets so cynically dismiss become the central figures in these texts, and throughout the course of the Roman plays,

Shakespeare confirms the skepticism that he alludes to in the sonnets.

In *Titus Andronicus*, the sight of the mutilated Lavinia is so appalling that the hero exclaims "had I but seen thy picture in this plight / It would have madded me" (3.1.104 – 5). He does indeed go insane, confirming the overwhelming force of such a spectacle. That shocking acts of violence take prominence in Shakespeare's Roman plays is not a new observation, nor does it distinguish these plays from others that offer similar excesses of cruelty, such as *King Lear* or *Richard III*. However, the violence in the 1594 poem "The Rape of Lucrece" and the Roman plays – *Titus Andronicus* (1594), *Julius Caesar* (1599), *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606) and *Coriolanus* (1608) – is more pronounced and draws attention to itself by the way in which the characters attempt to give it meaning. Shakespeare's other tragedies recognize the extent to which violent acts defy rationalization. Othello's exhausted plea, to "speak of me as I am" (*Othello*, 5.2. 342) recognizes the extent to which the murder he commits diminishes him; he describes the murder of Desdemona as an act as careless as casually throwing away a pearl, ignorant of its value. The fact that Othello suggests

that his tale needs no elaboration implies a pointlessness to the violence he committed, an attitude antithetical to that of the Roman plays.

In most of Shakespeare's tragedies, brutal acts such as the murder of Duncan or the death of Mercutio are presented as disruptive and malicious deeds, but in the Roman plays, violence is offered up as something to be ritualized, and as a potentially redemptive action. The Roman plays consistently attempt to use ceremony to turn violent murders into sacred rites, and attempt to validate butchery by imposing a sacrificial context, around a bloody scene. Generally, for Shakespeare's sources, dying in the high Roman fashion is valorized as a deed that strengthens the social body of Rome. Each of the deaths Shakespeare represents – Lucrece, Lavinia, Brutus, Coriolanus and even Antony – is, in Plutarch, notable for the good that emerges as a result. In this project, I propose that all attempts in the Roman plays to ritualize violence are undermined by Shakespeare's skepticism. Violence in these plays is merely suicidal or homicidal and never really benefits the social body. Equally, the characters' deaths fail to acquire substantive meaning. I want to further suggest that the

attempt to ritualize murder as sacrifice and suicide as martyrdom links the violence of ancient Rome with the superstitious practices of early modern Rome. Throughout these plays, ritual in Shakespeare's Rome is infused with the language of the English Reformation, most notably drawing attention to the similarities with the ceremony of the Eucharist.

I will explore these parallels in more detail in the chapters that follow, but for now I simply note the evocative language of each play. In *Titus Andronicus*, Titus tells his daughter's rapists "how I mean to martyr you" (*Titus Andronicus* 5.2.180), before serving their pulverized flesh and blood to their mother in a grisly perversion of a sacramental feast. Similarly, Brutus begs the conspirators to commit to being "sacrificers not butchers" (*Julius Caesar* 2.1.166) in an attempt to consecrate their murder of Julius Caesar and proposes that they carve him as "a dish fit for the Gods" (2.1.173). In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony insists that "with a wound I must be cured" (*Antony and Cleopatra* 4.14.78), indicating a clear belief that shedding his blood can restore the honor that he has lost in Rome. Finally, in *Coriolanus*, the hero's wounds are supposed to

be a sign of his devotion to Rome, but before he is welcomed into the Senate, its citizens must put their "tongues into those wounds and speak for them" (*Coriolanus* 2.3.5-6) to formally recognize his valor. Despite the valor and eloquence of the Roman heroes, they find themselves helpless to influence the fate of the violence they release. They cannot contain or redeem the chaos their deeds unleash. Painfully and paradoxically, they find, in the words of the Sonnet, their "true soul . . . stands least" in their own "control," and their destiny is "impeached" or usurped by adversaries and opportunists. Tamora rightly denounces the solemn cruelty of Titus Andronicus as "irreligious piety" (*Titus Andronicus* 1.1.133), and his murder of his own children as well as hers only causes more carnage and horror. As René Girard explains in his seminal *Violence and the Sacred*, ritual sacrifice is supposed to impose an end to violence and preclude revenge (12-13), but when it fails as it does in Shakespeare's Roman plays, it leads to what Girard calls the "sacrificial crisis," shattering any distinction between "impure" and "purifying violence" (49). Shakespeare's Roman heroes think their violence will be purifying, but the carnage that ensues becomes

all the more repulsive. Faced with such a prospect, one of Shakespeare's great tragic heroes briefly recoils. Othello rages at Desdemona because she "makest me call what I intend to do/ A murder which I thought a sacrifice" (5.2.65-66), but he proceeds to kill her anyway. Shakespeare's Roman heroes prove more obstinate and oblivious than Othello. Brutus is convinced that by sanctifying the murder of Caesar he can establish a new era in Rome, but the mayhem that results leads to riots and civil war. Antony's attempt at self-sacrifice is almost comical in its failure to achieve his anticipated level of dignity and gravity. Coriolanus discovers that, in spite of his wounds, his authority is first subject to the Roman citizens he despises and then to his enemy allies. In each instance, the hero fails to ennoble these killings, and as a result, ceremony becomes debased and unstable. Repeatedly, their attempts at control and dignity are undercut by the spectacle of on-stage violence.

Although bloodied bodies litter Shakespeare's work, this project focuses on the Roman plays in particular, because of the ritualistic treatment these horrors are afforded. Unlike cycles such as the history plays that

present defeated bodies as a sad consequence of war, the Roman plays celebrate bloodshed as an emblem of glory and honor. In a foreshadowing of the demands placed on Coriolanus, Lucius, in *Titus Andronicus*, announces that "my scars can witness" (*Titus Andronicus* 5.3.113) his veracity, offering them as a testimony to the truth of his bravery and commitment to Rome. Antony, in both *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* depends on the visible presence of blood to cement his reputation as loyal Roman. John Alvis proposes that "what is at stake for the protagonists of the Roman plays is less the fate of an immortal soul than the fate of a reputation" (Alvis 125), and in all of these plays, more than any others, this reputation is rooted in a willingness to shed blood, and is consecrated by the masses. In the Roman plays, characters attempt to give meaning to the casual violence that litters their world, and as a result, both ritual and violence fall short of acquiring any substantial relevance to the world. Unlike the violent acts that purge the world of *Hamlet* or *King Lear*, by the end of the Roman plays, nothing is gained by the death of the hero. Lavinia dies to perpetuate a myth of honor that was the very source of the tragedy: Caesar's blood is used to

score political points in Rome; Antony's death becomes a terrible parody of dignified self-sacrifice. Coriolanus dies in defiance of a city that has despised and rejected him, only to be celebrated as a sacrifice to the mob he loathed. He perpetuates the redemptive myth of sacrifice even by his own stand against it. The ending of *Coriolanus* is even more cynical than the numb close of *King Lear*, in which Edgar muses that "we that are young / Shall never see so much, nor live so long" (*King Lear* 5.3.325). For these pagan Britons, there is a sense that the sights of the piled bodies will be seared upon the minds of the survivors, but in Shakespeare's Rome, bleeding bodies are an impersonal spectacle that titillates and motivates the Romans until the next show arrives.

Earlier critical approaches towards the Roman plays have been largely concerned with the political, viewing the plays as representative of a world that John Alvis

calls "decidedly more secular" (Alvis 125).² In response to the critical reappraisal of the Reformation, recent scholars have begun to consider the theological implications of Shakespeare's plays, a movement that I build on, using the widespread doctrinal shifts as cultural background informing these works. Most notably, in *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy*, Naomi Conn Liebler studies the anthropological basis of sacrifice and ritual, applying the "metaphoric relation between body and state" (Conn Liebler 15); and reading the bleeding body as a representation of the broken state. In *Hamlet*

² Other popular approaches to these plays, such as the psychoanalytic and the feminist are equally concerned with a secular understanding of Rome. See Adelman, Janet. *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest*, Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds and Women*.

in Purgatory Stephen Greenblatt looks at popular Reformation topics such as purgatory and ghosts, devoting great energy to considering how Shakespeare's theological inheritance shaped the framework of his plays,. I plan to shift the focus onto the body a little more, in order to argue that the mutilated body is assumed to be sign of Roman strength, elevating the flesh to an icon of Roman valor. Over the years, a critical consensus has begun to emerge that views Rome as a place in which, as Lawrence Danson suggests in *The Tragic Alphabet*, "words and rituals have dangerously lost their meaning" (Danson 53), specifically implying that ritual has become entirely hollow.

I wish to propose that in light of the complexities of Reformation bodily discourse, such an assumption does not necessarily hold true. For the people of Shakespeare's Rome, rituals continue to hold meaning, and that is precisely why they are so dangerous. Lavinia, Coriolanus, Antony, and Caesar all die because of a belief in the validity of a Roman death. Even when their death is in vain, it is not because the ceremony is meaningless, but because the living will manipulate the potency of ritualistic death to suit a political agenda

that undermines any attempt at sacrifice made by the character. What Octavius Caesar calls "the common body" of Rome is led by an appetite for the visceral, and this is where ritual retains its potency, in spite of attempts by language to contain it. My dissertation argues that characters who assume that they alone can define the meaning of their own sacrifices are exposed by Shakespeare as naive and foolish because their deaths and injuries are exploited by canny survivors and opportunists with greater rhetorical skill. Brutus tries to sanctify the killing of Caesar, but his actions unwittingly pass the symbolic power over to the greater showman, Antony, and his failure to sufficiently manipulate his potent symbolism leads directly to his own death. In spite of the fact that the public nature of the deaths of Lucrece, Lavinia, Cleopatra and Coriolanus renders them figures of public veneration, the texts cannot rationalize or control the images they create because of this emphasis on the theatrical which foregrounds the ambiguities of visual interpretation. My project aims to refocus energy on the ceremonial nature of *all* of these texts and how it is undercut by the enactment of death. I want to consider the way in which

ritualized presentations of the body complicate the language used to represent the body. Ritual remains potent because of its emphasis on the visual, not the rhetoric that attempts to reshape it. The image of bloodied flesh on stage is disturbingly powerful, and "speaks" to the audience in a manner that paradoxically transcends spoken language, denying the victims the right to control their sacrifice, and turning religious death into a political commodity.

Rene Girard's unsurpassed analysis of sacrifice in *Violence and The Sacred* is a key to understanding the sacrificial world we see in the Roman plays. He proposes that in the ancient world "primitive religion tames, trains, arms, and directs violent impulses as a defensive force against those forms of violence that society regards as inadmissible" (Girard 20). Girard proposes that we recognize the distinction between "bad" and "good" violence in these societies. Sacrifice is common in primitive societies, he contends, because they lack the internal structures (a judicial system, for example) to deal with civil strife. As a result, tensions within a community can manifest themselves in blood feuds, or inter-family vendettas, all of which can threaten the

stability of a society. Within this context, violence can be a force of destruction – so-called “bad” violence. This aggressive impulse is inevitable, and religion, in particular, sacrifice, can be used to contain these energies. Girard says that “only the transcendental quality of the system, acknowledged by all, can assure the prevention or cure of violence” (24), meaning that religion offers an impartial structure into which such aggression can be channeled. He goes further, and explains that “only by opting for a sanctified, legitimate form of violence...can the system save itself from the vicious circle of revenge”(24). What Girard is here proposing that “good” violence can be used to assuage these tensions, and create a spectacle of socially beneficial violence, through a scapegoat onto which a community’s negative energies, or impulses towards revenge can be projected. The principle of sacrifice is one of exchange – the offering of something (or someone) of value, in exchange for divine blessings, or if necessary, forgiveness for a community. Veena Das, in her analysis of the Mīmāṃsaka school of ancient India, points out that the value of the sacrifice is not determined by the deity who is the object of the

ceremony, but by the society who is making the offering (Das 461). The thirteenth – century treatise, the *Summa Alexandri*, describes sacrifice as an “oblation which is made sacred in the offering, and which also makes sacred or sanctifies the offerer, unless impeded by his irreverence or sin” (qtd in Clark 445). Yet, Hubert and Mauss, in their famous anthropological study *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, suggest that a system of exchange, in which a community benefits through an offering of a valued object is built into the sacrificial process itself. They note that “the thing consecrated serves as an intermediary between the sacrificer, or the object which is to receive the practical benefits of sacrifice, and the divinity to whom the sacrifice is usually addressed” (Hubert and Mauss 11).

This idea of redemptive sacrifice becomes complicated during the Reformation, as Protestants would claim that through the worship of idols and the cult of the saints, Catholics were worshipping icons whose value was determined by their society, not by any presiding deity. Richard Smith, in his 1546 pamphlet, *Defence of the Sacrifice of the Mass*, argues that Christ’s sacrifice was the ultimate oblation, defining the act thus: “the

only price for the ransom of the whole world and the only redemption, which bought us with the price of his precious blood" (qtd in Clark, 149). Smith here emphasizes the Passion's expiatory role. Sacrifice is predicated on this idea that a consecrated object is a symbol of intercession between a divinity and a human soul, the most obvious example being the Eucharist, standing in symbolically for the flesh of Christ, son of both man and God, on earth to atone for the collective sins of humanity. In order for a sacrifice to be effective, something must be offered that is of great value to those making the gift. The willingness to offer something at great personal cost is done as a means of improving a social group by the receipt of favor from a deity as a gesture of recognition. The idea of social benefit as a result of sacrifice is the key distinction between sacrifice and martyrdom, and what ultimately became so problematic in the Reformation martyr tradition. A sacrifice is a selfless gift to a community, via a gift to a deity, offered either in communion, thanksgiving, or contrition, made potent by the ceremony that surrounds the act. A sacrifice binds the community in its deference to a higher power and its anticipated

benefit from the gesture. What is crucial in this idea of exchange, is that something (or someone) stands in for the community who makes the offering, with the assumption that the divinity will give something of equal value to those people making the oblation . In *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, in which the presence of merchants engaging in the trade of the host, merely reduces to its crudest form this notion of the sacrifice as an object of exchange. Substitution, as Brian K. Smith and Wendy Doniger reminds us, is at the very heart of sacrifice (Smith and Doniger 189). They go on to state that “the least symbolic of all sacrifices is the human suicidal sacrifice, in which the symbol stands for itself” (191), something we might call martyrdom.

Martyrdom, derives its etymology from the Greek *μάρτυρ*, meaning witness, and a martyr is defined as “a person who undergoes death or great suffering for a faith, belief, or cause, or (usu. with *to*; also with *of*, *for*) through devotion to some object” (OED). In Christianity, a person’s body is martyred in defense of his or her own soul, their flesh willingly offered as a symbolic gesture that will preserve the eternal spirit. A martyrdom is an act performed for the benefit of an

individual soul, needing no ceremony or rites beyond the actual destruction of the flesh. At the core of martyrdom is an exchange between the innermost intentions of the tortured and the deity who is able to understand the strength of that conviction and recognizes the purity of the faith. A true martyrdom can occur because of a private conviction, and is thus inescapably unknowable. Yet, the suffering of the body is the witness to this communion, and unlike a sacrifice, it is not an attempt to earn anything in exchange. In order to make a sacrifice, there needs to be an agreement between the symbol (i.e., the body offered) and those who give it signification – those in observance, the community who witnesses and gives value to the offering according to its principles. Hyam Maccoby makes clear the importance of audience, when he says that “an act cannot witness itself” (Maccoby 101). A martyr dies as a testimony to a conviction of faith, not as an intermediary between two sides of a negotiation.

Medieval and early modern martyrologists, seeking to glorify those who have died, and to celebrate a faith, conflated martyrdom and sacrifice, using the testimony of the martyr’s body to unify and benefit its Christian

community – essentially, they turn the private testimony of martyrdom into a public sacrifice aimed at enhancing communal bonds. The celebration of martyrs, cemented in texts like Jacobus De Voraigne's *The Golden Legend*, Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* and most famously, John Foxes's *Actes and Monuments* offers these bodies up as sacrifices made in the name of truth, which will benefit the readership who can admire such dedication, and find inspiration in such piety. In particular, as William Haller argues, Foxe uses a disparate history of executions, including pre-Reformation figures, such as the possibly Lollard figure of Sir John Oldcastle to galvanize an emergent Protestant English nation, and rewrite the history of a country from a Reformist standpoint. Within such posthumously imposed contexts, whether the English Reformation or Shakespeare's Rome, there emerges a shift in emphasis from the body of the martyr to those who interpret their legacy. This concern with who interprets the testimony of a martyr is an attempt to access the otherwise incomprehensible testimony of the persecuted. This concern, with making such testimonies visible is one that stretches back into the medieval period and suggests that

the politicization of death, which became so contested during the Reformation, was hardly a new conceit. In her analysis of *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, Sarah Beckwith suggests that there is a "sacred immunization" (Beckwith 70) that protects the testimony of an object or body, which keep the meaning pure, thereby presuming that such a thing as "truth" can exist. She implies that the object sacrificed is one that cannot be manipulated, or appropriated by corporeal objects – that is, that the thing sacrificed is in some way, divine itself, and this affords it protection. Yet, this untouchable mysticism is questionable. Caroline Walker Bynum's suggestion that "by the late third to early fourth centuries, the fragments of the martyrs had come to be revered as loci of power and of special access to the divine" (Bynum 3) implies that such a sacred space never existed. Beckwith proposes that in *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, the merchant offers a terrifying prospect of the Host's materiality when its value is defined not by the clergy, but market economy (Beckwith 70), which she suggests would be an unsettling prospect to a watching audience, who would be deeply invested in the untouchable purity of the Host. Beckwith suggests that the diminution that this

protective ceremony offers at the end of the Middle Ages is symbolized by the presence of a watching audience, which enhances the importance of interpretation, implying that such a shift only occurs in the late medieval period, in spite of Bynum's suggestion and the flourishing trade in relics that existed throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The fearsome possibility that the same principles shape theatre and liturgy apply here to martyrdom,³ and in the age of such shrewd self-fashioning, martyred bodies become a locus of epistemological, doctrinal and political struggle. In short, what we see through the martyrologists's

³ Beckwith surmises that within *The Croxton Play of the Sacrament*, "ritual and theatre hybridise each other" (79), proposing a link between Medieval religious politics and the early theatre. Sarah Covington goes further and describes martyrdom as "a kind of liturgical passion play from which themes of guilt, sin, judgment, justice, punishment, repentance and sacrifice could be played out" (Covington 174)

veneration of their subjects, is a martyrdom read as a sacrifice, although I would argue that such a confusion had been ongoing, as long as there have been people like Marjorie Kempe, who dreamed of having the opportunity to martyr themselves as a public act of devotion. In many ways, Beckwith is relying on the principles of Girard, who suggests that the object of sacrifice is in some way "contaminated" with violence, and therefore untouchable, for fear of contamination. In *The Renaissance Bible: Scholarship, Sacrifice and Subjectivity*, Deborah Kuller Shuger explores how of the evolving presentations of Christ necessarily politicize the most primitive and "pure" notion of sacrifice. The repeated interpretations that characterize the progression of Christ's portrayal in art, she contends, taints not only the sanctity of the Passion, but all subsequent imitations of it. Moreover, during the Medieval period, we see examples of the Eucharist being treated according to social rules, such as the emergence of altar rails, that were designed to keep the lower classes from directly touching the altar and host. William Haller explores the way in which this system of exchange becomes manifest in Foxe's work, by suggesting that "persecution gave its victims the

opportunity to dramatize their faith in the Word by embracing martyrdom, and its survivors the opportunity to exploit the testimony of the martyrs by the classic device of a martyrology" (Haller 50) – everyone benefits. Brad S. Gregory proposes that "the sight of men and women going to their deaths willingly, and bearing extreme pain with extraordinary patience could spark interest and even conversion" (Gregory 7). Moreover, he suggests, their extraordinary heroism in the face of unspeakable torments emphasized their holy deaths and exemplifies why God chose them as intercessors (45).

In many ways, the politicization of martyrdom echoes the Roman practice of *devotio*. *Devotio*, during the Republic, was a Roman tradition of embracing death, as a means of honoring the Gods of the underworld, but, under the Empire, it became a symbolic self-slaughter in honor of the Emperor (usually for reasons of health). As Paul Plass suggests, this conceit was often reappropriated for political uses, recognizing the basic premise that "violence was meant to be seen because it was meant to convey a message" (Plass 146). The opportunity to make oneself a "semantic marker" (146) was an incredibly

attractive idea to ancient Romans, and one that drew from the spectacle that was inherent in Roman death.

According to John Bodel, theatricality was an essential component of the Roman funerary rite. He explains that one of the principal aspects of ancient burial was the public eulogy in the forum, known as the *laudatio*. This ceremony also included actors, who impersonated the ancestors of the deceased, wearing realistic masks, *imagines*, as a mark of honor and respect⁴ – much like a triumph. In fact, Bodel notes that the parallels between a funeral parade and a public triumph were strong enough to solicit notice in antiquity (Bodel 261). Bodel goes on to explain that there was a system of exchange underpinning these ceremonies. Bodel cites Petronius's

⁴During the funeral of Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, at the climax of his speech, had a life-sized waxen image of Caesar lifted on a mechanical device, and rotated, so that each of his stab wounds were displayed to the watching crowd (Bodel 272). For good or ill, this *coup de théâtre* was not included in Shakespeare's play.

hero Trimalchio, who voices his hope that the magnificence of his funeral will encourage people of Rome to attend, and bless him (261).⁵ Such a practice is not unlike the will of Henry VI, who bequeathed two hundred and fifty pounds in exchange for ten thousand masses to be said for his soul. What Bodel suggests is consistent with what we see in the Roman plays, which is a concern for one's legacy, an insistence on honor that shows an excruciating awareness of the impact that posthumous glory can offer one's name. Moreover, honor becomes an ideological framework within which this theatricality can express itself. Catherine Edward suggests that the common desire of a young, valorous Roman is "to secure a place

⁵ In fact, Augustus found it necessary to impose limits on the numbers of slaves who could be freed in the will of a deceased, so as to control the spectacle of ancient funerals, and to ensure that families would not be bankrupted by the excessive will of a deceased relative (Bodel 262).

of his own *imago* in the funeral pageant of his descendants" (Edwards 20).

In Shakespeare's sources, the idea of a noble death goes further - a willingness to die is a gesture that routinely strengthens the social body. In Plutarch's *Lives*, the Roman Sertorius is offered up as an exemplary Roman, a consummate politician and dedicated warrior. His battle wounds were notable, according to Plutarch, including the loss of his eye which,

he always esteemed an honor to him; observing that others do not continually carry about with them the marks and testimonies of their valour, but must often lay aside their chains of gold, their spears and crowns; whereas his ensigns of honor, and the manifestations of his courage, always remained with him, and those who had beheld his misfortune must at the same time recognize his merits.

(Plutarch 253).

In the Roman psyche, wounds evidently make the man. In the ancient world, a willingness to offer one's body up for the state is the epitome of virtue. In the narrative of Coriolanus, Plutarch explicitly equates virtue with valor in the Roman mind:

Those were times at Rome in which that kind of worth was most esteemed which displayed itself in military achievements; one evidence of which we find in the Latin word for virtue, which is properly equivalent for manly courage. As if valor and all virtue had been the same thing, they used as the common term the name of the particular excellence.

(507)

Virtue is defined in Rome as manly courage – courage which most commonly manifests itself in acts of bravery and self-sacrifice, linked to the state through its context of war. To willingly face death in defense of Rome is a virtuous political statement. When Alexander's father, Philip, expresses dismay at his lameness, following a battle with the Triballians, he is sternly rebuked by his son, who tells him, "be of good cheer, father, and go on your way rejoicing, that at each step you may recall your valour" (*Moralia* 331). Philip's pride should stem from his willingness to sacrifice the health of his body in a battle for his country, and he goes on to bear his wounds "with him openly as symbolic representations graven on his body, of virtue and manly courage" (331).

For Edwards, the ultimate Roman sacrifice was that of Cato of Utica, who tries to kill himself with his own sword, only to be found by his friends, who force him to submit to medical intervention. Cato then tore at his wound with his bare hands, and eventually kills himself, earning "immediate glory" (Edwards 2). Edwards tells us that he was celebrated as a testament to "the value some Romans at least placed on ideals" (3). In Shakespeare's Rome, death is frequently manipulated as a sacrifice for the betterment of Rome – at the close of *Julius Caesar*, Brutus is honored for killing himself, and thereby ending civil war, and Lucrece's death is used as the catalyst to drive out the tyrannical Tarquin, liberating Rome. Yet, even in antiquity, this conception of honorable death and sacrifice is problematic. Kyle Donald, in his analysis of Roman honor, underline's Girard's philosophies when he says that "to reinforce the social order violence must be performed or proclaimed in public, and public violence tends to become ritualized into games, sports, and even spectacles of death" (Donald 7). This idea of honor through public spectacles of death is pre-eminent throughout the stages of Roman history, and Edwards offers a neat summary that allows us to parallel

Roman death with the principles I have suggested are at work within martyrdom. She cites Lucan's account of the death of Vultieus, in particular, his preoccupation with his own suicide, and that of his men. She says that "spectators are thus essential if the performance is to have meaning" (Edwards 43), and goes on to hint at the futility of such a gesture. Edwards explains that "in the context of civil war we find an increasingly pathologized focus on such deaths as acts which seek not witnesses, perhaps, but rather an audience" (45), because in these cases, the spectacle is all that remains. Traces of the tension between honor and glory-seeking displays of violence are evident in other ancient writers. In *Moralia*, Plutarch discusses the sport of young Spartan boys:

the boys in Sparta were lashed with whips during the entire day at the altar of Artemis Orthia, frequently to the point of death, and they bravely endured this, cheerful and proud, vying with one another to endure being beaten for the longer time and the greater number of blows.

(Moralia 444 - 5)

Such trials are individual acts of endurance, a willingness to endure tortures to prove value – a grotesque spectacle of bravery for the benefit of reputation. Just as early modern martyrdom is reappropriated by the martyrologists, genuine acts of bravery are aped by Spartan boys looking to glorify themselves. These boys create a spectacle of bravery to earn reputation, and such sport apes genuine sacrifice, clouding motive. Edwards confirms such a reading, proposing that throughout Roman history, the glory afforded to fallen Roman warriors waned, even going so far as to suggest the politicization of Roman military deaths (Edwards 24). Edwards explains that the chroniclers use spectacular death for their own purposes, and suggests that we read these texts with a skeptical eye. She explains that “the positive value sometimes placed on the term *spectaculum* is worth bearing in mind, as we see different ways in which other writers deploy the notion of the spectacular in relation to deaths in battle” (26). Problems arise when acts of violence are admired because of the fascination they evoke in others, and the labels of honor that are applied to them.

The Spartan boys, for all of Plutarch's admiration, are engaging in acts of futility for the sake of glory, and it is this confusion between an embodiment and performance of honor that Shakespeare charts in his Roman plays. Both Antony and Coriolanus die to preserve their glory, instead of as a sacrifice to the betterment of Rome – they die in defense their sense of their own honor, a martyrdom, in defiance of the authority they despise. Coriolanus throws himself to the Volscian mob, indiscriminately inviting "men and lads" (5.6.111) to stain their swords on him. However, their deaths are misread, deliberately, or otherwise, by their adversaries, and venerated as a sacrifice. Ultimately, Antony, Coriolanus, and even Brutus, kill themselves for nothing, and the validity of Lavinia's death is deeply questionable in spite of her father's justifications. The spectacles of death hold such great fascination that they cannot be ignored, and therefore must be exploited to suit political purposes. The tragedy of Coriolanus, Antony and Brutus then, is not the fact that they die, but that the values they died to preserve are routinely ignored by the survivors. The veneration they sought has been bestowed by unworthy people, and they die defeated,

in vain attempts at martyrdom. The confusion that Shakespeare charts throughout these plays in many ways reflects the struggles that Protestant England encountered in its attempt to reject the sacrificial nature of the Mass.

The controversy over the Mass was one of the major crises of the Reformation. During the Medieval period, the Mass was the ultimate sacrament, and the core of English Catholicism. Duffy suggests that common belief held the Mass to be the source of all of the sacraments, and describes the way in which popular art depicted the blood of Christ flowing from his body into images of other sacraments (Duffy 108). Duffy explains that the ceremony involves prayer to Christ, so that the flowing blood might wash away the sins of the parishioners and make them worthy of consuming his blood and body. Following is a prayer for renewal, in which new, pure, life can begin. Duffy notes that "at the climax of the prayer this new life is seen as essentially communal, not individualistic" (93). This ceremony, he contends, was emphatically visual: "seeing the Host became the high point of the lay experience of the Mass" (96). Luther's condemnation of those who participate in the mass as

people "seeking their own advantage" (Luther 165) is a direct rebuttal of the idea of redemptive sacrifice that underpins the Mass, and this, coupled with Zwingli's rejection of the idolatry the ritual promoted, were the most common arguments against the ceremony. Christopher Haigh notes that the faith of the Protestants "was a Word religion: the Word preached, the Word read, the Word sung to the Lord, the Word applied to life, the Word wrestled within a heart of a sinner yearning for grace" (Haigh 287). Luther's subtle distinction between *transubstantiation* and *consubstantiation* was an attempt to remove the mystical spectacle that the elevation of the Host offered, although for Luther, very little changed beyond the suppression of the paraphernalia of the ceremony. Leading Reformers such as Luther and Zwingli continued to emphasize the necessity of the sacrament, and throughout the Reformation, as Diarmund MacCulloch suggests, the ceremony was celebrated less frequently, because it was so sacred and special (MacCulloch 602).

Although Deborah Kuller Shuger's suggestion that Christ's sacrifice "slips to the margins of English Protestantism" (Shuger 89), the ongoing insistence on the

importance of the Eucharist suggests otherwise. The primary objection to the Mass, from a reformer's perspective, was its emphasis on continued sacrifice. Catholic doctrine argued for the Mass as a sacrifice made repeatedly and literally, with each ceremony. The belief in the mystical nature of the Mass, that the body of Christ can be summoned by a priest, to be consumed in the ceremonial bread and wine, meant that worshippers could partake in, and benefit from, this ongoing sacrifice. This equation of sacrifice and death meant that Christ was summoned, only to be killed anew during each Eucharist, as an ongoing sacrifice for the sins of the congregation. What Francis Clark calls the "over-credulous confidence in the temporal effects of Mass-going" (Clark 60), speaks to the power of the belief in the Passion as an ongoing expiatory sacrifice. Robert Abbot, in his 1594 pamphlet, *A Mirror of Popish Subtleties* asks "why do the priests of the New testament use a mystical Liturgie or sacrifice?" (Abbot 3). He goes on to further dismiss the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation by stating that "it is clear to them that are instructed in divine matters that we do not offer another sacrifice, but do perform a remembrance of

that one and saving sacrifice" (3). Moreover, the traditional doctrine of transubstantiation, in which through the power of the liturgy, "the wine sanctified by the service of the Ministers, be bodily turned into the blood of Christ" (Abbot 3) encouraged the adoration of the Eucharistic bread and wine, as holy relics of Christ's flesh, depending on ceremony to sustain the connection between sign and signified. The insistence of the reformers that Christ's body was sacrificed once, years in the past, also objected to the belief that ceremony could be used to gain access to the spiritual benefits of Christ's sacrifice. The author of an anonymous 1556 pamphlet, *Against the Detestable Masse* defined the Passion as the "sacrifice [which] maie not, nor ought never to bee made againe" and condemned the hubris of the "miserable sacrificing priests" who would put themselves on a par with Jesus Christ "as though they were our redeemers" (*Against the Detestable Masse* 10). Protestant theology ultimately read the Passion as an act of martyrdom, offered as a means of inspiring Christians to self-examine, and to rely on inward contemplations of faith, rather than as a communal ceremony that would offer a means of salvation. During his interrogation

Foxe's Doctor Rowland Taylor clarifies this distinction.

He says:

Christ gave himself to die for our redemption upon the cross, whose body there offered was the propitiatory sacrifice, full, perfect, and sufficient unto salvation, for all them that believe in him. And this sacrifice did our Saviour Christ offer in his own person himself once for all, neither can any priest any more offer him, nor we need any more offer him, nor we need any more propitiatory sacrifice: and therefore I say with Chrysostome, and all the doctors, "Our sacrifice is only memorative, in the remembrance of Christ's death and passion ; a sacrifice of thanksgiving"; and therefore the fathers called it "eucharistia" : and other sacrifice hath the church of God none.

(Foxe, Vol. 6. 683)

Taylor's testimony makes clear the difference between re-enacting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and remembering it. Part of Taylor's objection is a common one: the power that is put into the hands of the priests performing the ritual. Protestant discourse absolutely rejected the authority this rite offered the clergy, because of the

human capacity for error, and more dangerously, hubris. Taylor attempts to reject the centrality of the sacrificial myth to Reformation theology, yet the very existence of his testimony as a martyr, implies that his ambition was not altogether successful.

Even if Protestant theology ultimately read the Passion as an act of martyrdom, the ceremony proved that the communal aspect of sacrifice was inescapable, as very act of remembrance was to insist on the community that is saved by Christ's death. Ultimately, sacrifice remained a fundamental part of Christianity, and the Protestant reliance on martyrdom only emphasized this fact. This accounts for the enduring popularity of martyrologies. John Donne may note that Thomas Aquinas said "the Catholique faith is the mother of martyrdom" (qtd. in Donne 204), but Protestant martyrologists commandeered this practice with enthusiasm. John Foxe and John Bale adopted this genre and re-appropriated historical martyrs as exemplary icons of reformed Christianity, presenting them as pioneers in the new national faith. The continued fixation on the spectacle of faithful bloodshed as evidenced in books such as *Actes and Monuments* makes the ongoing attachment to sacrifice clear, and the popularity

of Foxe's work shows an enduring appetite. Shakespeare's works sought to gratify that appetite for spectacles of death, but at the expense of the author's control over the images he created. Sacrifice in the Roman plays is a controversial act, and like early modern martyrdoms, its value is often defined by the ones among the survivors who can raise their voice to the loudest pitch.

The notion that a good death can retain the power to convert held a great appeal for the proponents of the blossoming Protestant faith in England.⁶ A.G. Dickens suggests that Foxe's *Kalendar*, a recreation of a Catholic saints' calendar replacing Catholic holy days with

⁶ Interestingly, a similar power was ascribed to the theatre. A popular apocryphal story of the late sixteenth century tells of the way in which a female audience member was motivated to confess to the murder of her husband, as a direct result of the play she was watching. *Hamlet's* "The Mousetrap" is based on a similar assumption, that images have power enough to move a spectator to an involuntary conversion, and revelation of conscience.

memorials of contemporary Protestant martyrs was an attempt to link the new with the old, creating a familiarity with new Protestant practices by manipulating the appeal of the traditional. Dickens emphasizes the propagandistic nature of Foxe's book, explaining that "Foxe obviously understood the value of such a device in instructing the unlearned, to whom his book was primarily addressed" (Dickens 45). Susanna Brietz Monta's suggestion that "much of Foxe's work exhibits a pastoral awareness that readers whose consciences are not yet convinced of their election need extra comfort" (Brietz Monta 18), assumes that the horrors of his martyrs are intended to encourage his readership to endure daily tribulations. In his preface to *Actes and Monuments*, Foxe himself stated that the inspiration for writing his book was his horror at seeing "the simple flock of Christ, especially the unlearned sort, so miserably abused, and all for ignorance of history" (Foxe, Vol. 1 xviii). Yet, the shock tactics he employs in service of this aim frequently discredit the Protestant emphasis on discursive spiritual development over spectacular images. The nightmarish scenes of torture presented in the book, both rhetorically and through the use of woodcuts,

suggests an attempt to capitalize on lurid sensationalism and morbid fascination with torture. Foxe's account of the martyrdom of John Hooper, Bishop of Worcester and Gloucester, is an example of the grisly fascination that these martyrdoms hold. We are given a lengthy description of how he burned, which included him speaking until his lips charred, and beating his breast until one of his arms fell off, while the other hung down, dripping gore. Foxe follows this almost comic horror show by nearly canonizing Hooper, asserting that "he now reigneth, I doubt not, as a blessed martyr in the joys of heaven" (Foxe Vol. 6, 658). Foxe's grim account illustrates an uncomfortable contradiction: that, following their public deaths, the martyrs were assigned a voice and role in popular religion that was, in spite of the official Protestant stance of idolatry, startlingly similar to the role of martyred saints in Catholic iconography. Such graphic imagery echoes Ælfric's description of Saint Vincent, stretched on the rack as severely "as a man stretches a web" (Ælfric 433), before being scourged and beaten with rods so that "his inward parts also opened again / and his joints slipped asunder in the cruel torments" (437). Although Foxe and his peers would argue

for a Protestant emphasis on testimony over veneration of bodies, the lurid spectacle of these deaths suggests otherwise. In addition to the many grisly descriptions throughout his book, Foxe also features woodcuts, such as figure 1., in which William Gardiner is lowered into the burning flames, as his handless wrists gush blood. At the bottom of the picture, two severed hands nestle at the bottom of the fire. Shuger's insistence that Christ's sacrifice "slips to the margins of English Protestantism" (Kuller Shuger 89) is doctrinally appropriate, but greatly complicated by the sheer popularity of early modern martyrdom. In spite of the Reformation's doctrinal discomfort towards sacrifice, the popularity of such "polemical journalism" (Collinson 13) attests to the allure of high-profile martyrdom in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England. Brad S. Gregory notes the shift in Passion images during the late Medieval period, from the triumphant figure of divinity of earlier times to "a broken, bleeding man hammered to a wooden cross, thrust before the beholder" (Gregory 55). This image, realistic and even exaggerated, "fed the devotion to Christ's passion" (55) and created sordid and graphic images to inspire Christians to piety.

The central problem with these images, particularly those found in martyr books, is articulated by Jody Enders when she says that although the touchstone of torture does extract truth, the truth that emerges clearly depends on the eye of the beholder (Enders 46). John Donne, in his 1610 tract, *Pseudo-Martyr*, highlights the problem with popular martyrdom when he says that "one will prove by his death, that too little is professed, and the other, that too much" (Donne 201). Donne suggests competing testimonies at the stake can undermine and contradict one another, creating "fools of time," which was precisely the problem that Foxe was attempting to circumvent by writing martyr narratives. Huston Diehl's landmark study, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage*, argues that Foxe's method of manipulating familiar forms and images (such as the Saint's tale) is a typical characteristic of Reformation discourse, blending together the traditional rhetoric of Catholic martyrologies with Protestant doctrine (Diehl 45). Furthermore, she suggests that such a literary technique becomes problematic because of the way it consciously solicits the eye, while simultaneously dismissing spectacle. John Bale, in his account of Sir John

Oldcastle's martyrdom, tells his reader to "pluck from your eyes the corrupted spectacles of carnal or popish judgments" (Bale 56), yet he later makes a point of creating a vivid mental image when he tells his readers that Anne Askew was so terribly tortured upon the rack "that the strings of her arms and eyes were perished" (142). Moreover, in spite of his insistence that Popish martyrs were "made amongst themselves" (316), created in explosions of self-glorification, he continuously equates Oldcastle with Jesus Christ, insisting on Oldcastle as not only a prototype of the fifteenth-century Protestant martyr, but fashions as his death as an echo of the Passion. He falls victim to the hyperbole and self-importance that he sees in the earlier martyrs. John Knott describes Foxe as both editor and narrator, and in his discussion of Foxe's account of John Roger's trial and execution, proposes "Foxe here converted what Rogers would have said to what he would have liked Rogers to have said" (Knott, 24). The issue that continues to arise in these texts, is that by narrating and glorifying martyrdom, the authors are relying on traditional concepts of sacrifice, which potentially lead back to

scapegoats and idolatry. Bale tells us of Oldcastle's death that

more vile was not his hanging under the gallows in an iron chain, than was the hanging of his Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross in the time of his death; nor than was the hanging of Peter, Andrew, and Philip in his holy apostles... more odious was not his burning in the fire, than was the cruel burning of Barnabas the apostle... and many hundreds more.

(Bale 57 – 58).

In the absence of any meaningful testimony of Oldcastle, Bale relies on the impact of his cruel and lowly death to venerate him. He equates Oldcastle's experience with that of the Apostles, to act as a substitute for the absence of any testimonial statement. The hyperbolic reverence with which Bale treats his subject claims this English pioneer as the ultimate Protestant hero because of the particularly ignominious nature of his death. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault argues that public execution allows a truth to be "published" on the body (Foucault 41), but through their accounts, the martyrologists draw attention to the highly subjective nature of such truths. By publishing these deaths as

testimony, writers attempt to make their martyrs a sacrifice to a Protestant order, marked by a continuum of Christian oblations, all intended to strengthen the English Protestant nation. Furthermore, such glorification leads to the active seeking of martyrdom, and the willing embracement of the "wantonly inflicted" suffering that Miri Rubin proposes was sought by religious zealots in the Middle ages, much to the dismay of the Holy See (Rubin 162). Donne neatly characterizes this tension, when he asks "How deeply and how irremediably doth this indiscretion possesse many others, whom themselves only and a few illuders of their weaknesses, esteeme to be *Martyres*, for provoking the execution of just lawes against them?" (Donne 208). Donne's question draws attention to the dangers found in the veneration of Protestant martyrs that comes from reading them as necessary sacrifices to a Reformist cause. As Jonathan Sheehan points out, "idolatry and sacrifice went hand in hand" (Sheehan 659) because of the value placed on the object of sacrifice, and certainly, the popularity of martyr narratives might help substantiate his point. Sheehan's wry observation not only highlights the doctrinal grey area that Reformers

found themselves in when using martyr accounts in service of their cause, but also hints at the appeal such events had to a lay audience.

This notion that a martyr can be validated by the watching crowd can only hold true if there is an enthusiastic audience to witness and interpret such an event, and certainly there was no shortage of onlookers for displays of public cruelty. Foxe explains that "great multitude of people" (Foxe, Vol. 6 698) were present at the suffering of Rowland Taylor, attesting to the popularity of these events, and Peter Lake and Michael Questier put the attendance of the execution of the Catholic priest Thomas Maxfield at four thousand (Lake and Questier 96). The popularity of violence seeped into Medieval and early modern theatre. John Spalding Gatton reads the brutality in medieval morality plays as "violent theatre for a violent era" (Gatton 80), and the spectacles of death witnessed both in martyrologies and on the early modern stage, suggest that Gatton's observation continued to hold true. During the middle ages, and into the Renaissance, violence was a common component of popular plays as a part of what Pamela



Fig. 1. The execution of William Gardiner. Woodcut from the 1563 edition of *Actes and Monuments*.

Sheingorn calls "the fundamentally visual nature of Middle English drama" (Sheingorn 173). The Corpus Christi play *The Slaughter of the Innocents* involves the onstage murder of infant children, which as Gatton explains, was created using dolls with detachable limbs. *The York Play of the Crucifixion* allows the audience to witness the nailing of Christ to the cross, and in France, the detailed enactment of Saint Barbara's mutilation was incredibly popular, appearing frequently in French mystères during the fifteenth century. Lee Simonson talks about the death of Judas in the mystery play *The Acts of the Apostles*, in which Judas' belly bursts and animal entrails fall out (Simonson 185). That these plays were liturgical in their form does not rationalize the need for such brutality and the popularity of bloodshed continued long into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, suggesting a primitive fascination with gore that does not subside with the waning of liturgical drama.

Clearly, the Shakespearean theatre (which routinely shared its space with such brutal spectacles as bear-baiting and cockfighting) capitalized on the appeal of the horrific. Elaborate and awe-inspiring spectacle

appears to have been the staple of commercial Elizabethan theatre – think, for example, of demons emerging from a hell-mouth, to drag Faustus down to his doom, or the elaborate masque that is the climax of *Women Beware Women*, featuring a deadly shower of gold, and onstage gas chamber. Lee Simonson's 1932 chronology of stage practice, *The Stage is Set*, tells us that "the Elizabethan stage, literally ran with gore" (223). He suggests that this blood was presented realistically, using a variety of methods, including blood soaked sponges, and bladders filled with blood, and examines Henslowe's diary for evidence of elaborate mechanisms that would enable the hanging of actors, for onstage executions. Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* features a variety of onstage deaths, from the stabbing of Olympia to the braining of both Bajazeth and Zabina. Thomas Kyd's play, *The Spanish Tragedy*, features more hangings and an elaborate death scene that intertwines theatre with ritualized murder. In the works of John Ford, horrifying tableaux of death are commonplace. Orgilus slits his own wrists onstage in *The Broken Heart*, and 'Tis Pity She's a Whore features a grotesque dinner party in which Giovanni presents his lover's heart, "trimm'd in reeking blood"

(Ford 5.6.9) to his horrified audience. Shakespeare himself is not immune to the appeal of blood – beyond the brutality found in his Roman plays, the Shakespearean audience witnesses stabbings, eyes being ripped out of their sockets, and decapitation, to name but a few atrocities. Yet, throughout the course of his career, Shakespeare develops a quiet skepticism about the images that feature so heavily in his own plays. I would like to argue that as martyrdom became increasingly unreliable as a means of testimony and ideals of honor and self-sacrifice began to break down under the pressure of religious politics, spectacles of death became more spectacular, to reinforce a meaning that could no longer be taken for granted. For Shakespeare, violent spectacle became increasingly dislocated from any substantial meaning, and we can trace a growing mistrust of theatricality throughout his career.

In Shakespeare's theatre, spectacle is routinely used to mislead, or obfuscate the truth. In *Hamlet*, the image of the praying Claudius is ironically misleading, deceiving Hamlet just as Romeo is taken in by the apparently dead Juliet he sees before him. The entire tragedy of *Othello* is predicated on manipulated ocular

proof, just as the comedies find their humor in the trope of mistaken identity. For a man whose career was the theatre Shakespeare shows a surprising ambivalence to such spectacle in his plays. Diehl notes that in *Othello*, there emerges in the play a conflicted attitude towards theatre, as it "examines the seductive power of his own art and the forces at work in reform culture that threaten to reduce and contain that power" (Diehl 154). Throughout Shakespeare's plays, there builds a tension between the impulse towards spectacle and we can chart a resistance to credit the authenticity of what is created onstage. During the dethronement scene of *Richard II*, the monarch calls for a mirror, and studies his face, lamenting the inability of sorrow to represent itself adequately on his appearance:

No deeper wrinkles yet? Hath sorrow stuck
 So many blows upon this face of mine
 And made no deeper wounds? O Flatt'ring glass,
 Like to my followers in prosperity,
 Thou dost beguile me. Was this face the face
 That every day under his household roof
 Did keep ten thousand men? Was this the face
 That like the sun did make beholders wink?

Is this the face which fac'd so many follies,
That was at last out-fac'd by Bolingbroke?
A brittle glory shineth in this face;
As brittle as the glory is the face,
For there it is, crack'd in an hundred shivers.

(4.1.276 – 89)

Richard's devastating realization illustrates Shakespeare's ambivalence succinctly: the king's assumption that his internal misery will be transplanted onto his external visage is precisely the rationale that lost him the crown. Richard's despair at what he sees in the mirror is an expression of anxiety, as the face that kept ten thousand men remains unchanged. His very subjectivity is shaken to its core as he is forced to examine himself as a mere man, without being able to assume inherent regality present in his reflection. His brittle glory has been shattered by Bolingbroke, who now wears the face of a king. Because of the change in context, Richard no longer has the countenance of a King, and as he considers himself, he is surprised to see no physical change. Yet in spite of such apparent dismissal of spectacle, Richard steals the show, and by doing so, challenges the apparent dismissal of images that the

scene purports to endorse. The deposition scene belongs to Richard – throughout his short time onstage, he speaks 116 lines, compared to Bolingbroke's mere 14. Bolingbroke is reduced to almost begging for the crown, as Richard turns his dethronement into a grandiose ceremony, declaring "with mine own tears, I wash away my balm, / With mine own hands I give away my crown, / With mine own tongue deny my sacred state, / With mine own breath release all duteous oaths" (4.1.207 – 10). Ironically, Richard's declaration that "all pomp and majesty I do forswear" (4.1.211), is part of his elaborate stripping of office, that will culminate in his histrionic demands for a mirror and the melodramatic examination of his face. Shakespeare seduces with spectacle, even as he attempts to diminish its potency, creating a tension that erupts throughout the course of the Roman plays. Theodore Levinwand calls this ambivalence characteristic of the "Shakespearean ego" (Leinwand 526) that is omnipresent throughout his work. Levinwand suggests that the Shakespeare's theatre is, in a sense, interrogation itself, and it is in this spirit that we can address his attitude to theatricality and spectacle.

The Richard example continues to serve. Richard's continued emphasis on what the face can demonstrate centralizes a more specific concern with the relationship in Shakespeare between spectacle and the body. Richard, "out-fac'd" by Bolingbroke recoils in horror at the discovery that the king's two bodies – the political and the corporeal – could be so easily separated with no impact on the flesh. His accusation against the flattering glass indicates his sense of betrayal that his body cannot reflect the injury done to his sense of honor and dignity. The body consistently becomes one of the biggest sources of misappropriation in Shakespeare, from the bed-tricks that litter so many of the plays, to the tortured Leontes' inability to tell the living, breathing flesh of his wife from a supposedly marble statue. Titus's previously cited response upon seeing his ruined daughter underscores Susan Zimmerman's point that the putrefying body is a liminal space in which what cannot (or should not) be seen can be made visible (Zimmerman 9). Lady Macbeth confirms such a power, when she lamely excuses herself from the murder of Duncan, by saying, "Had he not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done't" (*Macbeth* 2.2.12 – 3). Such illusions may be the

fervor of her overexcited imagination, but ultimately, the image of the murdered Duncan pushes both Macbeth and his wife into a living hell, consuming their minds, and driving the tragedy of the play.

Throughout the course of the Roman plays, not only can we chart Shakespeare's growing disillusionment with the notion of sacrifice, but we can also note a distrust of the genre of tragedy as a means of exploring these ideas. In *Sweet Violence*, Terry Eagleton proposes that tragedy is inherently a disingenuous art form, and we can use his attempts to clarify a definition of the genre as a means of understanding what breaks down in the Roman plays. Eagleton says that "if tragedy ennobles suffering, then it edifies only at the cost of truth, since real-life suffering is not in fact ennobling" (Eagleton 29). Tragedy, then, can be argued to operate on the same system that we understand early modern martyrdom. In order to adhere to the conventional descriptions of the genre – i.e., to be cathartic, to offer a potential for redemption – the suffering we see must necessarily be heroic and meaningful, and it is not. By the time that we reach Antony and Coriolanus, their heroic deaths are merely pathetic. As the value of sacrifice becomes

defined by those who are left behind in the wake of the victim, the tragedies become more complex, shifting the crisis away from the heavily social structure of revenge tragedy in *Titus Andronicus*, to a deeply personal tragedy in *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, in which a character's death is self-defeating. In Shakespeare's Rome, the belief that the "good" violence of sacrifice can prevent the rising of "bad" violence that simmers under the surface of every society falls flat. With so much gushing blood, and many bodies piling up onstage, it becomes difficult to understand what these Roman martyrs are bearing witness to. Characters who assume that they alone can define the meaning of their own deaths are exposed as naive and foolish because, despite noble intentions, their deaths and injuries are exploited by canny survivors and opportunists with greater rhetorical skill. Ultimately, Shakespeare discovers that this contradiction between fascination and revulsion and potency and futility is a problem from which these plays cannot escape, nor can they resolve. What happens as a result is that the meaning of sacrifice becomes unclear, and what remains is merely violence. What we discover throughout these plays is that once violence is unleashed

onstage, the appeal of bloodshed is confirmed, and the plays begin to fall apart as tragedies. If we follow Naomi Conn Leibler's correlation between tragedy, ritual and myth, it is possible to use the Roman plays to trace a complete breakdown in the conventional definitions of the genre. There is a shift from the conventional model of revenge tragedy that clears the stage of social corruptions, as seen in *Titus Andronicus*, through a confusion as to who claims the tragic mantle in *Julius Caesar*, until we reach a deeply personal tragedy, in which the deaths of Coriolanus and Antony mean nothing to the world in which they live.

The chapters in this dissertation trace a series of deaths that become increasingly unsatisfying, both in terms of achieving any substantial communion for the characters of the play, or offering a cathartic resolution for the audience. Chapter two, "'Shall I speak for thee?': Lavinia's Corpse, Female Martyrs and Revenge Tragedy in *Titus Andronicus*," explores the insufficiency of the genre of revenge tragedy to sustain politicized sacrifice, and exposes Roman rites as little more than a smokescreen for barbaric acts of cruelty. Following the exemplary life and pious death of Lucrece in his 1594

poem, Shakespeare attempts to offer an equally admirable sacrifice in Lavinia, but by modeling his victim on female martyr narratives, Shakespeare undermines her necessary role in Titus's personal revenge tragedy. Although functioning in the genre's role of ghostly inspiration for revenge, Lavinia's construction as a saintly martyr gives her an agency that inadvertently exposes Titus's "sacrifice" of his daughter as a sham, performed for selfish motives, and weakly rationalized. Throughout the play, the ceremony imposed on the deaths of Alarbus, Mutius, Chiron, Demetrius and Lavinia conflate the significance of each, rendering justification meaningless and underscoring Tamora's accusation of "irreligious piety" (*Titus Andronicus* 1.1.133).

Chapter three, "'His Sacred Blood': The Body's Rich Legacy in *Julius Caesar*," explores the pivotal moment in the decline of sacrifice's efficacy, during which Shakespeare explores the process of beatification of Caesar, exposing it as little more than competing theatrics of two canny politicians. Living, Caesar resists the deification of his body, but his death takes away his power to control the spectacle of himself, and

Brutus and Antony treat his spilled blood as a valuable commodity in their propaganda war.

In chapter four, "'A wounding shame': Restoring Identity through Sacrifice in *Antony and Cleopatra*," Shakespeare illustrates the futility of attempting to die in the high Roman fashion, and Antony's decline and demise show the personal tragedy caused by an investment in such values. The idea that Antony's nobility is inherently his is exposed as a self-delusion and myth. His honor is merely a performance of greatness, and in the shadow of Cleopatra, he is exposed as the poorest player of them all. Antony attempts to redeem himself by a unifying act of death that will bind his reputation with his body. That its failure is characteristic of his life and feeble opportunism is exemplified by Cleopatra, in her devastatingly theatrical death. Yet further irony exists, as both lovers have left their legacy in the hands of Octavius, a shrewd and untrustworthy politician.

Finally, in chapter five, "'He was a thing of blood': Language, Honor and the Sacrificial Body in *Coriolanus*," I suggest that that Shakespeare presents the inevitable outcome of this politicization of martyrdom: a sacrifice of a man that ultimately means nothing. In a

sense, Coriolanus, like Lavinia, becomes the embodiment of a walking ghost of vengeance. He is symbolically killed when he is driven, like a biblical scapegoat, from Rome. Out in the wilderness, he tells Aufidius, the man is destroyed and "only that name remains" as his monument to his identity (*Coriolanus* 4.5.77). As an unwilling sacrifice, Coriolanus returns to Rome as a revenge tragedy ghost, calling for blood. However, this is not a revenge tragedy, and Shakespeare creates a new, personal tragedy in that Coriolanus is forced to accept his own sacrifice, as his city and even his family turn against him, his mother stripping away his validation of himself, his connection to the divine, that makes himself a sacrifice of value. As a result, he finds himself symbolically killed in the eyes of Rome during the third act expulsion, and all that remains is to savagely invite his physical death, at the hands of a leering mob, rendering his demise both tragic and deeply pathetic.

**Chapter Two: "Shall I speak for thee?": Lavinia's corpse,
Female Martyrs and Revenge Tragedy in *Titus Andronicus*.**

Prior to her rape, Lavinia asks Tamora not only to "keep me from their worse-than-killing lust" (2.2.175), by preventing the attack, but to show mercy by killing her. Lavinia claims that her right to exist among the living died with her husband, and tells the Goth Queen that "'tis present death I beg" (2.2.173) over the ignominy of rape. This request for the mercy of death allows for Lavinia to be read as a complicit victim in her later slaughter – both by her father, and critics reading the play. For example, Thomas P. Anderson suggests that Lavinia is an active participant in the revenge that requires her death (Anderson 42) and Catherine Belling suggests that Lavinia is "dependent on her father, both to separate her from her own contaminated body and to identify and destroy the source

of the contamination" (Belling 125 – 6). Such readings as these deem the violence in the play not only successful, but necessary. Yet in *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare shows violence to be inadequate as a means of resolving social discord⁷ and offering a satisfactory conclusion to revenge tragedy. Often recognized as Shakespeare's response to conventional revenge tragedies such as *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Titus Andronicus* is Shakespeare's first foray into this popular type of play, and when he returns to the format in *Hamlet*, the tropes break down irrevocably. Yet, the dismantling of the genre that we see so methodically in *Hamlet* finds its roots in *Titus Andronicus*, most notably in the figure of Lavinia.

⁷ Many critics concur with this assessment, such as Karen Cunningham who proposes that the play promotes the idea of trial by torture as anachronistic, and sees the action of the play as emptying Roman institutions and values of all meaning (Cunningham 135). Yet, still many of these critics do not consider the impact that Lavinia's presence has on their dissatisfaction with the play's conclusion.

If we consider Lavinia within the context of the staples of revenge tragedy, she cuts a strange figure indeed. Lavinia's mutilation is given as the prime motivation for Titus's plots of vengeance. In many ways, she is the embodiment of the ghost who demands that Hamlet "revenge his foul and most unnatural murder" (*Hamlet*, 1.5.25). Yet, in light of the fact that she is not, in fact, dead, and because of the Eucharistic undertones that permeate the language of the play, Lavinia's presence forces us to re-examine her father's decision to assume agency on her behalf. Titus claims sacrificial status for his daughter, yet, by calling her a martyr, he creates an image that is antithetical to the oblation he intends her to be. I propose that Lavinia should be read as a descendant of the female martyr narratives of the middle ages, and to do so, affirms an agency that undercuts Titus' authority as avenger. Titus's first act in the play is a ritual killing that is condemned as "cruel irreligious piety" (1.1.130), and in many ways, this sentiment reverberates throughout the play. When Titus tells Demetrius and Chiron to note "how I mean to martyr" them (5.2.180), he conflates revenge and redemptive sacrifice, rendering both meaningless. In

the presence of the truly martyred Lavinia, Titus's insistence on killing her to end her "shame" (5.3.45) simply becomes the final outrage in a long sequence of ritualized atrocities he commits throughout the play. The deaths of Chiron and Demetrius is the most obvious example of the confusion that characterizes any attempts to ritualize violence in *Titus Andronicus*. In Titus's mind, the murder of Chiron and Demetrius is less about administering justice than sacrificing them to a higher order – that is, the enactment of vengeance against their mother. When he tells them to "hark, wretches, how I mean to martyr you" (5.2.180), not only is he re-contextualizing their bodies into a grotesque parody of the Eucharist, he is offering their suffering up as a testimony to the wrongs inflicted on his family and by extension (in his mind), on the Roman state. Titus' instruction to Lavinia, to "come / receive the blood" (5.2.196 – 7) is an attempt to sanctify the slaughter by ritualizing the act. Titus' imposition of ceremony on his acts of vengeance is characteristic of revenge tragedy, and an attempt to validate his self-satisfying acts of violence. Moreover, the instruction to "receive the blood" draws explicitly on the tradition of the Catholic

mass, preparing the audience for the purification rite that will follow through the bloody banquet. The enactment of his revenge becomes a hollow echo of the most holy of Catholic rites, and through playing the role of cook, Titus is able to orchestrate a ritual and force it upon unknowing participants. Eucharistic imagery routinely draws on the association between food and the sacrificed body – in eating the communion wafer, one eats the literal or figurative body of Christ. If we read food as a metaphor for Titus' attempts at cleansing violence, then, Lavinia's prior actions have already condemned her father's plans. During the third act banquet, Lavinia refuses her father's attempt at communion, rejecting the food and drink he offers her, because he has determined that that act of eating is for nothing more than fuel "to revenge these bitter woes of ours" (3.2.3). By equating her with a martyr, the play encourages association that draw on the imitation of Christ. For Lavinia, therefore, to eat within such a context would be symbolically akin to cannibalism, and we can read her actions as a rejection of Titus' revenge, of which her death is a necessary component.

The control of bodies, notably by the men in the play, becomes the main source of tension in the text. In *Titus Andronicus*, bodies consume and are consumed with such fervor that challenges any attempt to put meaning onto them. Lavinia's body has the power to consume Titus' mind in much the way that the limbs of Alarbus are devoured by the sacrificing fire. The result is that in the rush to avenge her rape, and make her violated body hold any meaning, Lavinia's agency is misappropriated by the men who surround her as they try to turn her into a sacrifice for their idea of Rome. Douglas E. Green's suggestion that Lavinia's voice "might also accuse Titus as well" (Green 323), ignores the potential for her silence to stand as accusation. Ultimately by defining her as no more than "utter victim" (319), Green ignores her subversive potential. By killing his daughter, Titus merely recreates the honor killing he inflicts upon Mutius, and in doing so, condemns himself to be as barbarous as the Goths he judges. Titus' appropriation of power in his decision to control the fate of Alarbus and the burial of his son (Mitchell 58) is perpetuated in his commitment to acting on his daughter's behalf, but her onstage presence challenges his assumption to act for

her. Green suggests that Shakespeare's decision to keep Lavinia onstage is an attempt to articulate her experience "in a society that ignores and prohibits self-expression" (Green 325), but I would argue that we can read her mere presence as a form of self-expression. Shakespeare's 1594 poem, "The Rape of Lucrece," reflects the concerns that arise in Lavinia, through his presentation of an ideal Roman sacrifice.

Lucrece's defiance of Tarquin is created not by her words, but by her silent action, her willingness to cut her own throat. When she dies, she does so "after many accents and delays" ("The Rape of Lucrece" 1719), letting her wound speak as a symbol of her strength after her words have routinely failed her. Lavinia, like Lucrece, offers up a critique of this barbaric notion of honor that shapes not only the play, but the very genre in which Shakespeare is attempting to work. The idea of Lavinia as sacrificial lamb is not new, but discussions of her as sacrifice routinely confuse the two contradictory notions of sacrifice and martyrdom. This confusion effectively places Lavinia in the same category as Lucrece, and assumes the same willingness to die in defense of her name. By understanding the difference

between sacrifice and martyrdom, we can highlight significant differences in the deaths of Lucrece and Lavinia that allows us to view more cynically Titus' decision to kill his daughter. Generally, according to anthropologists such as Girard and Turner, a sacrifice is a willing death offered for the common good of one's community, a slaughter given to heal "the broken limbs" (5.3.71) of the social body. The popular view is one that sees Lavinia as representative of the broken Roman body: Molly Easo Smith, for example, says explicitly that Lavinia's body "best describes the plight of Rome" (Easo Smith 326). Anthropologists suggest that we view sacrifice as a role in an ongoing social drama, as a means of regulating or establishing social boundaries, with the value of the sacrifice being defined by the community making the offering – the use of "good" violence that purges a society's sins, and equally importantly, creates an outlet for built-up tensions within a community. The dominant emphasis in martyrdom is on the individual's testimony, offering up their body as a statement of the veracity of their belief, in spite of the opinion of authority. This distinction is important, particularly as Lavinia is viewed so frequently as the

play's tragic, but necessary sacrifice. Karen Cunningham suggests that the play's butchered bodies are "both the sites and resolutions of conflict" (Cunningham 68), among whom Lavinia is singled out as a sacrifice made for the audience's interpretive skills. Lorraine Helms explains that "silence, which proclaims the victim's ritual consent, is the keynote of Lavinia's role, marking its sacrificial trajectory from the opening scene" (Helms 557). Yet, in martyrdom, silence stands not as consent, but as a symbol of defiance and subversion.

The idea of honorable sacrifice through the giving of one's life was a popular myth of Roman culture. In "The Rape of Lucrece," the martyr's body, Lucrece, who kills herself in repudiation of the power Tarquin has asserted over her body, is turned into a sacrifice by Brutus who insists that her death can be beneficial to the Roman body politic. In his poem, Shakespeare offers us a vision of martyrdom that is entirely suited to these military Roman values, and one that unifies an exemplary life with a successful method of self-immolation, but only because there is accordance between both the martyr and those left behind to shape her legacy. Lucrece is able to secure what Lynne Enterline calls a "corporeal

legacy" (Enterline 154) because of the way in which Brutus capitalizes on her death politically, and uses it as an opportunity to destroy Tarquin. Brutus decision to "bury in Lucrece's wound his folly's show" (1810) suggests a political agenda all his own, but his intention to drive out Tarquin from Rome allows Lucrece's personal martyrdom to become a sacrifice that benefits the social body of Rome, as Tarquin's exile becomes the root of the Roman republic. Shakespeare's decision to make Brutus a symbolic participant in Lucrece's death, acknowledges the need for martyrdom to be a communal event, if it is to succeed as a sacrifice.

The connection between the poem and the play is worth pursuing, because in many ways, Lucrece serves as a foil to Lavinia, and the poem sets up many of the values that break down in Titus Andronicus. Unsurprisingly for a poem written by a playwright, the entire text of "The Rape of Lucrece" is structured around the idea of what is seen. Shakespeare tells us that in Lucrece's face "beauty and virtue strived" (52), suggesting the very thought that persecutes Lucrece after her rape – that the intangible qualities of a person can be viewed upon one's body. Coppélia Kahn suggests that almost as much as the

physical assault, it is the male gaze that asserts the power over a woman's body, in this founding myth of patriarchy (Kahn 27). Indeed, in the body of Lucrece, what Collatine sees as evidence of purity and inspiration for goodness, is the same thing that inflames Tarquin's lust and spurs him to rape and desecration. Lucrece's belief that "the light will show character'd in my brow / The story of sweet chastity's decay" (807 – 8) highlights Shakespeare's preoccupation with the verisimilitude of images that runs throughout the text, and becomes such an important feature of the Roman plays. Lying on the bed, Lucrece is the "picture of pure piety" (542), leading Tarquin by the eye towards her violation, and this emphasis on the visual spectacle recognizes that Lucrece "belongs to no one and everyone" (Bromley 209). Moreover, Amy Greenstadt's suggestion that we read Lucrece's body as a text focuses on the way in which Lucrece's "private scar" must be published in order for justice to be served (Greenstadt 828).

This focus of publishing a truth on one's body, combined with the power of what the later Brutus of Julius Caesar will call "the common eyes" (Julius Caesar 2.1.179) creates the sense that the rape of Lucrece is a

violation of the social body. Linda Woodbridge notes that the threat from within creates a corruption within Rome that can only be purged with Lucrece's blood – in fact, she goes so far as to say that "Lavinia's rape ultimately frees Rome from tyranny" (Woodbridge 276).⁸ Woodbridge, like many critics, suggests that we read assaults on the body in Shakespeare's Rome as metaphorical attacks on the body politic, an idea which is deeply rooted in the anthropological notion of primitive sacrifice as "good" violence, committed for the benefit of a given community. She suggests that the ruined bodies of Lucrece and Lavinia are directly emblematic of a social corruption

⁸ Other critics concur, for example Gillian Murray Kendall, in her essay "Overkill in Shakespeare" and Catherine Belling, in "Infectious Rape, Therapeutic Revenge: Bloodletting and the Health of Rome's Body," who view Lavinia as a representation of a troubled Roman state. Such readings play on the notion of the importance of restoring honor through her sacrifice, affirming an assumption of "good" violence that the play does not support.

that can only be released by the releasing of their blood (Woodbridge 291). Even Coppélia Kahn in her excellent analysis acknowledges the correlation between the political unrest in Rome and "a father's control over his virgin daughter" (Kahn 71). This metaphorical idea, rooted in the anthropological idea of "good" violence, which can benefit the community, is a common approach to Shakespeare's Roman texts, and works well in "The Rape of Lucrece" but only because of Brutus' involvement in the posthumous presentation of her body. Joyce Green Macdonald explains how "Shakespeare's version distinguishes itself by its presentation of the rape as both a personal and a social disaster, a crime against family, city, and the meaning of Roman history as well as against Lucrece's person" (Green Macdonald 89), emphasizing the way in which Brutus takes a personal tragedy and integrates it into a pressing social agenda. Brutus collapses the differences between the attack on Lucrece and his wished-for political resistance to Tarquin's family. Titus attempts to do exactly the same, but fails, because of Shakespeare's decision to fashion Lavinia as a martyr. Lavinia's submission stands against the patriarchal authority that would assume control of

her agency – which in this case, is her father. In “The Rape of Lucrece,” Shakespeare draws attention to the dangers inherent in sacrifice when he shows the extent to which spectacle can overpower testimony in the eyes of an audience. Overwhelmed by the sight of Lucrece’s death, her father and husband threaten to engulf her testimony to her innocence with spectacle of their own. Collatine, in particular, wallows, “in key-cold Lucrece’ bleeding stream” (“The Rape of Lucrece” 1775), making hollow vows of suicide. Seduced by the potency of the spectacle she has created, Lucrece’s husband becomes inarticulate in his lavishly shown grief. It is up to Brutus to “check the tears in Collatinus’ eyes” (1817), and to make Lucrece’s death a ritual with oaths of revenge. Brutus promise, secured with a kiss to the knife that took Lucrece’s life, consecrates Lucrece’s death, and secures her testimony to her purity. As Katherine Eisamann Maus suggests, Lucrece’s sacrifice was a gamble, because she is surrounded by the figure of Brutus, “supposed an idiot” (Eisamann Maus 82), her indiscreet husband and foolish father, and although ultimately, her sacrifice is a success, the trace of cynicism that is found in the poem becomes manifest throughout the Roman plays. The

idea of idealistic self-sacrifice that we see in "The Rape of Lucrece" falls apart in *Titus Andronicus*, because Titus tries to impose a sacrifice on Lavinia, without securing her unambiguous consent.

Lucrece's self-sacrifice is the most successful Roman sacrifice in Shakespeare, not only because her willing death so actively benefits the social body of Rome, but because Shakespeare resists the temptation to create spectacle, something that he does not do in *Titus Andronicus* – the image of Lavinia's violated body is undeniably the visual centerpiece of the play. Although Shakespeare avoids a voyeuristic approach to either Lucrece's rape or her death, instead favoring an intense psychological exploration of the mind of Lucrece, he recognizes and explores the power that images can hold when successfully manipulated. Lucrece's blood is able to "wash the slander of [her] ill" (1207), because, like Lavinia, she recognizes the impact she can have in making her body a site of resistance to authority which might otherwise attempt to contextualize her as whore. What emerges in this poem is the process by which Lucrece must become objective in terms of her own suffering, and think about how it can be displayed. In spite of her fear that

her groom "spied in her some blemish" (1358), Lucrece decides to subject herself to the common eye, for the sake of justice. Like Cleopatra, Lucrece fully understands the expressive power of her body, something the narrator renders explicit when he tells us that her breasts "by oath" (410) honor her husband – a lesson that is forced onto Lavinia during the bloody banquet in *Titus Andronicus*. During the rape, Lucrece is unable to overcome the potent power of her chaste body. Even when she calls on Tarquin to view his behavior objectively and notice "how vile a spectacle" the scene makes (631), her attempts to re-contextualize the scene fail. Lucrece recognizes that the power to define her body is out of her hands, so instead does what she can in an attempt to present her death in the most meaningful way possible. Although she is successful, it is only by the incidental presence of Brutus that she can achieve the justice she seeks. Lavinia, surrounded by villains, fools and madmen, is afforded no such luxury.

Through Lavinia's rape, and the inevitable march towards her death, Shakespeare launches his critique against Roman rites and the system of symbolic value upon which early modern martyrdom is based. Much has been

written about the sacrificial nature of Lavinia and her role as "no more than an emblem" (Murray Kendall 306) in the text, but, in order to fully understand the nature of her death, we should consider her not as a sacrifice, but as a direct descendant of female martyr narratives from the middle ages. In addition to the Eucharistic imagery that circulates throughout the play, both Titus and Lucius explicitly define Lavinia in terms of martyrdom, conflating the idea of Lavinia as martyr with their desire for an expiatory sacrifice. During the family banquet in the third act, Titus tells his brother Marcus that he intends to speak for Lavinia, as "I can interpret all her martyred signs" (*Titus Andronicus* 3.2 36). His definitions not only render her body as already slain, but, as critics such as Heather James proposes, reduce her body to no more than a sign.⁹ Lucius first response

⁹ James explicitly proposes that we read Lavinia's body as a text, simultaneously as something that illustrates the social disorder we

to his brutalized sister is to ask, "speak gentle sister: who hath martyred thee?" (3.1.82.). Immediately following her rape, Marcus introduces Lavinia to Titus using the past tense, saying "this was thy daughter" (3.2.63, my italics), and although Titus rebukes him, by saying "so she is" (3.1.164), he immediately associates her with imminent death when he describes the look of her face as "a lily almost withered" (3.2.114). Further on, Lucius bids his sister goodbye, saying that now "nor Lucius nor Lavinia lives / But in oblivion and hateful griefs" (3.1.295 – 6). Lucius offers himself the option to leave this limbo-like existence of sorrow and suffering through taking revenge on Rome and Saturnine, but Lavinia is offered no such route, and is immediately relegated to an other-worldly status. Disguised by a veil at the final

see in the city, and that Titus can write his own account of Roman history on (James 133). I, however, argue that Lavinia defies this presumption of Titus to use her as his authoritative text.

banquet, Lavinia appears like a bride of Christ, hidden from public view until it is time for her to die.

In *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare breaks from revenge tradition by his exclusion of a ghost motif – instead, he allows his object of vengeance, Lavinia, to remain very much alive, and the insistence of her presence threatens the validity of those who would act on her behalf.

Lavinia's rape and desecration are entirely suited to a revenge drama in which the violation and murder of a woman becomes emblematic for a poison that seeps through the social fabric, creating a bitterly corrupt world seen, for example, most clearly in *The Revenger's Tragedy* when Gratiana attempts to solicit her daughter Castiza on behalf of Lussurioso. Instead of a disembodied spirit, the ghostly staple of Revenge tragedy, we are given the ambiguous figure of Lavinia, a mutilated, not-yet-dead

corpse walking around.¹⁰ In a sense, she becomes the epitome of the troubling liminality that Susan Zimmerman

¹⁰ The idea of the dead walking the earth, or at least the stage, maintained great popularity in early modern theatre. *The Spanish Tragedy* is dominated by the presence of the ghost of Andrea, who sits with the figure of revenge, to watch the events play out on earth. At the spirit of Andreas' request, revenge operates on Hieronimo and Bel Imperia, "soliciting their soules" (Kyd 3.14.19), and in the 1595 anonymous play *Lochrine*, the ghost of Albanact appears, calling for "revenge, revenge for blood" (Anon 1336) leaving the surprised Humber to conclude that "nought will satisfy your wandring ghost / But dire revenge" (1338 – 9). Although Shakespeare shows a little more skepticism as to the efficacy of ghosts than most of his peers, he nonetheless utilizes this trope in *Hamlet*. The primary function of the ghost in the revenge tragedy, is to embody the divine forces at work within the play, controlling the drama, and implementing the much-needed retribution. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Andrea credits Revenge with the entire orchestration of the plot, when he tells the spirit "thanks to thee and those infernal powers / That will not tolerate a lover's woe" (Kyd 3.15.37 – 8), suggesting the intercessionary power the spirit has in applying

sees in the onstage corpse of the early modern theatre, that threatens to "disrupt the psychic programming of spectators" (Zimmerman 12) by collapsing boundaries with

vengeance. Revenge, in *The Spanish Tragedy*, operates in cryptic and abstract ways, sleeping above while events work themselves out on earth in a labyrinthine manner. The spirit of revenge promises Andrea satisfaction, through the agency of Bel Imperia, the bereaved lover of Andrea, implying a divine order that works outside of the parameters of conventional justice. This intervention comes to fruition at the end of the play, and although Horatio, Bel Imperia and Hieronimo wind up dead, Andreas is avenged and his avengers rewarded for their sacrifices with an eternity resting in Elysium fields, while Balthazar and Pedringano are subjected to the tortures of hell. What this divine intervention offers is a means of organizing revengers and unifying agency, as Balthazar continues to condemn himself by his actions, heaping crime upon crime so that multiple avengers find themselves joined together by a common motive. Furthermore, such excess of sin elevate the threat of danger that Balthazar represents, so his murder is not only an act of vengeance, but a death needed to secure the common good.

its potent and indefinable symbolism. Yet, Lavinia's performance as a substitute ghost continuously insists on her own desire for agency, even as it is stifled by the inability to express herself adequately by presence of the men around her. Heather James suggests that the symbolic currency of Lavinia's body is something that belongs to Titus and must bear his literalisms (James 133), but through her imposed martyrdom, Shakespeare allows the very ownership of her body to become a site of contestation. The motifs of sexual menace, passive resistance and her chaste suffering, are all hallmarks of the Medieval cult of female martyrs, and through her endurance of not only her attack, but her objectification as a simultaneous icon of pain and rebellion, the figure of Lavinia takes on religious undertones, a fact reinforced by the imagery surrounding her. One of the moments most critically condemned for its foolishness is the scene in the third act in which Lavinia trots after Titus, his severed hand in her mouth, is no less ridiculous than the story of Saint Christina, who had her tongue cut out. In response, she "never lost the power of speech; instead she took the dismembered piece of her tongue, threw it in the judges face, and struck out both

his eyes with it" (Winstead 30). Saint Cecelia lives, for three days, with her head half-hacked off, and somehow is able to continue preaching and converting pagans, becoming all the more effective as her commitment to her faith is etched on her nearly dismembered body. Yet, Lavinia is denied the miracles that confirm her status as martyr, and becomes a figure of ambiguity. She is a powerful symbol with unsecured meaning.

Popular Medieval martyrologies such as *The Golden Legend* and Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* frequently tell the stories of female martyrs, and in *Chaste Passions*, Karen Winstead suggests that the basic trajectory of these narratives is as follows: "the only good woman is a chaste woman; a woman's chastity is guaranteed only by her death; therefore, the only good woman is a dead woman" (Winstead 3). The female martyr can be married, and continue to be chaste; indeed, these women consistently strive to avoid sexual contact, whether it be by remaining married "in true chastity" (Ælfric⁷⁶) as Basilissa, the wife of Julian is or resisting devilish seduction or rape, as Saint Justine or Anastasia do. In response to her attempted rape, Lucy declares "no woman can be deprived of her virginity – no matter what is done

to her body – unless her heart consents. If you defile my body against my will, my virginity is all the purer and my reward all the greater” (33). Although she is married, there are many allusions to Lavinia’s chastity in the play, which, in the wake of the rape will allow her to be reconstructed as a defiled virgin. The very site of the rape, evokes the saints Crisaunt and Daria, who marry without corruption, having refused to consummate the marriage, and are thrown into a dark pit to become “consecrated in martyrdom” together, similar to the abhorred pit in which Lavinia is raped over her husband’s corpse.¹¹ Moreover, in Lavinia’s plea to Tamara for a merciful death, she asks to be thrown into a pit to die

¹¹ The parallels between Crisaunt and Daria extend beyond *Titus Andronicus*. After her husband is placed in prison, Daria, like Marina in *Pericles*, is sent to a brothel, to live in forced prostitution. There, she converts her customers, and they run throughout the city, exclaiming his conversion and declaring her a goddess.

as a testimony to her marriage. Bassianius' body is likened to a "slaughtered lamb" (2.2.223) by Martius, equating him with Christ, further enhancing the parallels between his wife Lavinia, and Medieval virgins such as Lucy, who claim chastity through their marriage to Jesus Christ. In act two, Lavinia rejects Saturnius' observation that the hunt is taking place "somewhat too early for new-married ladies" (2.1.15) by telling him that "I have been broad awake two hours and more" (2.1.17), rejecting his bawdy implication of her post-wedding night exhaustion. Later, immediately preceding the rape, Tamora and her sons talk about Lavinia in terms that continue to emphasize her virginity, which contributes to her aura of chaste piety. Chiron says that he intends to enjoy "that nice preserved honesty of yours" (2.2.135), and at the end of the scene, Tamora implies Lavinia's virginity by describing the rape as deflowering. The sexual violence in many of the medieval martyrologies becomes an emblem not of lust, but of control, something that echoes through Titus Andronicus with Titus' claims of the rape as an act committed by "traitorous"(4.1.93) men.

The fact that Lavinia is a chaste wife becomes central to the wordplay of the rape scene. The existence of her marriage creates a contradiction which Tamora recognizes when she orders her sons to "this trull deflower" (2.2.191). The trull identifies Lavinia as someone who is no longer virginal, turning her married status into a mark of whoredom. Moreover, Demetrius observes that

This minion stood upon her chastity,
Upon her nuptial vow, her loyalty,
And with that quaint hope braves your mightiness.

(2.2.124 – 6)

His choice of words allow us to see the process of using language to simultaneously raise Lavinia up to the status of a virgin, to make the rape an even more wicked act, and to mark her as a sexually active whore. The word minion, as the OED tells us, not only is a disparaging description of an underling, but also implies a sexual favorite. Equally, the word quaint within this context contributes to this sense of the deliberate construction of Lavinia as a virgin martyr. As well as the obvious pun on female genitalia, the word also hints at Lavinia's previous demeanor, her "proud, haughty and vain" (OED)

contempt for Tamora, which echoes the defiance that many female martyrs show towards their persecutors.

Additionally, the OED also offers "carefully or ingeniously elaborated" (OED) as a definition of quaint, suggesting that the construction of chastity is a strategic move, and this idea becomes increasingly evident as the play progresses. Instead of violating her wedding vow, violating Lavinia's chastity seems to be the ultimate aim of her attackers, and subsequently throughout the remainder of the play, Bassanius becomes almost an afterthought to Lavinia's destroyed honor.

Rape is the realization of the threat of sexual violence that underpins many medieval martyr narratives. As with Lavinia, the main threat against women in these texts is that of forced sexual activity. Saint Elizabeth and Saint Christina are punished for refusing to marry the man of their father's choice. Other women, such as Winnifred, are killed while defending themselves from sexual violence. Before her death, Saint Lucy is made as heavy as stone, in response to Paschasius' attempt to force her into prostitution. Critics who express discomfort with Lavinia's venomous response to Tamora in the woods before the rape, do so because to present her

in such a way contradicts a reading of her as willing and complicit sacrifice. To read Lavinia as submissive and pliant, requires ignoring her tartness towards Tamora, and her retort that "'tis thought you have a goodly gift in horning" (2.2.67), which is tantamount to calling the Empress a whore. Reading her character through the lens of medieval martyrdom, coupled with her righteous indignation and assertions of autonomy, suggest a complexity that transcends the image of obedient daughter to her wronged father. When Tamora attempts to wield her authority over Bassanius and Lavinia, the latter immediately invokes the Emperor's rule, renouncing any claim to power that Tamora attempts to hold over her as "tyranny" (2.2.145), evoking Sir Thomas More's famous rebuttal that he dies "the king's good servant, but God's first." Lavinia's tone of disgust is similar to many of the female martyrs, who openly distain the authority wielded over them when called to account for their actions. Saint Christina declares to her father that he is the devil, and Dorothy, when rejecting the sexually infatuated Fabricus "utterly despised him as she would have done clay or any other earthly corruption" (Winstead

35). Lavinia is going so far as to threaten a curse on Tamora when she is dragged off by Chiron and Demetrius.

Moreover, such a reading draws attention to Lavinia's earlier supposed attention to duty. To presume that she is a dutiful and obedient daughter to her father is not an obvious assumption. Saturnius' dismissal of Lavinia as "that changing piece" (1.1.314) could easily be read as a response to a staged moment in which Lavinia is a willing participant in her abduction. There is no evidence to suggest that Titus' description of his daughter being "surprised" (1.1.288) is anything other than his projected understanding of her absconding with Bassanius; in fact, during this episode, everyone but Titus acknowledges the validity of this sudden elopement, so it is reasonable to assume some degree of complicity from Lavinia in the plan. Titus proves himself an unreliable witness when it comes to making assumptions about his child. His later description of her reluctance to participate in the feast as a marker of her intention to drink "no other drink but tears" (3.2.37) is a construction of her character created by her doting father. Titus wishes to recreate his daughter in the image of patience and virtue, even going so far as to re-

imagine her as unmarried virgin, when he talks of her deflowering, and continually refers to her with the child-like term "girl" and "wench." Defiance in the face of a suppressive and spiritually corrupt authority is an essential part of the martyr narrative, and Titus' insistence on speaking on her behalf is not only presumptuous, but led by his own misguided and self-interested motives.

Recent scholarship has begun to address the treatment of the female body in martyrologies, often acknowledging the necessity of near-pornographic violence in the martyrological tradition as a means of spiritual teaching. In her analysis of the female saint narrative, Catherine Innes Parker explains that silence is the primary means of regaining power over a suppressive authority placed violently on the body. She says that Saint Margret's passive resistance becomes active as her refusal to acknowledge her physical suffering allows her complete control over her persecutions and those who would attempt to break her (Innes Parker 209). Moreover, Innes Parker suggests that nowhere in the Katherine group of martyrs, "is there any sense of shame on the part of the virgin martyrs, with which the audience might

identify" (206). The belief in these texts that a woman might be shamed by being publicly stripped and tortured against her will is a male assumption, and the martyr's defiance stems from her refusal to recognize the acts of humiliation inflicted upon them as such. Lavinia is defined by her silence, even prior to her mutilation, not even crying out when she is "surpris'd" by Bassanius. To misread her silence is to construct Lavinia as a symbol of her father's grief and to accept that she is as shamed as he is by her defilement. To assume that she accepts having her throat cut because she is shamed is as presumptuous as Titus' declaration, that "I understand her signs" (3.2.144). This insistence on reading Lavinia as sacrificial victim is dangerous because of its potential for misreading, intentional or not. Marcus articulates this concern when he wonders,

Perchance she weeps because they kill'd her husband;
Perchance because she knows them innocent.

(3.2.115 - 6)

The disparity between these two interpretations is enormous. His musing illustrates the enormous ambiguity that faces the characters who look at Lavinia and hints at how enormously misleading it would be to act on such

vague symbols; however, when overwhelmed with their own sense of sorrow, the men of the play cease to care about her intentions.

What we then see is the juxtaposition of the identity of a sacrifice imposed on Lavinia by the male characters throughout the play against Shakespeare's deliberate fashioning of Lavinia as female martyr. By submitting to the tyrannical authority of the state, the martyr dies in a demonstration of faith in a godly authority that transcends the judicial system that so unfairly condemns him. As Foxe illustrates with the story of Master Ridley who bathes his hands in the flame that is soon to consume him, the martyr willingly embraces the tortures put upon him, and offers their defiant submission to show the lack of power physical degradation can hold. Physical punishments are endured, even welcomed, as a means of ensuring spiritual salvation, and the representation of violence on the body ultimately proves the insignificance of the flesh (Horner 35). By openly declaring that he can read her martyred signs, Titus creates his daughter as a deeply ambivalent figure, and undermines the very authority by which he claims to act. The patriarchal fear of such an imposing figure as

Lavinia is articulated by Saturninus in the fifth act when he asserts Virginiu righteousness in the slaying of his ravished daughter. Saturninus explains that he was right "because the girl should not survive her shame / And by her presence still renew his sorrows" (5.3.40 -1). Lavinia's continued presence is not only a reminder of Titus' sorrows, but of his impotency in the face of atrocities, and even serves as a reminder of the pointlessness of violence itself, which, to a soldier validated by honor and ceremony, is an abhorrent thought. Titus himself confirms this view of the martyr Lavinia, when he says that he is "as woeful as Virginius was / And have a thousand times more cause than he / To do this outrage" (5.3.49 - 50). Titus emphasizes Lavinia's role as a sacrifice made to appease his sense of dignity and ease his suffering, but in doing so, strives deliberately to ignore her agency. Tamora's bewildered question "why hast thou slain thine only daughter thus?" (5.3.54) suggests a gendered belief in survival and endurance in the face of calamity that these men of honor refuse to acknowledge. Tamora's first act accusation against Titus' particular brand of piety, and subsequent revenge plot, along with Lavinia's presumed complicity in her

elopement, encourage us to read against the patriarchal system of sacrifice as a means of sustaining honor. Furthermore, this female defiance suggests that the potency of Lavinia resides in her capacity to endure all sufferings placed on her body, including those inflicted by her father. As a martyr, Lavinia embodies the paradoxical notion of rebellion through submission and the play locates such rebellion through the living girl's physical toleration of her father's plot. However, such submission merely reinforces the misconceptions of the persecutors who misguidedly focus all of their energy on the literal flesh (Horner 30). By cutting his daughter's throat, Titus is refusing to acknowledge any other meaning than his own, and focusing on the extent to which her body discomfits him with little regard for his daughter's experience. In much the same way as Titus is remarkable for his ability to literalize rhetoric in violent acts, the persecutors of Ælfric's saints would literalize their rhetoric in the tortures they inflicted, reading the body literally, with no consideration of the spiritual and symbolic message suffering flesh might carry (Horner 30). Green is wrong to read Lavinia as an articulation of Titus' own suffering and victimization

(Green 322) – even if we concede that she is a reflection of his loss, we must also recognize the extent to which her suffering is used to stand in condemnation of his actions.

The world of *Titus Andronicus* is dominated by Roman rites, and when we consider the extent to which Titus invests in ceremony, it is no surprise that Lavinia is so quickly beatified in the wake of her attack. Titus' opening speech is a declaration of intent to follow tradition and see his sons entombed with his ancestors, in this "sacred receptacle of my joys" (1.1.92). When he condemns Tamora's oldest son Alarbus to death, he does so under the guise of piety, telling her that it is for the benefit of his community, as "religiously they ask a sacrifice" (1.1.127), putting aside any personal feeling he might feel in the face of the vocal demand of his sons, who are then clearly the onstage representative of Titus' Roman community. The excuse that Titus gives for the killing of Alarbus – he explains that it is for the benefit of the immortal souls of his brethren – whilst primarily pagan, at once is connected to the Catholic ceremony of mass by the intercessionary power assigned to the death. Alarbus' slaughter is an expiatory sacrifice

that will appease the forces that watch over the souls of his dead family, in much the same way that many people during the Middle Ages would request masses, the commemoration of Christ's sacrifice, to be said for their soul as it struggles through purgatory. Lucius' observation that the sacrificing fire's smoke "like incense doth perfume the sky" (1.1.148) evokes not only the liturgical parade in which censers burned incense to symbolize prayers rising up to God, but echoes the instructions given to Aaron in Leviticus 16, to "put incense upon the fire before the Lord" (Leviticus 16:3) when he makes a sacrificial offering of a bull to cleanse his sins. Further on in the play, Lucius' use of the phrase "our Roman rites" (1.1.146) clearly evokes both Catholic and pagan ritual. In another Eucharistic flourish, Lucius discusses the strategy of Alarbus' death, telling his brothers to "hew his limbs until they be clean consumed" (1.1.133), metaphorically devouring the sacrificed body. This conflation of the two methods of slaughter – dismemberment and burning – is directly reminiscent of the traditional forms of martyrdom. Commonly, early modern heretics were burned at the stake such as John Foxe's East Lothian Mr. Wishard, who was

entirely consumed by fire in under an hour. Prior to the reign of the Tudors, religious recusants were routinely decapitated, and often met with other equally unpleasant forms of dismemberment. Moreover, according to the OED, the word "consumed," is derived from the Roman Law, "to exhaust a pursuer's right of action" (OED), conflating the idea of the consuming fire of sacrifice with a legal entitlement to pursue justice, a concept crucial to the revenge tragedy genre to which *Titus Andronicus* belongs. As her sons are dragging the helpless Lavinia away, Tamora reminds them of this ceremonial consumption of their brother, allowing this to be not only the catalyst, but the justification for her rape and mutilation. The "rhetoric of violence" (Helms 558) that Lorraine Helms finds prevalent in the play overwhelms language, and in particular, the claim on piety that is used in the description of Alarbus is made graphic in the presentation of Lavinia. Albert Tricomi categorizes the bloodbath in the play as a literalness of imagination that creates relentless horror (Tricomi 36), but in reality, it is simply Shakespeare's attempt to present images that can live up to the over-inflated rhetoric the

characters offer in order to expose the ugliness that people such as Titus would hide.

In *Titus Andronicus*, all the deaths, from Mutius and Alarbus, to Chiron and Demetrius are linked by a language of piety, while simultaneously being exposed as butchery by the presentation of what we, the audience, see with our own eyes. Demetrius' declaration that the plan to "first, thrash the corn, then burn the straw" (2.2.123) clearly echoes the "sacrificing fire" in which Tamora's eldest child was butchered by the Andronici cynically mocking Titus' Roman rites. In the play, the spectacle of butchery overwhelms any Roman language of piety, even exposing it as disingenuous. A.C. Hamilton's believes that "to keep his violence sweet, Shakespeare ritualizes the language and action of his play" (Hamilton 208), but in the face of Tamora's cold indifference to ritual, any attempts to sweeten the violence merely exposes the inadequacy of language and action to modify any of the horrors we are forced to witness. Moreover, Eugene Waith's concern that "a physical impersonation of the mutilated Lavinia should not block our vision" (Waith 28) speaks to the extraordinary power that the spectacle of sacrifice has to derail the language used to contain and

validate it, and expose the way in which the ghastliness of Lavinia's brutalized body can hijack the drama. In most revenge tragedies, such brutality is the climax of the vengeance and the text itself, and Shakespeare's decision to place this arresting sight a little earlier than halfway through his play, ultimately destroys any attempt to ritualize and validate it, purely because it is impossible to overcome the shock we get from the unadulterated cruelty of the attack. Equally, Shakespeare finds himself unable to surpass the scene he wrote, and as a result, his employment of the genre begins to unravel as he struggles to balance the remainder of his play with the shocking images he has created.

The next time Shakespeare will return to the genre of revenge tragedy, in *Hamlet*, the entire play will be motivated by the drive to find a rationalization that can justify the deed of murder, and Lavinia's body, in many ways, is responsible for this uncertainty. If we read her as a martyr, then we must read her body as representative of the futility of violence, which exposes the ritual employed to justify her slaughter as hollow and self-deceptive theatrics. Titus' revenge pales in comparison to the excruciating first glance we have of Lavinia after

her rape, and Marcus' lengthy speech in response to the sight of Lavinia feels artificial and stilted. No amount of rationalization can compete with the shock of seeing exactly how much Lavinia has lost, and as a symbol of pain, Lavinia literalizes Elaine Scarry's belief in the extent to which pain actively destroys language, yet at the same time, is able to move beyond it. Ceremonial violence is an essential part of the revenge tragedy canon as it offers a ritual purging of a corrupt society, and when used successfully within the genre, works in a manner akin to sacrifice. In *Titus Andronicus* no amount of ceremony can compete with the disarming horror of Lavinia's body and the silent, bleeding woman becomes an expression of how little can be undone by brutal revenge plots. Lawrence Danson discusses the ceremonial violence in *Titus Andronicus* as a means of arguing that the play is a perfect revenge tragedy. He explains that "revenge is one of the various routes to the ritualization of death which permits the Elizabethan dramatist to conclude his tragedy with the expressiveness of *consummatum est*" (Danson 57), recognizing the extent to which the death toll in these plays tap into a desire to witness "good," cleansing violence.

Such cleansing violence is characteristic of a revenge tragedy, and suggests the sacrificial ethos that underpins the genre. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hieronimo dramatically reveals the corpse of Horatio, almost chanting as he reveals the hideous sight, emphasizing his own sacrifices before he stabs the King. He says,

See here my show, look on this spectacle.

Here lay my hope, and here my hope hath end;

Here lay my heart, and hear my heart was slain;

Here lay my treasure, here my treasure lost;

Here lay my bliss, and here my bliss bereft;

(4.4.89 – 94)

Like Titus, Hieronimo validates his vengeance with the spectacle of the body, relying on the sight of bloodshed to justify his actions. The death count in revenge tragedy is routinely high, and the methods of slaughter often excessive, but all serve to purge the state of the corruptions that dominate it. Violence in revenge tragedy is viewed as a positive force, as it operates as part of the political process while simultaneously indicating divine forces who will accept the bloodshed in expiation. Because Titus Andronicus lacks any form of divine presence – be it ghosts, Gods, or a spirit of revenge –

genre is often used by critics to contain the otherwise disturbing, "hugger mugger" (Bowers 115) atrocities. In this sense, early revenge tragedies operate using the similar intercessionary principles as the popular medieval cult of the saints.¹² The genre's insistence on

¹² This is a generalization that is applicable to many early revenge tragedies. In the wake of *Hamlet*, in which the authenticity of the ghost becomes a central concern, we can trace a shift in not only the belief in a supernatural power, but in the impact such forces have on the world of the play. The assumption that injustice can be impacted through some form of ghostly or divine intervention is one that is based in a fundamentally hopeful view of the world – that there will be someone left to take up the reins of power, no matter what the cost. Even as Vindice is hauled away at the end of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, an audience can take comfort in the new Duke's austere belief that nobody is above the law. During the Jacobean period, however, we can mark a shift in the role of the ghost – in a sense, Astraea has fled the earth and taken with her any hope of divine intervention. The world of later tragedy borders on irredeemable, and ghosts, such as that of the Duchess of Malfi, do

external or supernatural forces intervening on in support of a person and validating action echoes the belief in praying for a saint to plead on one's behalf. Such belief was one of the central ideas attacked during the Reformation, and this shift away from spectacles and faith in spirits becomes manifest in Shakespeare, in his contemplative interpretation of the genre, that we find in *Hamlet*.

Unlike *The Spanish Tragedy* whose violence is authorized by the ghost of Andrea sitting with the spirit of revenge, the characters in *Titus Andronicus* lack any form of divine order, and out of desperation cling to ritual for guidance. Even when the excess is undeniable, most critics agree on an element of closure that is afforded by ritual, and ultimately recognize the value of violence. Lorna Hutson, for example, builds on the work

not inspire or lead one to action, but lament an inevitable horror, or reinforce a belief in an irredeemable universe.

of critics such as Anne Pippin Burnett who sees vengeance in tragedy as "an honorable imperative essential to the preservation of order" (Pippin Burnett 6). Hutson proposes that we view the revenge enacted in the play as an exploration of two judicial systems, the older "trial by ordeal" and a newer system, more akin to the contemporary trial by jury. Ultimately, she argues, the judiciary processes explored within the play expose the older, inquisitorial system of law and order as arbitrary and unreliable. Although Huston breaks with the outdated way of thinking that reads revenge tragedy "as demonstrations of the ways in which God reveals and revenges secret crimes"¹³ she nonetheless promotes an idea that the cruel acts of violence we find in revenge

¹³ Ronald Broude, in "Revenge and Revenge Tragedy in Renaissance England" articulates the typical attitude of many critics, who neglect to acknowledge the deeply complex and subjective nature of early modern English belief in relation to genre.

tragedy can be validated by their connection to the social body, and ritualized accordingly. Emrys Jones, in his discussion of the Senecan aspects of Shakespeare's tragedy suggests on a meta-theatrical level, a similar purging. He talks specifically of the cathartic action of the play, suggesting that at the end of *Titus Andronicus* the "relief-giving pleasure of revenge is savored" (Jones 89). Even Robert Miola's recognition of excess that "sweeps the sinner into sin" (Miola 14), articulates a doctrine of sacrifice that consistently underpins discussion of revenge tragedy, one that *Titus Andronicus* rejects by suggesting condemnation to the plot Titus lays.

This imposition of ceremony on the dirty business of politics is typical of the Roman sense of "virtue and nobility" that is employed to justify the actions of various characters. From the decorum of the brothers' fight for the empery of Rome to the murder of Alarbus, we find conflict in Rome masked under the guise of ceremony. In particular, Alarbus is killed to "appease their groaning shadows that are gone" (1.1.129). Tamora's condemnation of Titus' "false, irreligious piety" (1.1.133) is an accusation that undermines the currency

of ceremony in Rome. The Roman manipulation of ritual is most clearly seen at work in the wake of Mutius' slaying, one of the traitorous sons who aided in the surprising of Lavinia. All the characters who witness Titus' murder of his son condemn the act as rash, excessive and unnecessary. Marcus' accusation of "impiety in you" (1.1.360) joins the chorus of sons who argue that Titus has killed a virtuous son without cause – something that Green argues establishes Titus as a tyrannical and cruel counterpart to Tamora.¹⁴ Titus' disavowal of his son and his refusal to bury him with the "soldiers and Rome's servitors" (1.1.349) in the family tomb, identifies Mutius' value to his father as primarily symbolic, rather than personal, and emphasizes Titus' belief in the link

¹⁴ Green specifically talks about the limit of the Revenge tragedy genre that we find in Titus, but proposes that Tamora's comments are emblematic of a hubristic lesson that Titus is to learn throughout the play. Yet I would argue that Titus learns nothing, and any patriarchal order that is restored is exposed as hollow and cruel.

between his family's honor and the health of the social body. His sons, however, violently disagree, and demand that Titus recognize the valor in his son's defiance, and allow him to be buried in the family tomb. In order to ameliorate this fraught situation, and to make palatable this slaughter, Marcus attempts to reconstruct this brutal murder as a sacrifice. Marcus tells Titus,

Suffer thy brother Marcus to inter
His noble nephew here in virtue's nest,
That died in honour and Lavinia's cause.
Thou art a Roman, be not barbarous.

(1.1.380 – 383)

Marcus employs two tactics in his appeal: firstly, he offers to take responsibility for the burial, emphasizing the familial relationship as a counter-argument to Titus' cold stained honor. Then, he uses Titus' sense of pride to emphasize Mutius' death as necessary, defining him as a chivalric hero, falling in defense of a woman's honor. Finally, Marcus draws on Titus' own sense of self, identifying a Roman as one who kills only with sacred purpose. Despite categorizing Mutius' death as a mere brawl, Titus demonstrates the appeal that honor holds for him, and recoiling against the accusation of barbarism

and impiety, he grudgingly agrees for the body to be interred. The argument that Marcus and the sons make, that Martius "died in virtue's cause" (1.1.395) is a rather impressive rewriting of history, a posthumous beatifying of the son's actions, one that renders him a sacrifice to family honor, and sets a pattern that Titus himself will follow when it comes to resolving the issue of his ruined daughter. Their argument that "thou art a Roman, be not barbarous" (1.1.383) is persuasive precisely because it reveals that, for a Roman, meaning can be given to the death of Mutius with an appropriate ritual. Thomas P. Anderson, considering the performative nature of such oaths, suggests that in the play, oaths are "virtually identified with the acts of violence that accompany them" (Anderson 32). His suggestion that within *Titus Andronicus*, the "representations of tortured and disfigured Protestant martyrs give flesh to the

controversy over language" (20), is misleading, because, like James Calderwood's belief in the dislocation between language and action,¹⁵ Anderson's presumption is rooted in the idea that physical action holds consistent meaning during the play. Lavinia's mutilated body directly contradicts such assumptions. Language fails in Titus Andronicus precisely because Lavinia cannot speak to exclaim her suffering. Her endurance stands in place of her words, and in the face of such powerful expression, attempts at verbal communication fall short. Rhetoric is obsolete, because it is overshadowed by blood, which, in itself is exposed as pointless. The symbolic actions that Titus offers throughout the play – the murder of Mutius,

¹⁵ Calderwood tells us that "Shakespeare fails to mold his verbal style to suit occasion, and as a result, word and deed become dislocated, and come together only to clash (35). He says that "The Rape of Lucrece" is different", because the in the narrative form, language is created by, and not slowed down by rhetorical flourishes (35).

his willing dismemberment of his own hand, and his act of firing his complaints into the skies - achieve nothing but more misery.

Performance theory can help us to understand the failure of ceremony in *Titus Andronicus*. A performative speech act is only successful when accepted on the terms of the speaker by the listener. In order for a speech act to be successful, there must be an agreement on the meaning of the words between both parties. Furthermore, oaths, as Anderson suggests, only work when the pledge is given and accepted on common semiotic ground. In many ways, physical ceremony in the play operates - or fails to operate - along the same principles. An act of violence is offered up on the assumption that the gesture's meaning is shared by those who witness it, and this is rarely the case in *Titus Andronicus*. Even the death of Lavinia, offered up within the context of the analogy of Virginius, is met with incomprehension and disgust. Titus' murder of Mutius, his offering of his severed hand, his act of shooting letters to the gods, are all exposed as posturing and empty ceremony. If witnesses cannot validate with language the sights that are seen, then the killing of Mutius, and indeed,

Lavinia, holds no more symbolism than a madman shooting arrows at the moon. This meaninglessness is exposed most poignantly in the brutality against Lavinia. Try as the characters might, no language can give meaning to the horrific vision of the tongueless, handless, ravished girl, and her sheer grotesqueness exposes any attempt to do so as delusional. Miola talks about how "the ending of the play raises serious questions about the warrior ethos and about the barbarism of victory" (Miola 22), but the only victory in the play belongs to Lavinia, because she alone understands the strength in sufferance. Lavinia is not a sacrifice made for a restoration of a social order, but a witness to its futility.

Unlike the Romans of the play, the Goths make no such attempt to gloss their violence with pious words. The language the Goths use is blunt and active, as Helms suggests, "pressing language into enactment" (Helms 558), allowing the violence to be nothing more than what it is, thereby exposing the failure of piety as metaphor in the face of brute force. When committing the play's most outrageous act – the murder of Bassanius and rape of Lavinia – Tamora refuses to hide the violence behind ceremony, by her rejection of rhetorical framing.

Tamora's insistence that "I will not hear her speak" (2.2.137) is a deliberate rejection of the structures of ceremony that are used in Rome to validate characters' actions, and to justify the horrors we witness. In stripping these acts of what she perceives to be their meaningless religious justifications, Tamora dismisses the power of the tongue to create potency – a decision horrifically symbolized by her sons during Lavinia's abduction. Tamora's refusal to ornament revenge, evidenced by her instructions to her son to "let not this wasp outlive, us both to sting" (2.2.132) reduces the slaughter of Lavinia to no more than practicalities and necessity. Her blunt insistence on denying violence its ceremony stands in opposition to Titus' conventional revenger rhetoric, forcing him into more and more elaborate displays of lamentation, that can only culminate in an enormous spectacle of death and vengeance. In order to give meaning to his family's misfortunes, Titus must assume the role of revenger, claim injustice and social corruption, and offer a ritual righting of the wrongs he perceives done to him, no matter who must be sacrificed. By these actions, Titus merely reaffirms the validity of Tamora's accusation of

irreligious piety. The brutality of his revenge, from the gruesome meat pies, to the slaughtering of his own daughter, is shockingly barbaric, and by styling Lavinia as a martyr, Shakespeare reveals the disparity between the murder he commits and the ceremony that he attempts to impose on it.

This ambivalence we find in the character of Lavinia demonstrates Shakespeare's unease with the notion of sacrifice. In *Titus Andronicus*, the fallibility of sacrifice increases until it quite simply, does not work. By becoming a martyr, Lavinia becomes an icon that stands in opposition to everything a ghost represents in conventional revenge tragedy, because she stands as a constant reminder of the gulf between sacrifice and butchery. A ghost clearly exists beyond the realm of physical pain, and as fleshly tortures cannot contaminate its meaning, it can be read as a pure symbol. If, as John Kerrigan postulates, revenge tragedy is predicated on a structure of displaced agency (Kerrigan 8), Lavinia must be read by the men around her as a martyred sign, so that they may act on her behalf and make her Rome's expiatory sacrifice. But to do so, is to turn her into a premature ghost, to abandon any belief in either human

justice or the power of endurance as a means of negating the power of atrocities committed against the family, instead consciously turning to archaic belief in the power of spectacle. By choosing to allow the victim of the most heinous crime in the play, Lavinia, to continue to walk around on stage, Shakespeare flies in the face of revenge convention and Titus' plans must accommodate this sacrifice to social order that has not yet been made.

The play is unable to dismiss Lavinia's presence, and this gives her power. As a result, her silent onstage body becomes a threat because of her ability to rise above her disgrace. Her capacity to endure her suffering puts her father's histrionics to shame, and the dormant presence of her agency casts a cloud over his insistence on acting on her behalf. Her subtle resistance to her father's authority in the first act makes her an uncomfortable presence of autonomy and resistance to the displaced agency of revenge tragedy – in a sense she becomes a ghost of the son irrationally slaughtered in the first act. Ultimately, Shakespeare's choice to maintain onstage the presence of this passive icon of subversion undermines the resolution of the play, because it denies Titus the right to act on her behalf (and by

doing so, kill her). By continuing to live, Lavinia becomes a ghoulish shadow of female agency, which is so terrifyingly realized in Tamora's furious revenge. Tamora's insistence that "I will not hear her speak" (2.2.137) is a deliberate rejection of the rhetorical ornamentation of violence. Tamora dismisses the power of the tongue to create potency, relying instead on actions, foreshadowing Lavinia's capacity for survival. Lavinia thus becomes a shadow of aggressive female agency, scaring young boys who have not yet reached manhood, such as the young Lucius. Such a threat can only be quashed with violence.

John Klause suggests that we read the play as a tragic satire (Klause 237), and emphasizes the incomprehensiveness of martyrdom, ignoring its appeal.¹⁶ Cynthia Marshall is more specific about the response an

¹⁶ For a greater discussion of the cultural conflation of doctrines in Renaissance England, see introduction.

audience has to Lavinia, describing the appeal as "fetishistic attraction" (Marshall 109), as a part of pornographic violence that the play voyeuristically and enthusiastically promotes. Klause's insistence that the play would appeal primarily to "moderate lay Catholics" (Klause 236) assumes the appeal of spectacle to traditional religion, but, in *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare realizes the danger of spectacle, as it is both attractive and repugnant to the characters. Upon first sight of Lavinia, Marcus' description highlights the gruesomeness of the sight of Lavinia. He says,

Alas, a crimson river of warm blood,
 Like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind
 Doth rise and fall between thy rosed lips,
 Coming and going with thy honey breath.
 But sure some Tereus hath deflowered thee
 And, lest thou shouldst detect him, cut thy tongue.
 Ah, now thou turn'st away thy face for shame,
 And notwithstanding all this loss of blood,
 As from a conduit with three issuing spurts,
 Yet do thy cheeks look red as Titian's face,
 Blushing to be encountered with a cloud.

Marcus' speech is an attempt to mythologize the horror he sees, offering an ironically accurate allusion as a way of attempting to read this otherwise incomprehensible vision of his niece. The rivers and fountains graphically suggest fresh wounds, and blood continuing to flow, or spurt from her bleeding body, evoking the description of Saint Christina, whose blood flowing out of her body was "like as a stream runneth out of a fresh springing well." Shakespeare revisits this image later, when Titus informs her rapists that "here stands the spring whom you have stained with mud" (5.2.170). In *Titus Andronicus*, spectacle is mistaken for meaning, and the significance Titus decides to impose on the overwhelming sight of his daughter becomes his impetus for action.

Titus kills Lavinia for no other reason than "she was enforced, stained and deflowered" (5.3.38), thus focusing the sacrificial energy and his sorrow on his sense of personal shame. Titus consciously interprets Lavinia's martyred signs to justify his own sense of dishonor that he was unable to protect his daughter, and because her continued presence serves to remind him of his inadequacy. By offering her up as a sacrifice, Titus attempts to impose his own revenger's agenda on her,

ritualizing the deed with the help of Saturnius. At the final banquet, Titus asks Saturnius to validate his impending action by drawing on historical example. When Saturnius asserts the righteousness of Virginius' decision to kill his ravished child, Titus responds by saying,

A reason mighty, strong, and effectual;
A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant
For me, most wretched, to perform the like.

(5.4.2 – 4)

By claiming precedent, Titus offers his murder as both a re-enactment and commemoration of the previously approved sacrifice, attempting to turn this slaughter into ceremony. The “pattern, precedent and lively warrant / For me” makes the murder of Lavinia a sacrifice to Titus’ sense of family honor, and marks the deed as one that is a part of an historical trajectory of female sacrifices, offered for the good of the social body, beginning with Lucrece. Charles and Elaine Hallitt tell us that disembodied spirits are necessary to “imply the existence of natural forces that lie dormant until roused by atrocities too great for the world to bear” (Hallitt 21), but in the world of Titus Andronicus, there are no

natural forces waiting to restore balance, only the bafflement of witnesses to Lavinia, who find themselves in desperate need of a meaning that can ameliorate the horror of her presence. The presence of ghosts in these dramas implies an other-worldly order which will judge, and that deliberately conflates the distinction between justice and revenge, but Shakespeare's refusal to grant his characters such security, destabilizes the play, and makes Titus' status as revenger deeply questionable. Revenge is subject to the same pressures as martyrdom, notably the need to suffer through violence on behalf of a particular agenda, and publish one person's truth on another's body. If justice in revenge tragedy, as the Hallitts contend, is indicated by the presence of the supernatural, then *Titus Andronicus* simply becomes an exploration of competing willpower and self-justification. There is no divine order to be imposed on the world, and the characters are reduced to employing shock tactics to make a point, regardless of the human cost. Titus' effort to "solicit heaven and move the gods" (4.3.51) is delusional, no more than a token attempt at self-validation, and as disingenuous as his slaughter of his daughter. The emphasis on human factor renders the

process of revenge dangerously imperfect, and Shakespeare recognizes this, moreover, such awareness halts his ability to offer a satisfactory conclusion to the play. In order to avenge the wrong done to his family, Titus creates a ritual that both avenges the rape of his daughter and ensures her destruction. When confronting the bound Chiron and Demetrius, he tells them that "I will be revenged" (5.3.195), for the staining of his child. Throughout his speech to the sons, his repetition of the order to Lavinia to come could be read to suggest her reluctance to participate, or at the very least, a statement of her father's desire to control her movements. In act four, Marcus illustrates this type of presumptive reading of her actions when he watches her raise her arms, and says,

I think that she means that there was more than one
Confederate in the fact. Ay, more there was –
Or else to heaven she heaves them for revenge.

(4.1.38 – 40)

Her revelation of the rape offers the men around her the excuse for revenge that they have been seeking, interpreting her disclosure of her rapists as "what God will have discovered for revenge" (4.1.73). Both Titus

and Marcus read Lavinia as complicit in their desires, assuming the authority to act on her behalf, insisting on her yearning for blood. Lavinia, bereft of speech, cannot plea for revenge, but equally, having witnessed the ineffectualness of violence firsthand, she cannot plea for sufferance, either. Her use of Ovid, in particular, illustrates this ambiguity. "The Rape of Lucrece" and *Titus Andronicus* both utilize Philomel as an emblem of speech, but for Lavinia, the association with Ovid's heroine constricts her agency. Lucrece says,

Come Philomel, that sing'st of ravishment,
 Make thy sad grove in my dishevel'd hair;
 As the dank earth weeps at thy languishment,
 So I at each sad strain will strain a tear
 And with deep groans the diapason bear;
 For burden-wise I'll hum on Tarquin still,
 While thou on Tereus descants better skill.

("The Rape of Lucrece" 1128 – 34)

In "The Rape of Lucrece," Shakespeare uses Philomel to foreshadow Lucrece's control over the publication of her shame by emphasizes the changed Philomel's voice, but in *Titus Andronicus*, the metaphor becomes more restrictive. While the audience is encouraged to empathize and read

Lucrece as heroic because of her insistence on her testimony, Lavinia is denied access to her voice by Chiron and Demetrius and we can only stare in horror at the way in which the rape has been written on her body. The story of Philomel is not something that inspires, but defines Lavinia, because it is the model for her mutilation. Instead of becoming the source of her voice, as with Lucrece, it serves to restrict her within a role of passive victim, and allows Titus to assume that Lavinia needs an agent to act for her. Shakespeare thus deliberately creates Lavinia as a more ambivalent figure, and literally, takes the control of her death out of her hands. By the excision of her tongue, Lavinia is denied the chance to articulate her testimony, because unlike Saint Christina, no miracles will allow her to continue to berate her persecutors. Lavinia becomes a symbol of discrepancy between those who give testimony and those left to interpret the legacy, making her not only a sign of "the omnipresent violence which marks the play" (Helms 56) but also a sign of the futility of such violence, and the arrogance with which it is applied.

In spite of multiple attempts to validate the violence in the play, the ghastliness of what we see

shows quite simply that such sacrifice does not work. The visual power of physical torture is sufficiently enormous to derail the language, action and even genre of the play as characters struggle to contextualize and manage the horrible vision of the mutilated Lavinia in a way that can give her torture meaning. Helms suggests that Marcus' speech authorizes the movement of Lavinia, his directions of fly away, bleed, blush, and so forth as directing the silent action on stage (Helms 559), but instead, we should see his descriptions of her movement as his way of processing the horror of what he sees through refocusing on her role as a sign. Articulating the image is an attempt to manage the pain and outrage Lavinia's body inspires, and by describing her movements, Marcus is able to avoid trying to understand her pain in favor of a more symbolic reading of her suffering. In the world of the *Andronici*, bloodshed has previously been a way of establishing honor, as evidenced in Titus' pride in his fallen sons, and Lucius' offer of suicide as a means of proving truth. According to the Roman system of honor, bloodshed and death stands for something. Titus, when faced with burying his sons, calls the family mausoleum a "sweet cell of virtue and nobility" (1.1.96). The Roman

rites that the Andronici adhere to is evidence of an ongoing insistence in consecrating violence with ritual words to make it sufferable, but the agonies inflicted upon Lavinia transcend comprehension. The only way in which her family can live with her is to venerate her body, and view her as a sacrifice already made to some form of greater good. Titus uses a sacrificial ethos to justify her death before Saturnius, and shows his belief that there lies a nobility in what has happened. As a result, Lavinia is mythologized to allow her father to follow his impulse towards violence. Therefore, it is no surprise that Marcus attempts to ritualize the revelation of the rape, shifting the focus away from empathy with Lavinia's plight, instead prioritizing the social aspect of her attack. He says,

My lord, kneel down with me; Lavinia kneel;
 And kneel, sweet boy, the Roman Hector's hope,
 And swear with me – as, with the woeful fere
 And father of that chaste dishonoured dame,
 Lord Junius Brutus swore for Lucrece' rape –
 That we will prosecute by good advice
 Mortal revenge upon these traitorous Goths,
 And see their blood, or die with this reproach.

(4.1.87 – 94)

Marcus' repeated instructions to kneel, lends the oath a ceremonial air. By likening himself to the Brutus who capitalized on Lucrece's death, Marcus is taking himself out of the realm of onlooker, and turning the rape into an emblem of all the wrongs that have been inflicted upon the Andronici up until this point. Although he abandons calls for justice, he uses the word traitorous to define the Goths, implying a connection between Lavinia and the social body. His final line, that the Andronici shall "see their blood, or die with this reproach" simultaneously pledges revenge and commits to a sacrifice, to blot away the shame imposed on his family. Moreover, Titus' murder of Chiron and Demetrius must be equally ceremonious, in order to re-categorize it as a deed committed in the name of justice, and validate Titus' anger. Titus describes his plan to butcher the men almost as an invocation, and twice refers to the way in which Lavinia will "receive the blood" (5.2.196) that will spill from their cut throats. Titus here is following the ancient model of sacrifice, in which bulls would have their throats cut to the Gods, then their bodies baked for a communal feast, yet his declaration

that "I mean to martyr you" (5.2.168) clouds the issue. By contextualizing Chiron and Demetrius as martyrs, Shakespeare conflates the brutality that Titus sees inflicted upon his daughter with the violence he intends to confer upon her attackers. This double use of the word implies Shakespeare's deep ambivalence towards the validity of martyrdom, and creates such confusion in Titus' agenda that the symbolic meaning of this slaughter becomes negated. Consistently, throughout revenge tragedy, the plays end on a note of ritualized violence that means something, but in *Titus Andronicus*, violence cannot be ritualized, and is exposed as nothing more than savagery. Even more disheartening is the entrance of Lucius, who as Molly Easo Smith points out, speaks with the voice of the old order (Easo Smith 317), appeasing the horrified and befuddled crowd by offering honor to the slain corpses, in much the same way that Titus capitulated to the demands of his sons in the burial of Mutius. Lucius shows a startling lack of understanding when he announces that "my scars can witness, dumb although they are" (5.3. 113) the veracity of his sacrifice for his city. Lucius, in offering his scars as proof, is assuming that his wounds can speak to his

efforts on behalf of Rome, "that have preserved her welfare in my blood" (5.3.109) and perpetuate this myth of the noble sacrifice for Rome.

Lucius offers his father up, not as a man who reacted with equal cruelty to the machinations of Tamora, nor even as a man who brought ruin about himself by his initiating act of ferocity, but as "that true hand that fought Rome's quarrel out / And sent her enemies to the grave" (5.3.101 – 2). Furthermore, Lucius' absence of pity shows that little has been learned, as he condemns Aaron to an excruciating death and decisively denies Tamora any burial rites, while interring his father and sister in the family cell. Douglas E. Green's suggestion that the play ends on a reconstitution of patriarchy (Green 323) is exactly right, but I think we can go further to argue that Shakespeare exposes the deep flaws at work in this patriarchal order. There is no real reconstitution of order in the play, merely continued cycles of butchery and misery that are exposed as fruitless and futile. Titus merely recreates the honor killing he inflicts upon Alarbus and Mutius in the sacrifice of Chiron, Demetrius and Lavinia, and Lucius continues on this path of brutality. Yet, like his father

before him, Lucius commits all of his actions in the name of piety, and in both *Titus Andronicus* and *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare exposes such actions as self-delusional fictions.

**Chapter Three: "His sacred blood": The Body's Legacy in
*Julius Caesar***

Standing across Caesar's body in the marketplace, Antony follows his famous oration with the fallacious claim that his power of speech has not the power to "stir men's blood" (3.2.224). He wants to encourage the plebeians of Rome to look once more upon the piteous sight of the slain Caesar's corpse. The assumption that underpins Antony's observation is that the blood of Caesar can "speak" more to the citizens than any words the orators might use. And he's right, for the crowd repudiates Brutus' reasoning after the body is revealed, confirming the power of raw visual spectacle. In presenting the body of Caesar onstage, Shakespeare is capitalizing on the appeal of bloodshed, and Antony's decision to make a relic of the corpse evokes the resistance to iconography that characterized England's religious revolution. Throughout the Reformation, the power of spectacle was deeply disturbing, prompting more radical reformers to rampant iconoclasm. Shakespeare was keenly aware of controversies surrounding such spectacles, particularly since they were a source of

anti-theatrical prejudice. In "Shakespeare and The Exorcists," Stephen Greenblatt cites Samuel Harsnett's *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* as typifying the view of the theatre as maintaining "the indelible mark of falsity, tawdriness and rhetorical manipulation" (Greenblatt 112). Jonas Barish discusses the way in which Medieval antitheatrical writers viewed with disgust the "feigned recreation" (Barish 69) that the plays offered, drawing attention to the clerical resistance to spectacle that threatened to redirect the public gaze from a church that employed many of the same visual tactics, but for different ends, therefore blurring the boundaries between "true" and "false" spectacle.¹⁷ These critics who argue

¹⁷ Furthermore, Barish proposes in his discussion of sixteenth century anti-theatricalism, that there is an element of collusion between spectator and performer, which effectively renders an audience member complicit in the creation of false spectacle. His reading of Renaissance resistance to theatrical spectacle builds on the principles outlined in his discussion of Medieval theatre, and

for the dangerous allure of theatrical iconography recognize the early modern anxiety that is caused by the potency of image during the Reformation.

Antitheatricalists argue that staged performances reinforced the notion of unthinking belief in what is seen, and mirrored the practice of venerating church idols and material objects. In *Julius Caesar*, this power to dazzle is manipulated and exploited, revealing the extent to which the 'truth' of an image is dependent on its successful manipulation. The image of Caesar's carcass recalls the alarming spectacle of Christ's mutilated body, previously found on crucifixes and rood screens, which although now banished from churches, re-emerged in texts such as *Actes and Monuments* evoking one

applies the popular label of "idolatry" onto theatrical spectacle, but focuses his analysis primarily on attacks of the mimesis enacted by players, and assuming the response from the audience that is outlined in the earlier chapter. See Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*.

of the age's fiercest religious controversies. The bloody body of Caesar that Antony unveils is one of the play's most arresting sights, one that is not lightly wiped from the mind and incites the watching crowd to explode in violent fury. Anthony is a genius at manipulating powerful images in a manner that outstrips Brutus' skill, and Shakespeare's play exploits and explores the troubling sources of this power of violent spectacle. Literary critics have long been aware of the ceremonial nature of *Julius Caesar*, explaining Brutus' attempts at creating ritual as an example of a self-delusional attempt to justify the slaughter of his friend, Caesar.¹⁸ Brents Stirling's 1951 article, "Or Else This Were a

¹⁸ The discussion of ceremony is one of the more popular approaches to the play, matched only by discussions of the politics that underpin the text and Shakespeare's representations of Rome. For examples of the political approach, see Paul Cantor, *Shakespeare's Rome, Republic and Empire* and Rehorn, Wayne A. "The Crisis of the Aristocracy in *Julius Caesar*."

Savage Spectacle," paved the way for the discussion of the sacred elements in the play, specifically noting the failure of consecration through Brutus' incomplete attempt to "transmute political killing into ritual" (Stirling 769). Naomi Conn Liebler goes further, suggesting that the conspirators' lack of success arises from the fact that "the Roman populace has lost touch with the real sacramental import of the ritual" (Conn Liebler 98), while in the same volume, David Kaula moves in a slightly different direction, attempting to prove that Caesar is a quasi-divine figure, evoking a Protestant horror of papist idolatry from deep within the play. Over the years, a critical consensus has emerged to suggest that Rome is a place where, as Lawrence Danson suggests, "words and rituals have dangerously lost their meaning" (Danson 53). This assumption that Brutus is unable to sanctify the killing of Caesar is rooted in the premise that Caesar's death cannot offer any meaning to the Roman citizens in the play. Girard proposes that Brutus utilizes hollow ceremony in a vain attempt to sanctify this specifically political slaughter, something he terms "mimetic envy" (Girard 212). Consistently, critics describe Caesar's Rome as a site of meaningless

ceremony, a place in which words vainly strive to fulfill the city's spiritual void, but I would like to argue that belief in ceremony is rife among these Romans, and it is precisely this power of spiritual belief that derails Brutus' plan. In spite of Brutus' confidence that he can manipulate the presentation of Caesar's body to suit his political ambitions, he consistently betrays a belief in the rites he would condemn, and this ambivalence guarantees his failure.

Throughout the play, Brutus' actions would suggest that ceremony is still a potent force in the play. His words conflict as he renounces the value of oath, while simultaneously begging that the deed be framed as a sacrifice. His famous insistence on carving Caesar "as a dish fit for the gods" (2.1.173) suggests that he finds himself instinctively returning to ritual to validate what he does. Moreover, Brutus continually insists on the power of gesture, desiring to walk into the marketplace bathed in Caesar's blood, and even chooses to die in the high Roman fashion, impaling himself on his sword, so that "I shall have glory by this losing day" (5.5.36). Brutus fashions his final act as a self-sacrifice that might restore his tarnished honor — a notion that

Shakespeare credits by having both Antony and Octavius posthumously acknowledge him to be "the noblest Roman of them all" (5.5.68). I intend to argue that it is neither the play, nor any of the Roman citizens who lack the comprehension or belief that gives ritual its potency, and that Brutus does indeed sanctify the killing of Caesar because his actions unwittingly acknowledge that the power of spectacle is far greater than his words could ever be. Standing in the marketplace, Brutus mistakenly assumes that his rationality can recontextualize Caesar's death, and that he can simultaneously ritually kill and deny the ceremony's validity, persuading the citizens to accept this faulty reasoning. Because of the space of uncertainty that Brutus creates through this contradiction, Antony is able to usurp and manipulate the impact that the murder has on the Roman masses. In spite of the conspirator efforts to prevent the worship of living Caesar as a god-on-earth, Caesar's corpse becomes a consecrated object, and the citizens fall into idolatrous worship of Rome's dead monarch. The sacrifice of Caesar explores an analogous contradiction in Reformation theology and culture. The play illustrates the overwhelming power that the so-

called Catholic aesthetic retains, the sacrifice of Caesar reflecting the deep ambivalence towards the high spectacle of Eucharistic rituals that were still imprinted on the early modern English mind.

Sharpe's proposal that the ideology that underpinned public accounts of martyrdom was the attempt to use one public death to contribute to the shaping of the social body by asserting the ideology of obedience and conformity (Sharpe 150) illustrates the continuing problem with martyrdom throughout the Reformation: that is, the question of who becomes a martyr. The dedication given in Foxe to letters, examinations and other written texts, such as Tyndale's *Obedience of a Christian Man*, which is excerpted at length in *Actes and Monuments*, indicate Foxe's intention to educate, more than titillate or sensationalize. However, such accounts find themselves sandwiched between the narratives such as the story of Hellen Stirke, who was downed "albeit she had a child sucking on her breast" (625). Foxe's insistence on accounting for the martyrdom of so many ordinary people who died gruesomely to profit the emerging English Protestant state reinforces the extent to which reformed theology was unable to fully reject sacrificial theology.

Instead of rejecting this theological point of contradiction that sacrifice offered Reformation England, Shakespeare's play embraces it. Caesar's body becomes a locus for religious devotion and fervor in Rome. Considering the way in which his shattered body is turned into a sacred relic, a "rich legacy" left to the Roman citizens, it is possible to see that ceremony in Rome is most certainly not bankrupt, but a deeply contested site of meaning in which the popular voice battles against the Senators' re-interpretations of traditional ideas. The elevation of Caesar's bloodied flesh evokes the Catholic iconography so deeply feared by Protestant Reformers, and looks back to a more medieval form of worship, evoking the popular veneration of the saints' bodies and holy relics. Antony is able to exploit this latent power and his belief that Caesar's wounds "like dumb mouths do ope their ruby lips" (3.1.260) attests to the potency of Caesar's body as sacred relic. In spite of his protestations, Brutus' presentation of Caesar's blood invests it with symbolic meaning, and his insistence on wearing it as an emblem of tyranny recognizes the sacred power the blood holds for deliverance of the Roman citizens. The reaction of the people, and the raw,

violent emotion that Brutus inadvertently unleashes in Rome serves to validate the presentation of sacrificed flesh as magical relic with powers of purification. Through Antony's superior performance Caesar's body is consecrated in the way Brutus most feared and drives him from the city.

The spectacle that the desecrated body of Caesar represents is one that hearkens back to the medieval cult of the saints, and is treated as such by Antony and the citizens of Rome. Their attitude implies an intercessionary divine power that is instilled into the persecuted body, cementing a Roman sense of the world in which religion is conflated with more scientific and logical phenomena, an idea that Shakespeare validates in his presentation of Rome. Casca's discussion of the strange sights he has encountered in the streets, including the slave with the burning hand, the prowling lion and hundred ghastly women, creates an environment in

which superstition is justified because the world is a prophetically mysterious place. The discussions of omens, the garlanding of statues and the desire to see Caesar return, all indicate the way in which the visual is privileged over the verbal in this play,¹⁹ and what the conspirators arrogantly dismiss as the foolish infatuations of the common man is a symbolic power that is integral to Roman belief. The Rome of *Julius Caesar* is one that is deeply mired in superstition, and these ritualistic elements of religion offer security when danger threatens and the people are forced to choose between competing rhetoric in the marketplace. In spite of Caesar's protestation that "I am ashamed I did yield" (2.2.106) to the power of Calphurnia's dreams, his first response to his wife's visions was to bid his priests to

¹⁹ For the opposite argument, applied to *The Tempest*, see Neill, Michael. "'Noises/Sounds, and sweet airs': The Burden of Shakespeare's *Tempest*."

sacrifice an animal to the gods, in order to create a sense of security.

Caesar's superstitious fears mark him as typically Roman, but his belief is one that Shakespeare gives weight to by the discovery of the augurers making a sacrifice on his behalf: "Plucking the entrails of an offering forth, / [They] could not find a heart within the beast" (2.2.39 – 40). In opposition to a play such as *Hamlet* or *Macbeth* in which portents and omens are interrogated not only as divine judgments, but as a means of exploring an individual's psyche as they respond to inexplicable phenomena, the characters of *Julius Caesar* rarely meditate on the implications of these occurrences. Frequently, such enormous signs are passed over with little self-reflection in response, illustrating a strange characteristic of the Roman plays. Aside from the second act musings of Brutus, the characters refrain from revealing their innermost thoughts in private monologues, and instead are restricted to observations that give little more than glimpses into their underlying feelings. Caesar's recognition of his wife's apprehension and his own fear is manifest in his decision to submit to her request not to go to the Senate house the day of the

murder. However, instead of offering us the thought process that led to Caesar's decision, the play simply gives us his conclusion and leaves his audience to guess at his underlying motivation. This structure of the play that rejects any real interiority within the play in favor of dramatic spectacle creates an environment that is clouded with symbols to be interpreted, which contributes to the already superstitious environment, a world that Mark Rose calls "fundamentally mysterious" (Rose 262). *Julius Caesar* deliberately creates a world of mystery and the celestial happenings, combined with the shadowy presence of the gods in the majority of the character's psyches suggests a world in which ceremony very much retains its power to inflame and mystify and is directly connected to the mysteries that characterize this Rome. Cinna's foreshadowing of his own demise, Ligarius' assertion that Brutus "like an exorcist, hast conjured up / My mortified spirit" (2.1.323 – 4), and Portia's assumption that the vision of her on her knees can "charm" her husband into revealing his innermost thoughts, suggests a Rome that blends together a belief in magic and the divine, a world that early modern

reformers would have scathingly characterized as Catholic.

The comet spied over Rome offers an opportunity to examine the way in which the Reformation attempted to harness dramatic natural phenomena, and this event, found in Plutarch, both reinforces the mystical powers that hover around the edges of *Julius Caesar*, and considers the way in which such events manifest themselves in the popular mind. This "tempest of dropping fire" (1.3.10) was commonly viewed as a sign from God, either as a portent of doom, or divine endorsement of a particular course of action. The meaning of these visions was open to political manipulation, as Octavius Caesar recognized, when he declared the historical comet to be a marker of Caesar's welcome into heaven. This declaration both secured Octavius' relationship to the newly appointed deity as well as being a popular decision that gained the

new monarch great support among the populace.²⁰ Thomas Aquinas regarded comets as omens anticipating the apocalypse and calling for salvation and there was sufficient astrological activity during the late sixteenth-century to draw the subjects of comets into the Reformation debate. Philip Melanchthon's influential 1523 pamphlet on monstrous births, saw the comet as indicative of the Roman Catholic Church's imminent ruin, and the herald of political upheaval through war (Genuth 47). The reformer Melanchthon's pamphlet presented a political interpretation that moved away from the traditional view of the comet as omen of death, to one that may bring destruction, but in doing so, will purge the world and deliver the church from the hands of Roman tyranny.

²⁰ Sara Schechner Genuth, in her book *Comets, Popular Culture and the Birth of Modern Cosmology* traces the political appropriations of comets from ancient times. See Genuth, Sara Schechner, *Comets, Popular Culture and the Birth of Modern Cosmology*.

Two comets were sighted over England during the late sixteenth century; one in November, 1577 and another that was visible over the course of several weeks during 1582. In the late 1570's and early 1580's a flurry of pamphlets circulated in an attempt to address recent celestial happenings. The least overtly political of these documents, written by an author known only as F.K., in 1583, addresses scientific approaches, before reminding us that comets are a reminder from God "to pray that he may turne from us what evyl soever his comettes signifie," continuing the popular path of viewing comets as a celestial omen of doom. Such an approach is typical of even the most scientifically minded treatises, and other pamphlets go farther. Francis Shakelton discusses biblical contexts of comets in great detail, before drawing in a discussion of recent astronomical happenings – for example, he reads the four eclipses seen during the reign of Henry VIII as a divine endorsement of just rulers. Like many of these pamphleteers, Shakelton conflates science and theology, acknowledging his debt of understanding to Aristotle's explanation of comets as natural phenomenon, while insisting that, "Lord God hymself is the originall authour, and principall worker

of this Starre (as well as of all others), making it, an immediate messenger, and minister of his will." Thomas Twyne goes further, emphatically arguing for the recent comets as a sign of support for Queen Elizabeth I, arguing that

It doth not only portende the inseperable conjunction in marriage, as it were, of our most true and naturall soveraigne Queene Elizabeth, with the holy Church and Gospel of Iesus Christ, indissolubly united: but also of such ordinancies, leagues and confederacies, as she hath taken, or meaneth to take, eyther within her own dominions, or abroad with foreign countries.

Twyne attempts to incorporate all possible interpretations, arguing for a divine celebration of the English Queene, while acknowledging the roles that comets play as omens of death for princes in foreign countries. He acknowledges the forbidding power of such phenomena, when he says that

some vyle, ungodly, and wickedly disposed persons, thinking at such tymes as comets have appeared, that the minds of men being troubled and disquieted, they have had occasion to set any mischief abroad,

have snatched opportunity, attempted most horrible enterprises.

Twyne then goes on to list such mischief, including the raising of rebellions, the dissemination heretical and treasonous ideas, new religions and the incitement of war. What is common to many of the discussions of comets, however, is the way in which the authors integrate scientific thought, historical example, and traditional theological interpretation, often resulting in unstable readings of celestial phenomena.

Keith Thomas, in his landmark study *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, firmly locates "sciences" such as astrology, prophecy and superstitions in Catholic domain, suggesting that Protestantism rejected the appeal of popular magic as part of its doctrinal drive against the efficacy of ceremony. Yet, his proposal that "the century after the Reformation thus constituted a transitional period, during which a variety of magical agencies continued to offer their services to those for whom the Protestant notion of self-help was too arduous" (Thomas 639), implies the similarity in appeal to what he calls the "unsophisticated mind" (638) between the cunning man and religious leader. Thomas' observation that during

this time period, "holy relics became wonder-working fetishes" (26), suggests the difficulty of this transitory moment. In order to reach a culture steeped in these pseudo-scientific ways of reading the world, the reformers had to rely on similar rhetorical techniques and strategies of propaganda. The tension between doctrinal dismissal of magical beliefs, and the need to invest Protestantism's own martyrs and leaders with a sense of the sacred became a characteristic of the English Reformation.

Shakespeare incorporates this sense of uncertainty into *Romeo and Juliet*, declining to focus on the popular opinion of a comet as an event that foreshadows princely death, and choosing to acknowledge the comet only in act one, scene three, as viewed by the conspirators. Casca, having witnessed the "tempest dropping fire" attributes it to the more conventional meanings, proposing to Cicero that "either there is civil strife in heaven/ or else the world, too saucy with the gods, / Incenses them to send destruction" (1.3.11 – 3). Casca and Cicero's fear echoes the popular early modern interpretation of these occurrences, but Cassius' immediate entrance, "unbraced," and his subsequent declaration that he had "bared [his]

bosom to the thunderstone" (1.3.49) not only shows the desire of the conspirators to reinterpret traditional symbols and turn their back on the fears and superstitions of Rome but more cynically hits at Cassius' own immortal longings, compromising further Brutus' sacrificial intentions. Cassius even goes so far as to reprimand Casca for his fear, telling him that,

You are dull, Casca, and those sparks of life
That should be in a Roman you do want,
Or else you use not. You look pale, and gaze,
And put on fear, and cast yourself in wonder,
To see the strange impatience of the heavens.

(1.3.57 – 61)

Cassius, like Brutus, attempts to reject what he views as a superstitious approach, privileging his own opinion that when interpreting these natural events, the evidence suggests that "heaven hath infused them with these spirits / to make them instruments of fear and warning / Unto some monstrous state" (1.3.69 – 71). Like Brutus, Cassius cannot entirely reject the rhetoric of superstition and heavenly intervention, but simply demands credit for his ability literally to stand in defiance of the traditional meaning. He attempts to

reject superstition by facing the storm, but in demanding credit for his bravery, recognizes the phenomena as infused with a divine power. Like so many reformation astronomers, the conspirators make an effort to distinguish between what they consider to be thoughtless following of superstition versus scientifically and empirically reading heavenly signs, but consistently fail to adhere to their distinction and fall back into convention.

Such a response is unsurprising when we consider how deeply Shakespeare's Rome is a world steeped in the past. Tradition is an inescapable habit for all Romans in the play, and tradition, as Reformers proposed, is frequently linked with spectacle. *Julius Caesar's* Rome is a world dominated by the presence of tradition, both in terms of personal and communal recollection, a place in which the past dictates collective Roman identity, and shapes behavior. Cassius calls on Brutus to recall his noble ancestry as a spur to commit to the conspiracy, and Brutus himself relies on the awareness of his family's age-old nobility for motivation, linking himself to his forefathers who ran the tyrant Tarquin out of their beloved city. The tribunes evoke memories of past

triumphs, begging the people to remember the love that was borne to Pompey as part of their attempt to fight the wave of Caesar's popularity. Even in Brutus' home, Portia reminds her husband of her past loyalty and their former relationship when entreating him to confide in her, illustrating the extent to which present decisions in Rome are dependent on an awareness of the past. Indeed, the most pivotal scene in the play, the competing orations in the marketplace, is predicated on selective memory. Each orator strives to reconstruct a past image of Caesar in the minds of the Roman citizens, in order to influence the future actions of the citizens. From his pulpit, Brutus appeals to the wisdom and senses of the people in order to exculpate them from their role in the ascent of Caesar. Brutus politically re-creates Caesar's ambition as the sole motivating factor in his political rise, and presents himself as a loyal and honorable friend to Caesar, with no personal motives for the murder. Antony responds by presenting an alternate history designed to create a new mythology around Caesar. His myth-building challenges the veracity of Brutus' speech, is replete with theatrical gestures, and through this debate, we see ways in which the past can be

appropriated to suit ceremonial purposes. This pivotal scene presents a dangerous world, caught between reliance on a contextualized past, and political attempts to shape the future. In the marketplace, ritual becomes a political commodity, and the beliefs of the people are exploited in an attempt to pursue individual agendas. The characters in *Julius Caesar* are almost exclusively motivated by their awareness of the past and traditions of Rome, and throughout the play, remembrance is continually evoked as a means of persuasion. Shakespeare gives us a Rome poised on the cusp of two worlds, and the instinctive reaction for most of its citizens is not to look forward to an uncertain future, but to retreat into the safety of the known precedent. The play's emphasis on ritualized sacrificial violence is evocative of the controversy surrounding the question of the Mass as either a mystical summoning of Christ, or a commemoration of a historical event. Invoking, and sometimes even enacting what has gone before (as Brutus wishes to do through his slaughter of Caesar), is itself an act that turns history into ritual, implying that a re-enactment of a successful deed somehow creates a link to the

original intent behind a given action, and can tap into the efficacy or potency of the original deed.

In his essay, "The Birth of the History Play: Saint, Sacrifice and Reformation," Benjamin Griffith argues that history plays emerge at this time in response to the way in which "a sense of commemoration takes precedence over the sense of presence" (217). Griffith looks at the Edwardine relocation of emphasis on the memorial nature of the Eucharist in response to what was seen as the theatrical emphasis on the presence of Christ found in the Roman Mass. Griffith traces the evolution of the history play from the medieval saint's play, and reads Bale's King Johan as evidence that "martyrdom is only efficacious with respect to its future meaning" (232), emphasizing the importance of the audience's role in the validation of Protestant martyrs. Brutus attempts to reenact history (notably the exile of Tarquin from Rome) in order to influence the way in which his murder of Caesar will be seen when it becomes history. By doing so, he unwittingly recognizes the power that the immediate image will hold, and naively assumes that his conflation of past and future will override the symbolic power that the common eye may read into his action. He attempts to

reject traditional iconography in favor of the conspirators' revisionism.

The wound display carries Eucharistic undertones, most notably evoking the most potent symbol of Renaissance Christian thought – the Passion. The play goes to great lengths to reject the notion that Caesar can be seen as what Kaula calls "quasi-divine," by an emphasis on Caesar's physical flaws. Moreover, the invocation of Christ imagery that arises from such instances as the much-heralded notion that the conspirators be "sacrificers and not butchers" (2.1.166) and Cassius' proposal that his men wash their hands in the slain Caesar's blood to purify their recent deed, is raised precisely to elicit a comparison that will leave Caesar wanting. The play is littered with Christian iconography, from the three and thirty wounds, to the idolatrous statues of Caesar that are "decked with ceremonies" (1.1.65), and trouble the politicians so greatly. Kaula, René Girard and Peter Anderson all talk about qualities that mark Caesar out with "the sacrificial victim's identification with the world" (Anderson, 21) suggesting a need to sacrifice Caesar in particular (as opposed to any other high profile Roman)

to benefit his world. This idea of Caesar fitting the specific context so snugly, renders him one of Girard's stereotypes of persecution, which implies that he is marked out as some kind of quasi-divine figure; however, the play goes to great lengths to reject such association by pointing out the weaknesses of the living Caesar, unlike a character such as Coriolanus, whose strength borders on supernatural, and is matched only by his aloofness and arrogance. Caesar is not separated from his Roman people in any way that might make a Christ association sustainable. Cassius marks Caesar out as undeserving of becoming a monarch because he is physically weak, having previously been bested by Cassius in a swimming race, but more important is Shakespeare's choice to include scenes that highlight Caesar's physical flaws – his epilepsy, deafness, and inability to father children. Brutus focuses primarily on what "the common eyes" (2.1.179) will see, recognizing that in his Rome, idolatry is not necessarily contingent upon the selection of a worthy object of veneration, but the selection of what appears to be the most obvious choice of veneration placed in front of the people. This awareness creates a problem for the conspirators: how to make the citizens

understand a "purpose necessary, and not envious" (2.1.178), and because Shakespeare resists giving us any real insight into Caesar's motivations, the conspirators are left incapable of adequately explaining the burning need to sacrifice Caesar for Rome. The closest Brutus comes to a rationalization is at the beginning of act two, when he says,

Th'abuse of greatness is when it disjoins
 Remorse from power; and, to speak truth of Caesar,
 I have not known when his affections swayed
 More than his reason. But 'tis a common proof,
 That lowliness is young ambition's ladder
 Whereto the climber-upward turns his face;
 But when he once attains the upmost round,
 He then unto the ladder turns his back,
 Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
 By which he did ascend: so Caesar may;

(2.1.18 – 27)

Even though Brutus' rhetoric evokes the divine, with the image of Caesar climbing into the heavens to sit among the gods, the crucial word here remains "may." Brutus' eloquent theory is based entirely around conjecture of what Caesar *may* turn into, admitting that he has yet to

see such qualities in Caesar when he acknowledges that "I have not known when his affections swayed /More than his reason." Cassius exacerbates his sense of inevitable future injustice by indignantly declaiming Caesar's right to even presume greatness, due to his physical limitations, ambiguously asking "should Rome *et cetera*" (2.1.47, my italics), feeding Brutus' imagination, yet never giving any more reason than the personal rancor and jealousy. It seems that what angers the conspirators most is that Caesar is *not* divine, that he is one of them, chosen over them by the popular voice for adoration, because of his superior ability to manipulate theatrics, not his god-like characteristics.

The divine allusions locate the play within a world of piety, one that values sacrifice, something that early modern reformers would insultingly characterize as Catholic. The opening act is full of events and observations that carry religious undertones, and mix ancient Roman rites with allusions that would have been noticeably relevant to a contemporary Elizabethan audience. The first scene offers a mocking joke at the expense of the confused tribunes, with the cobbler's declaration that he is "a mender of bad soles" (1.1.14)

misunderstood by Flavius, who bristles at the prospect of being "mended" by such a fickle idolater. This moment is followed by the politicians calling on the people to renounce the processional celebration of Caesar's return, a celebration, that they argue, comes at the price of Pompey's spilt blood. Like Puritan preachers, they propose that instead of participating in a ritual in which meaning buckles under the weight of spectacle, the people "run to your houses, fall upon your knees, / Pray to the gods" for wisdom and guidance, privileging quiet, introspective prayer over noisy public ceremonies. It is the concerns of the tribunes in the early part of the play that mirrors the concerns of the conspirators – a fear that Caesar will cease to be human, and a part of the democratic political system of Rome, but will stand apart as a god-like monarch, forcing them all to "stand under one man's awe" (2.1. 52). In short, they fear that Caesar will become an idol, worshipped by the masses. Brutus takes an extremist stance, viewing all aspects of traditional religion as archaic, superstitious and primitive, a mindset that dominates the view towards a so-called Catholic aesthetic throughout the play and that was characteristic of the paradoxical attitude that

dominated sixteenth-century approaches towards the idea of sacrifice. The glorification of Elizabethan martyrs created new icons for adoration, and even if the traditional dependence on the intercession of the idols had been doctrinally removed, the popular culture that sprang up around contemporary martyrs insisted that the worship still remained – one might even go so far as to suggest that it was spurred on by the martyrologists. Caesar's death transforms him from a potential tyrant to a Roman martyr, and like many religious corpses in the sixteenth century, he is appropriated as a relic, and offered to the people as an affirmation of faith in the city of Rome.

The central problem in the play stems from Brutus' dismissal of what he sees as a backwards looking idolatry of the masses combined with his inability to truly turn his back on this popular way of thinking, by demanding that that the only choices available to the conspirators are between holy sacrifice or mindless butchery. Even as he rejects idolatry in his speeches, his actions validate the impact it holds over the citizens of Rome and mark him as susceptible to the same idolatrous tendencies. This ambivalence is characterized by his intellectual

desire to override the seduction that the visual image holds for him. Brutus views himself as a uniquely rational man, and sees the battle within himself during the plotting of the assassination as a battle between "the genius and the mortal instruments" (2.1.66), within himself, both of which can be subject to counsel. His continual attempts to rationalize the murder, and his desperate investment in his own power of rational thinking is the reason he so willingly enters into the marketplace with Antony. However, this extreme desire of Brutus to reduce everything to the power of words and his resistance to the power of images sets him apart from the ways in which the citizens of Rome communicate, and he is left foolishly surprised when he fails to present a sacrificial image that will be accepted by no other authority than an invocation of his honor.

What the politicians so arrogantly and misguidedly reject is precisely the popularity of images and ritual that was supposedly shattered during the English Reformation. In the Rome of *Julius Caesar*, there is a gulf between the beliefs of the senator and the beliefs of the Roman masses. This conflicting sense of ceremony, coupled with Brutus' misplaced assumption that his

intellectual rationalization of ritual has the capacity to override the potency of spectacle and subdue popular feeling, is what results in the conspirators' downfall. When committing to murdering Caesar, Brutus chooses not to take into account the desires of the public, and mistakenly assumes that a sacrifice made on the behalf of an unknowing (and potentially unwilling) public will be accepted as such upon his word alone, and can be explained away with eloquent language, suggesting a logocentrism that was characteristic of particularly zealous reformers. However, the Senator finds himself equally incapable of turning his back on Roman rites. His continued dependence on ritual, evidenced in his desire to swear over Caesar's body, and march into the marketplace brandishing blood-stained arms, creates confusion and destabilizes the meaning of the central murder.

Consequently, the line between Brutus' definition of sacrifice and that of the general populace is blurred, creating an ignorance as to exactly what Caesar died for. This resulting space of uncertainty allows Antony easily to evoke the more traditional and familiar aspects of martyrdom and sacrifice within the public imagination,

thus to turn the body of Caesar into a consecrated object. The failure of Brutus is not inability to sanctify the sacrifice of Caesar, but the fact that he is incapable of recognizing, as David Freedberg suggests in *The Power of Images*, that images are beatified by those who garland them (Freedberg 97) – and in this case, the conspiring Senators are vastly outnumbered by the general public.

In Shakespeare's Rome, the buildup of traditional religion, marked by superstition, image veneration and communal passions, is too great for Brutus and his company to ultimately contest. Brutus views his world as unreformed, and corrupted by practices of idol worship. He privileges his own intellectual rationale of ceremony and desires to internalize ritual for himself, claiming that he wants to strip away the abuses that he imagines Caesar will inflict on Rome. In actuality, what he does is attempt to consecrate a meaning of his own against the communal desires of the citizens of Rome, assuming that the explanation of his act of defiance will be enough to eradicate the long-held views of the citizens. As René Girard astutely notices, "Brutus wants to save the Republic, but the Republic does not want to be saved"

(Girard 194), a theory validated by Shakespeare's citizens, who, as the tribunes cynically note, indiscriminately celebrate Caesar's return, when previously they had "climbed up to walls and battlements, / To towers and windows, yea, to chimney-tops, / Your infants in your arms, and there have sat / The livelong day , with patient expectation / To see great Pompey" (1.1.38 – 43). What Brutus fatally miscalculates, and what here disgusts the tribunes so greatly, is the extent to which the Roman citizens are impressed by showy displays. The fact that Caesar's blood-stained, lifeless body retains its power to inspire and inflame the mob of Rome to civil war, suggests that sixteenth and seventeenth-century England was immersed in the very values that Brutus would reject – the values of what Eamon Duffy terms *traditional religion*.

The fear of the conspirators is that Caesar is not worthy of worship because he is a flawed human being, an assumption that the play itself supports; yet the fact that he becomes an icon anyway validates Freedberg's observation of the beatifying power of the people. Shakespeare's addition to Plutarch of concerns over infertility and his seizures mark Caesar as no more

iconic than any other human in the play – a point driven home by his unpleasantly superstitious request that Antony touch Calpurnia in order to “shake off their sterile curse” (1.2.11). Shakespeare includes parallel scenes of both Brutus and Caesar with their wives, showing the uncertainty and insecurity of Caesar when faced with Calphurnia’s concerns. Unlike Brutus, Caesar is deeply influenced by his wife’s sense of foreboding, even to the point of nearly abstaining from the Senate based entirely on these irrational fears. Like Foxe’s martyrs, Caesar is distanced from saintliness, appearing privately vulnerable and human – a man, not an icon – one who believes deeply in the superstitions and traditions that drive his city.

Caesar’s rejection of kingship is a political display that centers around the awareness of the power of the people to elevate and lionize whomever they choose. Furthermore, Caesar himself publicly rejects any image of himself as a divine entity, by refusing (for the present time, at any rate) to accept the crown, which would distinguish him as King, and distance him from the people of Rome. Casca explains how Caesar, upon perceiving that “the common herd was glad he refused the crown, he

plucked me ope his doublet and offered them his throat to cut" (1.2.262 – 4). Such stage-managed humility reminds both the audience and the Roman crowd that he is not a static icon of god-like monarchy, and will not stand as a puppet of the people, giving the citizens what they wish to see, when they desire it. Caesar understands the way in which his city operates, and gives the citizens not only spectacle, but a sense of control over spectacle, as evidenced by the stage managed offering of the crown. Caesar refuses the crown three times, each time inciting the crowd to howl a little louder, and we can see Caesar's ability to manage the delicate political balancing act that supports Rome. Caesar maintains a Machiavellian control of the situation by feigning humility and thereby leading his audience to demand that he ascend to political preeminence in Rome. It is a scene, as Casca points out, worthy of "the players in the theatre" (1.2.260), and a tableau presented so effectively that even Ceasar's seizure cannot quell the passion of the crowd. Furthermore, Caesar's concern that Cassius "thinks too much" (1.2.196) illustrates not only a contempt for the citizens of Rome, but an awareness

that spectacle can override rational thought, and control the emotions in such a way as to cloud the judgment.

The fact that Caesar's humanity and limitations are given to his audience at every turn enrages the conspirators when they witness the extent of the crowd's adoration, and drives their desire to make his body an object of disgust, and not veneration. The elevation of Caesar offers a fascinating tension for a man of theatre such as Shakespeare, with regards to the presentation of spectacle. While the sensational nature of theatrics can be used to captivate, it also runs the risk of obscuring intention, and in *Julius Caesar*, this danger becomes a threat that Brutus cannot avoid. Shakespeare's dissection of the mechanics of spectacle, as seen in the murder of Caesar and the subsequent marketplace orations contaminates spectacle in Rome, and throughout the remainder of the Roman plays, we see increasing hostility towards such visions, as their manipulation becomes more blatant and more dangerous.

Considering the skepticism shown towards ceremony in the play, it is no wonder that there is confusion in Brutus' claim that they be "sacrificers and not butchers" (2.1.165). Brutus' actions throughout the play reveal a

surprising ambivalence towards the notion of sacrifice, and this uncertainty towards the efficacy of such ritual is the reason he is unable to exploit the body of Caesar in the way that Antony does. Trying to make sense of a system that is so easily manipulated, Brutus's thoughts are continually at odds with each other, and this conflict becomes manifest both in his actions and speech. His suggestion that the conspirators maintain lofty goals is immediately undercut by his insistence on not making a pledge together. He recoils from the idea that "our performance / Did need an oath" (2.1.135 – 6), rejecting the idea of consecrating the murder in promises, before immediately attempting to recast the death as a sacrifice, declaring that Caesar will be carved "as a dish fit for the gods" (2.1.173). He acknowledges Caesar's symbolic representation of the Roman Empire by breaking up his body into parts, and allocating parts to

public figures when he calls Antony "but a limb of Caesar" (2.1.165), strengthening the traditional link between sacrificial victim and the social body. His concern for the way Caesar's death will be constructed, combined with the continual references to hewing and hacking found in Brutus' speech,²¹ contradicts the common assumption that Brutus is a man trying to invest meaning in empty ceremony. In spite of his words, Brutus is fully aware of the symbolic potential of such gestures, and tries to manipulate the murder for his own purposes, even as he strives to downplay its potency. His insistence that the conspirators "bathe our hands in Caesar's blood / Up to the elbows, and besmear our swords" (3.1.107 – 8)

²¹ Robert Miola in *Shakespeare's Rome* discusses the butchery metaphors in *Julius Caesar*, observing the omens in conjunction to Brutus's language, but not taking his observation further than to note Brutus's language is simply revealing the savagery inherent in what Miola terms the "Roman ritual." See Miola, Robert , *Shakespeare's Rome*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983, 93.

is a ceremony in itself, and we must question the extent to which the conspirators recognize this. Cassius subsequent musings come dangerously close to conflating history and ritual when he says,

How many ages hence
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over,
In states unborn and accents yet unknown.

(3.2.112 – 4)

Cassius' words suggest that in years to come, their deed will be invested with the same symbolic potency as the crown they so fear Caesar wearing. Brutus, however, showing himself as having less political acumen than Cassius, makes a token attempt to deny the ritual power this image of slaughter may hold, by adding that if there were to be a re-enactment, "shall Caesar bleed in *sport*" (3.1. 115, my italics), but not in ceremony. By the physical act of washing his hands in the blood, instead of undermining Caesar's symbolic value, Brutus simply further sanctifies the spilt blood. His actions are a recognition of the symbolic power that blood holds, and certainly an image that arrests the eye more assertively than any of his eloquent speeches may captivate the ear. Brutus hopes to present Caesar as a sacrifice to Rome,

but on terms that must be carefully explained to the crowd.

In his essay, "Shakespeare's Stage Blood and Its Critical Significance," Leo Kirschbaum vastly understates the problem when he merely observes that "how the audience is to get the notion of a solemn religious sacrifice from the shocking gory effect is not explained" (Kirschbaum 32). If further proof of Shakespeare's investment in the dramatic power of visual imagery is needed, we might only consider act three's revelation of the body. Shakespeare's citizens respond thus:

O piteous spectacle!
 O noble Caesar!
 O woeful day!
 O traitors! villains!
 O most bloody sight!

(3.2.199 – 203)

This list both begins and ends emphasizing the extraordinary shock at what is *seen* by the common eyes. Brutus's concern has been proven right. Having experienced the vast popularity of public bloodshed, both secular and religious, in England, Shakespeare understood the significance of elevating the visceral over the verbal,

and the shock of Caesar's body is the centerpiece to the scene in the marketplace. Brutus has deeply underestimated the extent to which the citizens of Rome respond to what they can see and touch, but Antony astutely realizes that to "show ...Caesar's wounds, poor poor dumb mouths" is to "bid them speak" (3.2.226 – 7). The spectacle of Caesar's body is not one that will be forgotten easily, and will reverberate in the public imagination, and what is at stake during the scene in the marketplace, is who can most convincingly appropriate this image.

Antony is quick to exploit this horror show in order to further sanctify the body of Caesar, turning it, not into an emblem of tyranny as Brutus had hoped, but into an icon of the Rome that is under threat by the senators who are out of touch with the common people. The most valuable commodity in this war of propaganda is the corpse of Caesar, and Antony recognizes the potential this spectacle can have if stage-managed effectively. In the famous third act, Antony's superior performative ability is illustrated when both men speak to the crowd. Brutus remains in the pulpit, above and away from the common people, offering an eloquent but impersonal

oration, symbolic of his separation from the people he is supposed to represent, challenging the lower class citizens of Rome to step forward and "censure me in your wisdom" (3.2.16) and stand up to him in public debate. Antony, however, offers an emotional response and comes down into the marketplace to place Caesar's body firmly amid the crush of citizens. He is even forced to beg the masses of Rome to "stand far off" (3.2.168) in order to maximize the impact caused by the revelation of the body. Antony may lack the lofty aspirations of Brutus (or at least, the claim to lofty aspirations), but he excels in his ability to exploit the spectacle of Caesar's corpse on a purely visceral level, and to beatify the corpse in a way that Brutus fails to anticipate, and most certainly cannot contend with. The failure of Brutus, then, is not a failure to sanctify a political killing, but his unwillingness to recognize that the death of Caesar turns his body into a static icon left open to multiple interpretations; or that he has created a sacred object for the people of Rome to revere. The conspirators' arrogant dismissal of the desires of the people creates a space in which meaning can be laid upon the corpse, so it

is little wonder when Brutus' projected meaning is rejected in favor of something more traditional.

Act three, scene three presents a spectacular exploitation of Caesar's corpse, and in the marketplace, the flesh of Caesar passes from the body of slain tyrant to become a Roman martyr, and becomes sanctified to such an extreme that it whips the people of Rome into a frenzy of violence and passion that cannot be contained. In this moment, the play offers its most critical dissection of the processes of idolatry and martyrdom, revealing the ruthless personal agendas that underpin each perspective. In Shakespeare's Rome, poised between Republic and Empire, the beliefs of the crowd are used as political tools, and similar to Brutus' earlier scenes of deliberation, we are encouraged to maintain a detached view of Antony's performance, but without ever losing sight that we are watching exactly that – a performance. In spite of his claim that "I am no orator as Brutus is" (3.2.211), Antony succeeds in contextualizing the public presentation of Caesar's corpse, in order to maximize the potency of what the citizens will see, as a means of inciting their passion.

For a "plain blunt man" (3.2.212), Antony demonstrates an ability to stage manage a public occasion that could rival Caesar's, and his exploitation of this relic suggests a wariness in the play of trusting too wholeheartedly in iconic visions.

Antony offers not one, but three lengthy speeches that anticipate the revelation of the body. In his first speech, he surreptitiously challenges Brutus' reshaping of the murder, calling attention to the way in which language can be subject to interpretation, presumably, in advance of offering a sight that would appear to need no contextualization. Like Brutus, he appeals to the rationality of the citizens, but unlike Brutus, begs the masses to invoke their own sense of Roman history, and remember what they have themselves witnessed as examples of Caesar's ambition. He says

When the poor hath cried, Caesar hath wept.

Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.

Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,

And Brutus is an honourable man.

You all did see that on the Lupercal

I thrice presented him a kingly crown,

Which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition?

Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,
And sure he is an honourable man.

(3.2.91 – 99)

Antony, like Brutus, invokes this selective memory of Rome, but asks the citizens to privilege what they have seen over what they hear. Underlying his repetition of the phrase that Brutus "is an honourable man" is a direct challenge to Brutus' logocentrism, asking his audience to believe, not the words that they hear, but to place their faith solely in what they themselves have seen in his behavior.²² If Brutus calls himself honorable, but acts like a butcher, then it follows (according to the logic of Antony) that what is termed a sacrifice cannot be more than a savage murder. In fact, Antony rejects the very

²² This idea manifests itself more clearly in *Henry IV, Part One*, when Falstaff asks "what is honour? A word. What is in that word honour? What is that honour? Air. A trim reckoning!" (*Henry IV, Part One* 5.1.133 – 5)

idea that honor can be something discursively created. Honor is the "scutcheon" (*Henry IV, Part One*) that Falstaff claims it to be in *Henry IV*, a badge worn on the body, but to Antony, it is a badge made of wounds, valor embodied in blood and scar tissue, not in serpentine speeches and declarations of nobility.

Theatrics, in the shape of spectacle, will become necessary, because the audience cannot distinguish between the two arguments and words are translated into visual icons. The citizens themselves affirm this, by asking each other,

Marked ye his words? He would not take the crown,
Therefore 'tis certain he was not ambitious.

(3.2.112 – 3)

Here, Antony's words become material signs, to be marked or observed. The fifth plebeian's comment does not invoke his own memory of what he saw, but his understanding is dictated by Antony's biased remembrance of what was a highly public spectacle, and translated into a logical equation dictated by visual signs. The seduction of visions is undeniable, and deeply underestimated by Brutus what this passage illustrates is the extent to which the citizens can be misled by the contextualization

of the sights they are subjected to. Ironically, then, while the citizens struggle to evaluate what they have heard, Antony stands before them, weeping, as a visual reminder to the love that Caesar inspired, showing a startling cynicism on the part of Shakespeare, with respect to the untrustworthiness of images. His quiet tableau appears to validate his words, and once the citizens have noticed that "his eyes are red as fire with weeping" (3.2.115), their immediate response is to note that there is "not a nobler man in Rome than Antony" (3.2.116), showing the extent to which in Rome, public perception is inspired by theatrical visions, even if they are as unreliable as the words used to explain them.

Like a confident showman, Antony drives his audience to beg – first for the will, then for the body of Caesar. The will, Antony implies, is the marker that shall turn Caesar's body into a sacred relic, and turn his death into a sacrifice that will strengthen the social body of Rome. He says,

'Tis his will.

Let but the commons hear this testament –

Which, pardon me, I do not mean to read –

And they would go and kiss dead Caesar's wounds,

And dip their napkins in his sacred blood,
Yea, beg a hair of him for memory,
And, dying, mention it within their will,
Bequeathing it a rich legacy
Unto their issue.

(3.2.129 – 137)

The use of a will neatly encapsulates the idea of intention buried in corporeal forms, operating as both a desire and a material object that can symbolize intent. In this moment, Antony drives home the consecration that Brutus began when he smeared his arms in Caesar's blood, taking control of an image that Brutus never fully understood, and capitalizes on it, by framing it in a manner suitable for his purposes. It is Antony who takes the image of blood that is already smeared across the stage, covering the bodies of the conspirators, and directly suggests that this vision is seen as a holy one, piquing the curiosity of the citizens of Rome. Through the consecration that Brutus began, Antony shapes the citizen's response to the body. Furthermore, he pretends to resist their curiosity, by proposing that

It is not meet you know how Caesar loved you.
You are not wood, you are not stones, but men;

And, being men, hearing the will of Caesar,

It will inflame you, it will make you mad.

(3.2.141 – 4)

Even if the sight of Caesar's body were not arresting enough, Antony's skillful rhetoric anticipates what his audience will see – revealing the body only after he has whipped the crowd into a frenzy, to ensure that the sight will incense them even more. In fact, the will becomes forgotten in the outcry that Caesar's body inspires, and Antony must restrain the angry citizens, reminding them that "you have forgot the will I told you of" (3.2.232).

The final presentation of the body is framed even further by Antony's appropriation of Brutus' vision of the murder as a sacrifice for the benefit of the social body, by placing the myth of the man as part of a collective Roman history. Standing over the body, he draws attention to its covering, and uses the props to anticipate the spectacle and to create a history fresh in the minds of the citizens. He declares,

If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.

You all do know this mantle. I remember

The first time ever Caesar put it on.

'Twas on a summer's evening in his tent,

That day he overcame the Nervii.
 Look, in this place ran Cassius' dagger through.
 See what a rent the envious Casca made.
 Through this the well-belovéd Brutus stabbed;
 And as he plucked his curséd steel away,
 Mark how the blood of Caesar followed it,
 As rushing out of doors to be resolved
 If Brutus so unkindly knocked or no —
 For Brutus, as you know, was Caesar's angel.
 Judge, O you gods, how dearly Caesar loved him!
 This was the most unkindest cut of all.
 For when the noble Caesar saw him stab,
 Ingratitude, more strong than traitor arms,
 Quite vanquished him. Then burst his mighty heart,
 And in his mantle muffling up his face,
 Even at the base of Pompey's statue,
 Which all the while ran blood, great Caesar fell.

(3.2.166– 186)

This speech is worth quoting at length, as it offers a clear illustration of the way in which Antony frames the spectacle, by forcing his audience to imagine the death of Caesar and to therefore incorporate *his* version of the death (which he was not present to witness), into the

myth of Cesar as martyr. He follows the conspirators in conflating Roman history with sacred ceremony and this revisionist history, combined with the wound display, will elevate Caesar to glory. The blood marks a transitionary point between history and ritual, as Antony uses it to mythologize his version of events, conflating it with the blood of Pompey, that, stigmata-like, ran from his statue at the fall of Caesar. Antony promotes his imagery even further, lamenting that "I, and you, and all of us fell down" (3.2.188) with Caesar, inverting the intended meaning of the sacrifice and challenging the citizens to right this wrong by using Caesar's death to strengthen the social body of Rome. Only, at the end of his oration, when he notices that his audience, the "kind souls" that he stands among "weep you when you but behold / Our Caesar's vesture wounded?" (3.2.192 – 3), does he remind us that the Roman citizens have yet to see the actual body of slain Caesar. His observation further clarifies the power of theatricality on the people.

It is at this point, when he feels sure that it would be impossible to misread the sight in favor of the conspirators, that Antony uncovers the corpse and the consecration is complete. Instead of mollifying the need

for a scapegoat, Brutus' misunderstood act of violence has simply inflamed the crowd, and Antony, by exalting Caesar, has turned the 'good' violence that would purge the city of a tyrant into 'bad' violence, which merely leads to more brutality. The conspirators intended to control the violence by using their bloodstained arms as a statement of democratic oblation, but by failing to satisfactorily validate their claim to sacrifice, simply created an anger that Antony deftly rechannels towards them. Even though Antony is easily able to manipulate the feelings of the crowd, he is no better than Brutus at containing them, and chaos ensues.

Antony is able to succeed where Brutus fails, because, from the very opening of the play, we see the tribunes continually underestimate the appeal that spectacle holds for the people of Rome, and misunderstand the way in which their city operates. In the first scene, despite their indignant stance, the politicians are reduced to angry chaperones, scurrying in the wake of the citizens of Rome, stripping the idolatrous statues, and driving away the vulgar from the streets, where Caesar's triumph is eagerly awaited. Brutus' decision to walk into the marketplace "waving our red weapons o'er our heads"

(3.1.109) illustrates his awareness of the power that the visceral can hold, but he assumes that a convincing speech can override the impact from the sight of carnage. It would be presumptuous to presume that *Julius Caesar* promotes a specifically Catholic agenda – certainly, the violence evoked in response to Caesar's sacrifice quashes any idea that this play could be a nostalgic look back at Catholic times, but the play indisputably establishes Caesar's Rome as steeped in more traditional ways of reading the world, ways that are shared by everyone but the politicians. In *Julius Caesar*, there remains a potent emphasis on the popular interpretation of what is seen. This dependence on visual spectacle that Shakespeare is exploring within the play could be read to suggest that there exists an unresolved Protestant frustration with Catholic idolatry within the play, before going further to imply the futility of attempting to stand up against the roar of tradition. Certainly, the conspirators suffer greatly for failing to take into account the reaction of the citizens, and the appeal that public spectacle holds over the citizens of Rome is not to be underestimated.

Following the scene in the marketplace, the brutal death of Cinna serves to reinforce a cynical view of the

crowd as an easily swayed mob. Led by their frenzied emotions, the crowd is unable to distinguish between the right and wrong labels – or even more chillingly, they do not care. They accost Cinna, demanding to know whether he is friend or foe of the late Caesar. Already, we can see that the nuanced projection by Brutus of himself as a friend forced to turn to violence has been eradicated. At this point, the issue of sacrifice has become so clouded that the mob's act of butchery is offered in the intent of salvaging the social body. When Cinna announces his name, civility vanishes, and the plebeians call for the mob to "tear him to pieces" (3.3.27). Even though their mistaken assumption that he is a conspirator is corrected, and accepted as truth, they continue to bray for blood:

Tear him for his bad verses! Tear him for his bad
verses!

(3.3.29)

The repetition of this moment alludes to the hysteria that has taken over the crowd, and the idea of purging the city through the blood of the conspirators has taken an ugly turn. Through this indiscriminate violence, we see how Brutus attempt to validate the murder of Caesar

has obliterated all binaries of "good" and "bad" violence, leaving simply violence, which Antony has redirected towards the conspirators. Cinna's attempt to distinguish himself from the conspirator falls flat when the mob jeers,

It is no matter. His name's Cinna. Pluck but his
name out of his heart and turn him going.

(3.3.31 – 2)

Brutus and the conspirators have collapsed the distinction between "good" and "bad" violence, and left only violence. The plebeian's directive to "pluck but his name out of his heart" illustrates the ugly response to such manipulation and the belief that violence can obliterate manipulative and untrustworthy words. Such a response is ultimately a rejection of Brutus' logocentrism and this latest murder by the mob is a cruel parody of sacrifice, tearing the poet apart in a futile attempt to undo the damage caused by the conspirator and appease a collective bloodlust.

For all of Brutus' and Cassius' rhetorical maneuvering, their deaths ultimately reaffirm the Roman values that are so frighteningly reinforced by the public response to Caesar's death. During the quarrel between

the two men, Cassius offers Brutus the opportunity to "revenge yourselves alone on Cassius" (4.3.93) through murder. Although Brutus rejects Cassius melodramatic offer of his heart "that denied thee gold" (4.3.105), the gesture is enough to reinforce their broken bond of friendship, showing their continued belief in the purging power of sacrifice. Brutus, in true Roman fashion, firmly believes that "it is more worthy to leap in ourselves / Than tarry till they push us" (5.5.23 – 4). He describes his own death thus:

I shall have glory by this losing day

More than Octavius and Mark Antony

By this vile conquest shall attain unto

(5.5.36 – 8)

Brutus, in a tacit acknowledgement of his earlier error in judgment, makes a ritual out of his own death, embracing the Roman way of thinking that he had previously rejected. When begging Strato for assistance, he calls upon him as someone whose "life hath had some smatch of honour in it" (5.5.46), to hold a sword for him. Such action is immediately rewarded, by Antony, who, in contrast to his prior character analysis offers Brutus an effusive eulogy,

The noblest Roman of them all.

All the conspirators save only he
 Did that they did in envy of great Caesar.
 He only, in a general honest though
 And common good to all, made one of them.
 His life was gentle and the elements
 So mixed in him that Nature might stand up
 And say to all the world, "This was a man."

(5.5.67 – 74)

Interestingly, neither Antony nor Caesar acknowledge Brutus' act as honorable, but Antony does offer a conciliatory description of the nobility of Brutus' gesture. These descriptions of "noble" and "gentle" allude just as much to Brutus' social status as his nature, and hint at a more muted celebration of this gesture. Yet, Brutus' nobility is confirmed by his willingness to make a "true" sacrifice of himself that redeems the "bad" sacrifice he made of Caesar, and is recognized accordingly.

What forces this final recognition in Brutus is the appearance of the ghost of Julius Caesar. Of the Roman tragedies, this is the only play in which we are given any firm visual evidence for a world beyond the social

body – evidence that we do not see in any other tragedies, aside from the ambiguous aural evidence of Hercules abandoning Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra*. The mystery of this world that Shakespeare evokes in the comets and omens comes to fruition when the ghost of Caesar appears before Brutus to accuse him of murder. *Julius Caesar* was written in the same year as *Hamlet*, yet the ghost of Caesar lacks the expressive ability of Hamlet's father to comment on divine mysteries. Appropriately enough for the pagan setting, the ghost of Caesar offers no dissection, or even comment on the afterlife.²³ Ludwig Lataver's 1572 pamphlet *Of Ghosts and Spirits* explains pre-Christian belief in ghosts thus:

²³ Most recently, Stephen Greenblatt offers an historicist reading of the ghost of Hamlet's father that suggests that Shakespeare's portrayal of the ghost was directly informed by residual Catholicism in Reformation England. His exploration of this issue can be found in Greenblatt, Stephen, *Hamlet in Purgatory*.

Moreouer the heathen were persuaded that the soules which dyed before their naturall time (especially of those which perished by violent death, whome they call as by hanging, drowning or beheading. &c) dyd strap abroad so long time as they should haue liued, if they had not ben slaine by violent death. Which opinion *Tertullian* also confuteth. *Plato* in his 9. booke *De legibus*, writeth, that the soules of those which are slayne, do pursue their murtherers so far, that they do hurt them: the which except it be vnderstoode by way of a Metaphor, is likewise to be reiected.

The intriguing final line of the quotation suggests a common dismissal of spirits as a metaphor for these justice-seeking ghosts, and Brutus muses on such an interpretation, even as the spirit terrifies him. Such a vision of ghosts is consistent with the standard portrayal of spirits on the Renaissance stage. Ghosts themselves were seen as unquiet souls, and Shakespeare gives us examples of this in *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *Richard III*. What is notable is that the ghost of Caesar, the closest we, as an audience, are given as evidence of the supernatural world in the Roman plays, is of even more

questionable authenticity than the father of Hamlet.

Brutus, a man tortured by guilt, is the only witness to this spectacle, the boy Lucius being fast asleep nearby. Moreover, in describing itself as "thy evil spirit, Brutus" (4.3.284) the ghost is effectively rejecting any claim to identity as the recently deceased Caesar, and presenting itself arguably as a manifestation of Brutus' guilt. The phrase "evil spirit" is most commonly found in expositions of scripture, describing how God sends an evil spirit into the soul of a sinner, to trouble him or her with their sin. In his collected sermons, the Protestant martyr John Bradford incorporates the common argument of the time that suggests that those who believe witches to be responsible for the presence of evil spirits in the lives of those on earth are missing the lesson that God intends them to learn. Citing the evil spirit sent down to vex Saul in 1 Samuel, Bradford, like many others, proposes that it is idolatry to believe that evil spirits could be anything other than the hand of the divine. Just as popular as Bradford's thesis was the Protestant fear that spirits were in fact always inherently evil, sent to tempt good Christians into despair, securing their place in hell.

Hamlet wonders if the ghost of his father is a "goblin damn'd" (1.3.40) and some years previously, in *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe used a demon in disguise of Helen of Troy for precisely this purpose. Faustus embraces its potential for harming the living when he asks it to "suck forth my soul" (5.1.93). Marlowe's interpretation of ghosts, however cynical, was drawn directly from the Medieval morality tradition, and the apparitions were explicitly presented as demons coming forth to entice Faustus into damning despair.

It would be misleading to suggest that we may read *Julius Caesar* in any way as a morality tale, and to do so would ignore the deep hostility Shakespeare shows to the sanctimonious claims of piety the conspirators make in the buildup to the murder. However, the echo of the morality tradition is useful, as the spirit of Caesar inspires in Brutus an overwhelming loss of faith and a sense of inevitable doom. Succumbing to the influence of otherworldly phenomena, he declares that because of the presence of the ghost, "I know my hour is come" (5.5.18). Although there are no clear inferences that the spirit might be an demon tempting Brutus to damnation, it certainly inspires a feeling akin to despair in him. The

spirit of Caesar stands for all that Brutus has tried to ignore throughout the play, and reveals his final inability to turn his back on the superstitions and mysticism found in Rome.

The appearance of this apparition marks a shift in the trajectory of the Roman plays, and becomes a transitional moment from the social tragedy of the play *Titus Andronicus*, to the deeply personal tragedies that are *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*. If we accept Antony's assessment of Brutus as a noble Roman, one who tried to put the needs of the Republic before his own personal loves, the Republic loses a fundamentally decent and selfless advocate. Brutus is the only character conflicted by his course of action, and the scenes with his wife paint a portrait of a man genuinely striving to justify an action he is about to commit against his conscience. If we accept such a premise, then it is possible to argue that his death fails as a sacrifice, as ultimately, Rome will suffer for this loss, and Greenblatt acknowledges the possibility that Rome is weakened by Brutus' suicide when he writes that as a result of his death, the social tyranny that the death of Caesar was intended to cure "only intensifies and

spreads" (185). In spite of Brutus' genuine attempt to resist tyranny, we are left with Octavius and Antony, who, as history will reveal, destroy the triumvirate and create the Roman Empire, realizing the fears of the conspirators. If Caesar's death is turned into a sacrifice for the social body, it is a hollow victory, as the stability reached at the end of *Julius Caesar* does not last, and the acts of Brutus ultimately lead directly to tyranny. Brutus' decision to die in the high Roman fashion is equally tragic, as Rome loses the "noblest Roman of all," and the last honorable citizen willing to stand up for the city is destroyed for nothing.

Throughout his career, Shakespeare demonstrates an ongoing mistrust in the reliability of ghosts, either as genuine spirits or dependable theatrical devices. In addition to the discomfort that Shakespeare shows with the ghost of Hamlet's father, his earlier refusal to adhere to the conventions of revenge tragedy by keeping

Lavinia as a *living* incentive for vengeance,²⁴ the unclear purpose of Caesar's ghost merely confirms the ambivalence that has dominated his play. Shakespeare cannot offer his audience any certainty that the ghost is real, which would validate the world of mystery he has created in Rome. The mob of Rome is too fickle and too volatile to make amenable Brutus' decision to submit to the cultural pressures of Rome. In spite of his nobility, Brutus does fail to make the murder of Caesar anything but a murder, and the ghost of Caesar serves to remind him of the futility of his attempt. The ghost represents a tradition; it is an embodiment of a belief that Brutus could never overcome – in his own mind, much less in the

²⁴ Revenge tragedy convention most commonly requires the death of the central inspiration for justice. Examples can be found in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, and Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*. For a further discussion of Lavinia's complex status, see Chapter Two, "'Our Roman Rites': Lavinia's Corpse and the Problem of Revenge Tragedy in *Titus Andronicus*".

minds of others. Brutus dies in an attempt to reclaim his Roman honor – a conceit that Shakespeare ultimately renders suspect by the theatricality that is necessary to maintain it.

In *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Greenblatt, emphasizing Brutus' delusional belief in self-sacrifice, insists that the ghost reveals "a half-hidden psychological element in Brutus, a quality of epic self-regard and a capacity to envision himself as the savior of Rome" (184). Brutus' participation in and justification for the murder undermine any absolute confidence we can have in his purity of intentions, and accordingly, his death is not quite the valiant delusion that Greenblatt suggests. Brutus' dying declaration – "Caesar, now be still. / I killed not thee with half so good a will" (5.5.49 – 50) – links his death to Caesar's, revealing Brutus' awareness of the veneration that martyrdom can create. His dying declaration ultimately privileges preservation of his family name over the desire to stay and fight for what he had previously viewed as the corrupt social body. For the people of Rome, Brutus' posthumous nobility is not found through his pious life, but through his violent death. He tells Volumnius that "it is more worthy to leap in

ourselves / Than tarry till they push us" (5.5.22 – 3), revealing the extent to which he continues to be invested in a system of honor that has proven to little more than a political tool for the pursuit of personal glory.

Brutus' sense of nobility ultimately means nothing to him without a crowd to concur, and he would rather kill himself to maintain this meaningless badge for his family name. His willingness to create himself as a martyr is the height of his ambivalence towards spectacles of death. His suicide pays homage to the Roman view of honor, yet his enthusiastic welcoming of death suggests a weariness that questions whether Rome is worth such a sacrifice. Throughout the course of both *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare discovers that the answer is no.

**Chapter Four: "A wounding shame": Restoring Identity
through Sacrifice in *Antony and Cleopatra***

At the end of *Julius Caesar*, Brutus' decision to fall upon his own sword is an attempt to "have glory by this losing day / More than Octavius and Mark Antony" (*Julius Caesar*, 5.5.34 – 5). Brutus offers his life as a sacrifice for Roman peace. His suicide is validated by the two Romans, who close the play acknowledging the slain conspirator to be 'the noblest Roman of them all' (5.5.67), giving political lip-service to the man who ended the civil war with his death. Although Brutus' death is an attempt to be "free from bondage" (5.5.52), and a political act of defiance that prevents him from ever playing the role of suppliant to Antony and Caesar, the two politicians claim this death as a victory, rewriting it as a valiant sacrifice that will spare the lives of many men, in spite of Brutus' responsibility for actually beginning the war by killing Julius Caesar. The idea that one can restore public honor by the presentation of their death is a popular concept in Roman mythology, capitalizing on the vogue for death literature that Catherine Edwards sees during the early centuries CE

(Edwards 44).²⁵ The idea of a redemptive death is based in the desire to create one's own myth, and this need is what inspires Antony, in the fourth act of *Antony and Cleopatra* to assume that "with a wound I must be cured" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 4.14.79). Yet, in describing Antony's death, Plutarch explained that "nothing was ever more sad than this spectacle, to see Antony, covered all over with blood and just expiring, thus drawn up, still holding up his hands to her, and lifting up his body with the little force he had left" (Plutarch 244). Shakespeare capitalizes on this image as a means of exposing the

²⁵ Edwards goes on to offer Cato's death as the exemplary Roman death. Cato, in defiance of Caesar, stabbed himself in the stomach, only to be found by his friends and given medical treatment. Determined to die, Cato tore at his stitches, in order to reopen the wound, and eventually died, showing extreme determination over what must have been extraordinary pain. For a greater discussion of the constructions of Roman death, see Edwards, Catherine. *Death in Ancient Rome* and introduction.

frailties of the systems of honor that are used to underpin martyrdom, and to discredit the assumption that a "good" death can rectify a tarnished reputation or strengthen a weakened social state. Antony's belief in the restorative power of his death is typical of his investment in the myth of his own grandeur, and trades on the glorification of death that existed throughout Shakespeare's England. From Richard II's last-ditch heroics, to Henry V's declaration that, "he to-day that sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother" (*Henry V*, 4.3.61-2) this fascination with a "good" death reflected throughout Shakespeare's plays. Malcolm's description in *Macbeth* of the fallen Cawdor's execution – "Nothing in his life / Became him like the leaving it" (*Macbeth*, 1.4.7-8) – is spoken with a tone of admiration at the way in which Cawdor publicly confessed, apologized and formally repented for his treason. Malcolm's simple and touching report illustrates the extent to which a repentant death could redeem a sullied reputation in early modern England.

Such public displays of contrition, especially at the gallows were seen on a regular basis throughout London. These performances spawned pamphlets and

broadsides, which exculpated the departed, and glamorized the redemptive nature of death. It is the allure of the glorious death that *Antony and Cleopatra* attempts to deconstruct through the deathbed humiliation of the play's hero. The respect that Malcolm offers the fallen Cawdor in *Macbeth* evokes the admiration with which brave martyrs would face the flames, preaching loudly, and impressing the crowd with their willingness to suffer. John Laurence, an old priest executed in Colchester, was so damaged by his torture that he had to be carried to his execution. Sitting in the fire, he cried, "Lord, strengthen thy servant, and keep thy faith" (Foxe, Vol. 6 740). His bravery drew tears from the young children who had come to watch the execution and inspired their parents to educate the youngsters according to his principles. This notion of inspirational martyrdom was appropriated by criminal deaths, which enhanced the assumption that honor can be found by the way in which a person faces death. Antony takes this idea to the extreme, and bases his suicide on a faulty assumption that his honor can be restored, and that his death could be the antidote to his dissolute life. His assumption is based on a skewed idea of honor as something that is

inherent, a quality of bravery that simply needs to find its expression in death – something the play actively refutes. It is this misunderstanding of what constitutes honor that becomes the defining characteristic of Antony throughout the play and shapes its central tragedy. Antony's assumption that an act of physical punishment can restore him to Roman glory is one that fails spectacularly, exposing the myth of Roman honor as exactly that – a myth. Antony's botched suicide is a significant moment within the trajectory of Shakespeare's Roman plays, because it crystallizes the misconception that the Roman characters have about the efficacy of such gestures. Antony's death is tragic because it is a theatrical disaster, and even though he attempts to construct himself as a true patriot who dies as in repudiation of any hold Octavius might have over him, he is upstaged by his lover and eulogized by his enemy in a manner that turns the meaning of the gesture on its head. In spite of historical status, and reputation, Antony dies debased and insignificant, a pale shadow of Cleopatra. His incorrect conviction that his death will stand as a testimony to his greatness exposes Antony's misguided belief in his body's representation of honor

and foreshadows Coriolanus' misplaced sense of self-importance. What Antony deems a martyrdom in defiance of Caesar is in actuality a badly-executed suicide, an act that is not a testament to his Roman nobility, but a final attempt at self-glorification. Antony's proposal that "with a wound [he] must be cured" (*Antony and Cleopatra* 4.14.79) is a direct continuation of the rejection of the redemptive power of blood that runs throughout the Roman plays. Antony, a warrior-made-politician, is the most ambivalent of all Shakespeare's Romans, believing that his greatness is inherent to him, unable to be given or taken away by any Roman. And, in spite of this conviction, he kills himself to avoid the shame of being paraded throughout Rome. Through Antony's appalling death, the play suggests a vain-gloriousness that undoes the very idea of martyrdom.

Throughout all of these plays, death affords an opportunity to venerate fallen Romans and reconstruct events so that the deceased can be woven seamlessly into the fabric of Roman history. The death of Lucrece is used as a catalyst to drive the tyrannical Tarquin from Rome, and likewise, the deaths of Lavinia and Caesar are used as spurs to purge the city of corruption. At the close of

Julius Caesar, Brutus is commended after his death as a noble Roman by Antony and Octavius, who implicitly read his death as a sacrifice to end the civil war and establish the new order of Octavius' Empire. Even Fulvia, whom Antony openly admits to wishing dead, is posthumously lamented as "a great spirit, gone" (1.2.123). Her death elevates her to Roman respectability in his mind, because her perceived sacrifice serves as a reminder of Antony's neglect of Roman duty. The preoccupation with death that runs throughout the Roman plays offers the characters of *Antony and Cleopatra* the idea of dying as a form of public purgatory.²⁶ A good death creates an opportunity to deliver a public rebuttal of those in power, whilst ensuring a degree of respectability that will safeguard a family name, as Lucrece demonstrates most explicitly. However, as *Julius*

²⁶ Cleopatra's political savvy, as evidenced by her interaction with Thidias, suggests that Egypt operates on very different principles.

Caesar and *Titus Andronicus* have illustrated, there is little stability to be found in the meaning of one's death, because of the diplomacy that surrounds the remembrance of the dead. Octavius' treatment of the deceased Antony's name suggests that Antony's faith in a universal system of Roman honor is misplaced. Cleopatra's spectacular death exposes the performative nature of the high Roman fashion, and exposes the inadequacies of Antony's performance. Antony's botched suicide destabilizes the capacity to create a meaningful death, and undermines the symbolic currency by which these acts are evaluated.

This investment in the redemptive death is particular not only to Shakespeare's Rome, but also manifests itself as a central problem to religious persecution in early modern Europe. Bradley Stephen Gregory's observation that between 1254 and 1481 the Catholic Church did not canonize a single person who had succumbed to a violent death (Gregory 30) speaks to the tension that was emerging between the official church and its people about what constitute martyrdom. Throughout the Medieval period, the concept of martyrdom had been concentrated in the saintly life of a martyr, not in the

way they met their demise. In texts such as *The Golden Legend*, a martyr's patient death was seen as a microcosm of their holy life – their patient suffering was simply the exemplary life of Christian piety taken to an extreme. Saint Blaise, for example, exiled from the city of Sebaste, made his home in a cave, where he lived, enduring hardship and blessing pilgrims before his torture and execution. Miri Rubin explains that during the late medieval period "martyrdom was preserved as a tradition which provided some guidelines for perfect lives" (Rubin 157), meaning that it is not the brutal death, but the piety that characterized one's life that matters. What began to emerge during the middle ages, however, and blossomed during the Reformation, was a misconception of martyrdom – a loosening of the term, to encapsulate any man, woman or child who died violent, unjust, or unsought deaths, regardless of the quality of their lives. Both Rubin and Gregory agree that during the Middle Ages, confusion arose as to what exactly made a martyr. Rubin suggests that we view the popularity of child martyrs and smaller, local martyrs as examples of popular resistance to focusing on the good life of a martyr over their violent death (165), and we can

identify the same opposition in Antony. The Holy See's resistance to canonizing many deceased community members from small villages suggests that this confusion was a widespread problem; and moreover, that the allure of death threatened to override any doctrinal requirements that might be in place.

During the Reformation, martyrologies capitalized on this uncertainty in order to create a chronology of English martyrs who died as testimony of the Protestant faith. Reaching back into history to create a Protestant English historiography, Bale and Foxe had to fashion martyrs out of historical figures whose testimony was frequently less than suited to their agenda. William Haller describes Bale's *Illustrium maioris Britanniae Scriptorum Sumarium* as "an encyclopedia on the medieval pattern comprehending what the author understood as universal history but focused upon England and the immediate crisis in the relations of England to the Roman church" (Haller 63-4). Haller goes on to explain that his martyrology is a re-creation of English history that reads the nation's heritage as an ongoing battle against a suppressive foreign authority, intertwining outright fiction and historical narrative in defense of this

ideal. As a result, a certain degree of myth-making became necessary to create martyrs and an authentic sense of the history to which they belonged. For example, Foxe's account of John Badby, martyred for heresy in 1410, is validated by an account that Foxe claims was publicly read by Master Morgan, an eye witness to the examination and execution. However, in spite of offering the statement as a direct quotation, as the document begins, Foxe tells us that what follows is not the actual testimony, but "the tenor whereof followeth, and in effect is such" (Foxe, Vol. 4 235). Foxe recognized the necessity of authenticity, and structured his narrative as a means of creating an aura of legitimacy. J.A. Sharpe implies that this self-fashioning was absorbed into secular deaths, that began to follow the pattern of religious executions. Gallows speeches of condemned criminals, according to Sharpe, followed a particular pattern, in which the condemned would stand in front of the crowd and make a carefully orchestrated show of contrition before his or her execution. These displays offered "not merely a spectacle, but also a reinforcement of certain values" (Sharpe 160). These public executions, which were styled to incorporate sermons from the

criminals, emphasized redemption and aspired to impact the watching crowd in much the same way as Foxe and Bale hoped that a martyr would inspire conversion.

Peter Lake and Michael Questier talk about the reshaping of religious deaths as political subversion in *The AntiChrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England*. They highlight not only the theatrical nature of the gallows, but the vast scope of ideologies exposed there, arguing for the execution site as a site "for a whole range of gestures and countergestures, a serious set of exchanges between state, victim and audience" (Lake and Questier 230),. Cheap print, such as the popular murder pamphlet afforded opportunities to capitalize on this scaffold theatre, and in many ways, the murder pamphlet aped the martyrologist's rhetoric. Mario DiGangi's examination of the pamphlet, *The Arraignment, Judgment, Confession, and Execution of Humfrey Stafford, Gentleman*, highlights the way in which Humfrey Stafford's presentation on the scaffold, surrounded by family and offering up a speech of repentance, might contribute to the pamphlet's "temperate account" (DiGangi 1) of his crime of sodomy. DiGangi's emphasis on the displacement of the crime of

sodomy onto local Catholic recusants shows how politicized public execution had become, and the obfuscation that a theatrical presentation of death can afford – by presenting Stafford as a faithful Protestant gentleman, the pamphlet aims to segregate the crimes he was accused of committing, and link them to non-conformist religious practices. This theatre is infused with martyrological undertones by its allocation of the blame onto Catholic recusants, implying that a good protestant embraces his doom in the manner of a martyr. Gilbert Dugdale's 1604 account of the crime of Elizabeth Caldwell is more aggressive in its evocations of martyrdom. During 1603, in the county of Chester, Caldwell, along with her lover and a friend, plotted the murder of her husband. She prepared a poisoned cake for him, only to see it eaten by a local child, who promptly died. Caldwell and her accomplices were soon arrested and sentenced to death. In prison, Caldwell turned to faith, and passed her time meditating in prayer, and repenting for her sins. A campaign was launched to acquit Caldwell, led by a local noblewoman, Lady Mary Chomsley, and Dugdale's leaflet was part of this effort. According to Dugdale's account, Caldwell's response to the efforts to

grant her a reprieve sounds extraordinarily like the submission of a martyr to unjust persecution:

Elizabeth dutifully yielded thanks unto her Ladyship; and said she was very well content to receive the death ordained for her. My Lady departed, and then practicing her former services, I mean prayer, until such time as the keeper came and told her the Sheriff was come to the Gloverstone to receive her and the rest of the prisoners appointed to death: and she very cheerfully answered, " trust in my God, I am ready, and farewell to the Lawe, too long have I been in thy subjection: so departing the castle, taking leave with everyone, and from hence to the place of execution, she sometimes sung Palmes, and used other godly meditation, as was thought fitting for her, by those divines and godly preachers, which accompanied her even to her death.

(Dugdale 7)

Caldwell meekly submits to the judgment placed on her, and her death is described by Dugdale as that of a good and pious woman, submitting to the overwhelming force of the law. Under interrogation, William Wosley submitted to the power of the secular authorities while alluding to a

higher authority, telling his interrogators that "I was brought hither by a law; and by a law I will be delivered" (Foxe, Vol. 7, 402). Like Wosley, Caldwell recognizes the two levels of authority – secular and divine – and found peace because of her willing submission to corporal punishment. Caldwell herself, Lady Chomsley, the preachers at the prison and obviously Dugdale clearly believe that "God had pardoned her offences" (6). His epistle joins Lady Chomsley's lament at "the fall of so good a gentlewoman" and his pamphlet goes to great lengths to justify her crime, in light of her "good" death and to recast her as a decent citizen. In the example of Caldwell and Wosley, the manner in which the felons met their death is offered as more significant than the choices they made in their lives, and it is this emphasis on mythmaking that Antony hopes to capitalize on in Shakespeare's play. Through her piety and bravery facing death, Dugdale attempts to fashion her in such a way as to minimize her crimes and emphasize her dignity. Dugdale states that her mildness of demeanor, and penitence "as to me, and many more, was most admirable" and her death stood as a testimony to God's glory, through which, others could learn.

What is key to this understanding of a good death, in both English Reformation history and Shakespeare's play, is the role that honor plays. If we can take Malcolm's respect for the Thane of Cawdor as typical (and the combination of execution pamphlets and martyrologies suggest that we can), the way in which a man met his doom could not only wash away previous sins, but create a legacy of honor – a great preoccupation of the Renaissance. Antony famously declares to Octavia that "If I lose mine honor / I lose myself" (3.4.22 – 3) and Shakespeare's play reflects this attitude as archaic and a contributing factor to Antony's downfall. Mervyn James proposes that honor was, in a sense "a corporate code" (James 11), creating an elite group of people, descended from the noblest houses in England; he cites Raymond Lull's late fifteenth century text, *The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry*, as a seminal text which places pedigree as the most important aspect of honor. Honor was a virtue passed down through the blood of ancient ancestral lands, something Richard McCoy underlines when he refers to Sir Philip Sidney's "particularly fierce" (McCoy 55) pride in his lineage. This ancestry could be traced back to feudal times in which honorable families were marked by their

status and capacity to fulfill noble duties, particularly, in war. Like Antony's sense of self, the older reading of early modern honor was directly connected to military prowess. James explains that the root of honor was found in the idea that through skilled battle, one proved one's nobility and worthiness - effectively, one's virtue. McCoy goes further to explain that the etymology of the term chivalry, is the French *chevalrie*, meaning skill on horseback, before going on to point out that this particular skill in battle was reserved for the higher classes (McCoy 16). Through military skill, one was able to build up a solid career of proven loyalty to a monarch, which often ensured more lands and responsibility and which clearly indicates the importance of honor as a way of assuring one political stability and a place at court. In previous centuries, when feudalism operated as the primary economic and social structure, the monarch rewarded military skill and loyalty with lands, creating a contradictory system of autonomous honor conferred because of the way in which landed gentry, who ruled over microcosmic kingdoms, were expected to supplicate themselves to the English king. This tension of the autonomous subject did not dissipate

over time, and in many ways, becomes manifest in Antony's fierce pride and resistance to Octavius' rising power.

During the reign of Elizabeth, honor developed an even more insular meaning, and began to splinter from its military origins. Elizabeth's rule was notable for its comparative lack of conflict with neighboring countries, and the opportunities for displays of military power were considerably limited, leaving soldiers to play politics. This lack of military opportunities combined with the changing economic infrastructure in England that disenfranchised many landowners, combined with Elizabeth's own flirtatious demeanor (which she often employed as a tactic to keep her fractious nobility in line) created a court-based aristocracy, with decidedly little opportunity or monarchical patience for rural fiefdoms away from the city. Lacking occasion to prove themselves in battle, the aristocracy retreated into the display of these chivalric ideals to mark them out as honorable members of the nobility. Behavior was codified in performances of honor and literary texts, such as Edmund Spenser's epic, *The Faerie Queene* or Sidney's *Arcadia*, which emphasized the ways in which nobility is to be displayed through conduct. Therefore, although

honor remained a political tool for courtly advancement, it became theatrical, and something to be performed at stage-managed state occasions. The strongest example is the Accession Day Tilts. McCoy suggests that these events "were an opportunity for extravagant shows of greatness, and they were often as much a celebration of the contestants' own status and splendor as a tribute to the queen"(McCoy 21), implying that honor was available to all the members of the aristocratic class, providing that they looked the part. Roy Strong concurs, pointing out that "through these festivities the ancient allegiances of chivalry were drawn close to the Crown and there occurred something of an imaginative refeudalization of late Tudor society" (Strong 129).

Such performativity destabilized what it meant to be noble, relocating the emphasis on the theatrical nature of Elizabethan virtue. McCoy points out that through the form of honor "each of these men turned to 'the rites of knighthood' to assert his own rights and ambitions"(McCoy 27). By this, he attempts to demonstrate the inherent contradiction that sat at the heart of honor - that the nobleman is expected to be simultaneously loyal to his own conscience and suppliant to a higher force. Moreover,

these performances are an attempt to contain the "aggressive energies"(McCoy 27) which constitute a direct opposition to the authority of the monarch. In his book, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563 - 1694*, John Knott defines martyrdom in similar terms. He focuses on the indomitable spirit of the martyrs, explaining that "by remaining unmoved by punishment, or even exulting in it, the victim shows the limitations of the power of the church or state to control the subversive spirit"(Knott 8). Although there is a world of difference between the aggressive pseudo-submission of the honorable, and the passive resistance of the martyr, the "subversive spirit" remains, and it is this spirit that we can identify at the core of Antony. In both honor and martyrdom, it is through a willingness to sacrifice the body, either through battle or state-sanctioned punishment that spiritual worth is proven. As Montaigne points out in his essay "On Glory," in many ways, honor is akin to reputation, in that it must be recognized from an outside source, in order to have validity. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony's sense of honor comes exclusively from his reputation as a soldier, and like Coriolanus, he demonstrates a remarkable ambivalence towards his

dependence on Roman society to confer the honor he desires. The rites that McCoy discusses are public performances of "knightly" valor that allows those who claim knighthood validation by the watching public. An act can only be a performance if it has viewers, and those who are successful in Shakespeare's play recognize this negotiation of power, and use it.

Antony defines his sense of self by his conviction that his honor is his own inherent virtue, impervious to stain by outside thought. This makes his honor something that can only be compromised by his behavior, giving him the power to assume that his nobility is under his control. When criticized as dishonorable by Caesar, Antony angrily retorts that "the honor is sacred which he talks on now / supposing that I lacked it" (2.2.91-2). Yet, Antony is deeply aware of his reputation and its fragility, asking his messenger for the common gossip and publicly declaring himself a "man of steel" (4.4.33) to assert his identity as a Roman hero. This ambivalence of Antony stems from his knowledge of his own weaknesses — his succumbing to Cleopatra, his predilection for carnal pleasures — and becomes an attempt to reject that part of

him that would compromise his identity as valiant Roman warrior.

When Strato, Brutus' assistant in suicide at the end of *Julius Caesar*, announces that "no man else hath honor by his death" (*Julius Caesar*, 5.5.55), he is reaffirming a belief in a military code of honor that gives glory to those who die on the sword, regardless of who holds it. Brutus is suitably rewarded by Octavius' decision to allow his corpse to lie in state, "most like a soldier, ordered honorably" (*Julius Caesar* 5.5.78). In this moment, Brutus' suicide ends the war, and earns him a place of honor in Roman history. This process of reinvention through the right kind of death is precisely the belief that Antony invests in when he decides to commit suicide. He believes that killing himself in the Roman fashion can restore his standing in the Roman Empire, and give him back the glory he has lost. Jonathan Dollimore subscribes to the myth of the redemptive death when he tells us that Antony's suicide has the effect of rendering him "larger than life" (Dollimore 213). While Dollimore recognizes the extent to which Antony's death is an assertion of his so-called Roman nobility, his analysis ignores the impact of the political structures

that Antony dies rebuking. Like the murderess Caldwell, Antony's life is doomed by the choices that he has made, in his case, his rejection of Octavius' Rome, and the assumption that he can still be the great Roman Antony in Egypt. In a spectacularly naïve gesture, he assumes that his suicide will restore him to respectability by creating a convincing portrayal of a "Roman" death. However, the example of Brutus exposes the extent to which dying in the high Roman fashion is a fiction, and Antony's death attempts to conflate a sacrifice for the Roman Empire with a martyrdom in defiance of Octavius, thereby dooming himself to failure because of his uncertain motives. This idea of a sacrificial death still carries great critical appeal, as it validates his poor choices, and can offer him the heroic status that the play assiduously resists. Many critics, focusing primarily on Cleopatra's spectacular exit, mistakenly assume that Antony's death is enough to qualify him as a hero. Even those such as Coppélia Kahn, who recognize its performative nature, are reluctant to concede how truly ineffectual it is. Kahn says that "Antony's determination to die in order to defeat Caesar of his triumph, then, would have found a certain sympathy in a Renaissance

audience, no matter how that death was accomplished"(Kahn 128) because of his lofty intentions.

Nancy Cluck is one of the critics who sees Antony's death as a triumph, explaining that "unable to recapture nobility as a soldier, he thus seeks honor through suicide" (Cluck 150), and she chooses to read the death as a smoothly executed foreshadowing of Cleopatra's triumphant demise. Cluck argues that he transcends shame through Roman heroism (150), and recognizes his own culpability in his downfall. I would argue the exact opposite: that Antony's suicide is his effort to avoid taking responsibility, to secure a glorious name for himself without any attempt to address the damage he has caused. Cluck's deeply conservative essay views Antony's return to his homeland as a "moral and patriotic duty" (147), placing her trust in an upright, epistemologically secure and constant Rome. Such a reading works against the play, particularly demonstrated by Shakespeare's presentation of Octavius. The Roman Emperor of *Antony and Cleopatra* is rigid, cold and manipulative. He schemes to destroy Antony by encouraging Cleopatra's betrayal, kills those who abandon Antony, such as Alexas, and lies to Cleopatra in the final act. Shakespeare's Caesar is

resistant to losing control, explaining that "mine own tongue /Splits what it speaks" (2.7.122-3) when he drinks, an excuse that affords him the opportunity to observe the drunken and unguarded men around him.

Antony wants to exist on his own terms, to be Antony yet in Egypt, but when his soldiers become disillusioned by the life he leads there, he loses his reputation, and does not know how to get it back without military glory. To his chagrin, in Egypt Antony discovers that his status as Antony is sustained only by those who recognize him as such – something Cleopatra understands and uses as a method of seducing her lover and keeping him by her side. Without even Cleopatra to adore him, Antony realizes that not even his name remains his, and to avoid ignominy, he chooses to die as he imagines a Roman should – falling on his sword, as Brutus did. He believes that this way of dying will return his glory, and cement his status as an iconic Roman. Yet he still foolishly attempts to ignore his dependence on those who will interpret his legacy once he is gone, showing the extent of his naivety. Antony wants to die honorably in defiance of the politician that now rules Rome, as a rejection of the slipperiness of the diplomatic world, but he is too

preoccupied with his own tattered name to remember that it is precisely the politicians who have the capacity to confer glory. The fact that Antony's suicide is such an undignified mess suggests that the play is turning its back on the efficacy of such gestures. Ritual, in these plays, has become so contested that even the most conventional gestures cannot guarantee success. Antony becomes a sad spectacle, dragged to Cleopatra, and dying in her arms without any Roman soldiers to recognize his valor. As Cynthia Marshall suggests, he is upstaged by both Eros and Cleopatra (Marshall 402), and arguably, even Enobarbus, who at least managed to die in the way he had intended. Worse is yet to come, as Octavius buries Antony with Cleopatra, cementing his legacy not as Rome's greatest warrior, but as Cleopatra's Antony. Just as Antony did for his slain friend in *Julius Caesar*, Octavius mythologizes Antony. But Octavius creates a new myth, turning Antony into a romance hero who throws himself away for a doomed love affair. Although ceremony is still potent in Rome, Antony dies friendless, politically bankrupt, ultimately becoming a symbol of a woman's power. By not securing his legacy, Antony makes the last in a long series of political missteps, and his

mistake leaves Caesar free to memorialize him in a more politically expedient manner.

Throughout *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare exhibits a mistrust of the efficacy of martyrdom in the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra, two characters whose honor appears to become entirely revived through their willingness to die. In particular, the play rejects Antony's misguided belief that he can restore his honor by falling upon his sword. Shakespeare seems to suggest that although both lovers orchestrate their deaths as a statement of independence, what these deaths ultimately do is strengthen the power that the Empire holds over their bodies, a fact underscored by Shakespeare's decision to allow Octavius Caesar to eulogize both. Octavius promises to glorify the "pair so famous" (5.2.358) in a political act that will ultimately serve to validate the "high events" (5.3.358) that shaped them. His declaration that "their story is / No less in pity than his glory / Which brought them to be lamented" (5.3.359 – 61) is deliberately designed to simultaneously validate Caesar's triumph by glorifying Antony and to make his fall inevitable, and render him weak in comparison to Octavius. By celebrating them, he is able

to turn their suicides into sacrifices made for the preservation of the Roman Empire. Spectacular as it is, Cleopatra's coup de theatre is a little ambiguous in its success, because of what had to be given up to secure her emblematic triumph.²⁷ Prior to his death, Antony is subjected to one degradation after another, and both his and Cleopatra's attempts at redemptive death only serve to underscore the extent to which the meaning of such gestures cannot hold. Moreover, *Antony and Cleopatra* exposes the notion of inherent honor as mere reputation, something that can be fashioned by cunning performance, or impressing certain images upon the common eye.

Antony's identity is shaped primarily by his own sense of subjectivity, and his attempt at martyrdom fails

²⁷ Octavius makes clear to Cleopatra that if she kills herself to thwart his glory, he will punish her children. Although Octavius's duplicitous nature offers no guarantee that the children have not already been executed, Cleopatra is more concerned with securing her legacy than safeguarding the lives of those around her.

precisely because under the threat of public humiliation, he knowingly retreats into a faulty set of principles, hoping that a private martyrdom can hold the weight of a public spectacle. In fact, he fails because he believes that there can be such a thing as a private martyrdom. We might go even further and suggest that Antony is seeking his own glory when he kills himself. Because death and honor are so strongly linked in his mind, Antony wants to re-establish his glory and cure his wounded reputation through bloodshed. However, his death is too self-serving to truly constitute a martyrdom (or for that matter, a sacrifice), and Antony, falling victim to the same mindset that he exploited so brilliantly in *Julius Caesar*, dies a long and undignified death, trumped by his lover, and leaving his memory in the hands of those he died in defiance of.

In keeping with the sacrificial nature of the Roman plays, Shakespeare locates honor on the body of the soldier. Antony occupies an important place in Roman history: not only is he one of the triumvirs, Octavius Caesar's "mate in empire" (5.1.43), but his loyalty to his friend Julius Caesar, and his actions in the wake of Caesar's death earned him the reputation as the Roman

"man of steel" (3.4.33), implying both an imposing physicality and an impenetrable will. Such a metaphor reduces Antony to a weapon of Rome, and he is happy to adopt this role. Pompey admits that of the three Roman rulers, Antony's "soldiership / Is twice the other twain" (2.1.34 – 5), and in the first act Octavius Caesar is paralyzed in his action against Pompey without Antony.

Throughout the play, Antony's sense of self is derived from the celebration of his past glories, and stands in stark contrast to the actions that the audience bears witness to as the play progresses. Caesar repeatedly alludes to Antony's earlier state as a natural state of being, and this emphasis on Antony's reputation allows him to believe that there is little Roman distinction between inherent and conferred nobility. Antony finds himself unprepared for the demands that honor makes of him in the political arena, and holds on to his iconic status as he finds himself threatened by the manipulative Caesar. He is a warrior-turned-politician, a man of action now out of his depth in the slippery world of diplomacy. His attempts to manipulate images and use political strategy (such as his marriage to Octavia) might have been successful had Octavius not

mocked his honor. Antony is unhinged by Caesar's use of the flexibility of symbols, and under such pressure, he succumbs to a literalness that he had previously mocked. During the first half of the play, Antony is fully cognizant of the political advantages of theatricality, recognizing that Cleopatra is "cunning past man's thought" (1.2.143), even as he attributes such political acumen as unmanly. His concern about "our slippery people, / Whose love is never link'd to the deserver / Till his deserts are past" (2.1.183 – 5) suggest a continuity with the Antony of *Julius Caesar*. In Act three, when Ledipus asks Antony to describe the exotic crocodile, Antony mocks his friend's fascination, saying,

It is shaped, sir, like itself; and it is as broad as it hath breadth: it is just so high as it is, and moves with its own organs: it lives by that which nourisheth it; and the elements once out of it, it transmigrates.

(2.7.42 – 5)

A crocodile, he tells Ledipus, is "of it own colour" (2.7.47), reducing the animal to only what can be seen, and failing to give any meaningful description beyond what Ledipus can imagine (which is not much). Antony's

playfulness shows his awareness of how reductive language can be, and as Octavius watches Antony talk to Ledipus, wondering incredulously, "Will this description satisfy him?" (2.7.50), we can see that both Antony and Octavius are fully aware of the potential of language to obfuscate and befuddle. Through this wordplay, we see Antony playing dangerously with words – by explaining something as shaped like itself, he is reducing words and objects to their most literal form, and inviting the audience (in this case, Ledipus) to fill in the blanks. Although the joke is on his friend, Antony misses his own point, which is that words are like the "slippery people" of Rome, rife for manipulation. Antony, secure in his own sense of honor, represented by the materiality of his body, can afford to employ dangerous wordplay – in many ways, he views himself like his description of the crocodile. He is Antony, because his body says so, and when his honor begins to slip, his body revolts.

Antony's reputation is most clearly explored in Caesar's description of his willingness to sacrifice his physical well-being during his retreat in the Alps. Caesar, begging Antony to leave his "lascivious wassails"

(1.4.56), describes the heroic Antony almost exclusively in terms of his body:

When thou once
 Was beaten from Modena, where thou slew'st
 Hirtius and Pansa, consuls, at thy heel
 Did famine follow, whom thou fought'st against,
 Though daintily brought up, with patience more
 Than savages could suffer. Thou didst drink
 The stale of horses and the gilded puddle
 Which beasts would cough at. Thy palate then did
deign
 The roughest berry on the rudest hedge.
 Yea, like the stag when snow the pasture sheets,
 The barks of trees thou browséd'st. On the Alps
 It is reported thou didst eat strange flesh,
 Which some did die to look on. All of this –
 It wounds thine honour that I speak it now –
 Was borne so like a soldier that thy cheek
 So much as lanked not.

(1.4.56 – 74)

Octavius' validation of Antony's honor is entirely rooted in the idea of his physical suffering. Caesar implies that Antony's honor stems from his willingness to

sacrifice his physical comfort and endure corporeal hardship with fortitude. Antony's reputation stems from his ability to survive on "the roughest berry" and is confirmed by popular report – "it is said" – not Antony's own account. Antony did not need to glorify himself, because in the public world of Rome, his actions encouraged others to speak on his behalf, bestowing glory. His comment that "it wounds thine honor that I speak it now" implies that virtue can be located in the penetrable body, as though Antony's honor is the actual body that suffered in the mountains. Antony's suffering in the mountains is a testament to his devotion to Rome, and by extension, the worthiness of Rome to justify such suffering. Critics such as Anne Barton and Coppélia Kahn have noticed that Antony's body is the central issue at stake in the battle between Octavius and Cleopatra, and throughout the play, we see almost exclusively Antony's honor being represented in terms of his body. At the opening of the play, Philo talks about Antony's "captain's heart" (1.1.6) and his goodly eyes / That o'er the files and musters of the war / have glowed like plated Mars"(1.1.2-4), continuously emphasizing Antony's physical attributes in military terms. The physical

degradation that Caesar speaks of is an emblem of Antony's willingness to suffer for the good of Rome, and an example of the fortitude and suffering expected from a martyr by the watching public. As such, his rebuke is given in physical terms – his honor is wounded. Wounds, in the Roman plays, have the capacity to both hurt and heal. Throughout these texts, the body's injury becomes the reputation's cure.

Plutarch, Shakespeare's primary source for *Antony and Cleopatra*, neatly encapsulates this ambivalence at the heart of Antony that will become the core of Shakespeare's tragedy. In describing Antony, Plutarch presents a man who is intrinsically honorable – he acts in selfless and courageous ways, on behalf of Rome. One example Plutarch gives of Antony's bravery is a retelling of a military exploit. He tells us that

In all the great and frequent skirmishes and battles, he gave continual proofs of his personal valor and military conduct; and once, in particular, by wheeling about and attacking the rear of the enemy, he gave the victory to the assailants in the front. (168)

Antony is clearly humble and modest enough to allow others the glory in battle. Instead of seeking out fame, he allows his Roman duty to be its own reward. Yet, Plutarch follows this account with a description of Antony's physicality.

He had also a very good and noble appearance; his beard was well grown, his forehead large, and his nose aquiline, giving him altogether a bold, masculine look, that reminded people of the faces of Hercules in paintings and sculptures. It was, moreover, an ancient tradition that the Antonys were descended from Hercules, by a son of his called Anton; and this opinion he thought to give credit to, by the similarity of his person just mentioned, and also by the fashion of his dress. For, whenever he had to appear before large numbers, he wore his tunic girt low about the hips, a broadsword on his side, and over all a large, coarse mantle.

(168).

Physically, Plutarch suggests, Antony looks like a hero. More interestingly, Antony recognizes the power that his appearance can hold, and reinforces the general belief in his ancestry by manipulating his dress to evoke

traditional images. Plutarch's Antony presents his body in such a way as to validate his bravery, and mythologize himself as part of an ancient line of demi-gods, to the watching citizens. Shakespeare's Antony is defined by the same self-fashioning; however, he cannot tell where the reputation ends, and his identity begins. Antony tells Cleopatra that when he returns from battle "I will appear in blood; /I and my sword will earn our chronicle" (3.13.179-80), assuming that the image of him as a bloodied warrior can make a statement of identity that will impress his lover, and cement his place in history. This idolatry is rampant in Shakespeare's Rome, and all characters in the play, Egyptian and Roman, succumb to the lure of spectacle.

Although Shakespeare allows his characters to offer testimony to Antony's honor, he also goes to great lengths to ensure that the audience recognizes the gulf between the loyal friend of the Roman Empire and the faded general in love with his Egyptian Queen. Shakespeare gives his audience an Antony who is primarily the famous "strumpet's fool" (1.113), before a great soldier. He drinks to excess, becoming maudlin on the eve of his final battle, rendering his men "onion-eyed"

(4.2.35) with his weeping. He makes one bad decision after another, including his betrayal of Cleopatra in order to make a political marriage, and his abandonment of his wife Octavia, both of which threaten to isolate him from military and political support, giving him the air of inconstancy and undermining his resolve. Moreover, Antony executes a series of terrible martial judgments, most notably, following the fleeing Cleopatra (doubtlessly leaving his men to defect or die) during his ocean battle with Caesar. In the wake of this debacle, he abandons his military responsibilities when he begs a kiss from Cleopatra, and his admission that "even this repays me" (3.11.71) discredits his soldiership because of his rejection of responsibility in favor of pleasure.²⁸

²⁸ Much has been written about the play as an exploration of the pull between duty and pleasure, but most critics do not see the way in which Cleopatra works to strengthen Antony's Roman identity while he is in Egypt. For examples of this argument, see Vivian Thomas,

He is variously abandoned by his ancestral deity, Hercules, his men and, arguably, by his lover throughout the course of the play. What we watch with increasing discomfort throughout *Antony and Cleopatra*, is the self-inflicted and steady decline of a middle-aged man, rather than a staunch hero who suffers the wrath of persecution with fortitude and patience as Octavius' description might have led us to expect. The name Antony becomes iconic as a marker of how far the man has fallen, and yet, he still insists on his identity as a heroic Roman, realizing the extent to which he is investing in a faulty system of dative honor when he tells Octavia "read not my blemishes in the world's report" (2.3.5), revealing the extent of his vulnerability to popular opinion.

In the first act, the soldier Philo describes how, "when he is not Antony / He comes too short of that great

property / Which still should go with Antony" (1.1. 57 – 9), distinguishing the name that had previously been worthy of honor, and noting the gulf between the man and the myth. For all other characters, his fall from honor is epitomized by the life of physical luxury that he leads in Africa. Pompey offers a stark contrast to Octavius' description of Antony's honor by snidely commenting on the "fine Egyptian cookery" (2.6.63) that Antony gluts on, drawing a comparison with "the stale of horses and the gilded puddle" (1.4.65) that had previously sustained him. Even Antony, when facing his final battle with Caesar, thinks of honor in exclusively physical terms. His insistence that his men drink in an attempt to "force/ The wine to peep through their scars" (3.13.195) is an uncomfortable image that juxtaposes the comforts and luxuries of Egyptian wine with Roman wounds of valor. His metaphor conflates honor with idleness, and the wine pouring like blood through wounds serves as a reminder of his ambivalence. His speech highlights the unnaturalness of such excess to the Roman mindset, and betrays Antony's inherent dedication to the Roman values that he is claiming to be fighting against.

Although not quite openly obsessed with his ancestry as Plutarch's account would suggest, Antony is clearly dominated by an awareness of his reputation – he is Antony yet, and will continue to demand the respect that such a name holds. Antony is invested in the currency that his reputation affords him, but becomes increasingly aware that the man his audience sees is such a vastly different creature to the Antony of legend. His name is used as a byword for valor, and his insistence throughout the play that because of his behavior, “I have fled myself” (3.11.7), is an attempt to abnegate responsibility – the “real” Antony, he is implying, would not indulge himself so, trying to distance his current actions from his identity. By suggesting that he is not himself, he reveals his subjective identity as a Roman and disclaims responsibility for what he has become. He continuously blames his “strong Egyptian fetters” (1.2.117) for his conduct, and refuses to reconcile his actions with his identity. His death is not a heroic assertion of his identity, but the logical end to his ongoing refusal to take responsibility for his errors of judgment throughout the play.

Recently, Cynthia Marshall and Garrett Sullivan have turned their attention to the construction of Antony's character, looking at his subjectivity, and analyzing his suicide in the light of his identity as a Roman. Both critics rightly propose that Antony's identity is primarily a cultural construction, and both critics read his death as emblematic of his multiplicitous identity. Marshall proposes that Antony's identity is shaped entirely by the projections that others put onto him, and that beyond this space lies a melancholy that drives him to suicide, the bungling of which illustrates his failure to reconcile all of the elements within him. Marshall proposes that the performance of his ugly death is intentionally juxtaposed against Cleopatra's famous eulogy (404), suggesting that Antony dies in a failed pursuit of an elusive and fixed male heroic identity. This is true to a point, but Marshall assumes that to do the deed successfully, is to access heroism. This is the faulty logic that leads Antony to his death, and makes it inevitable that he will fail to achieve the death he imagines himself worthy of. Her suggestion that to read Antony's death as heroic is to accept that his intention to die honorably can override what we see happen on

stage. Her contention that his parodic death "unsettles Antony's claim to Roman self-identity" continues to assume that there is a "right" way of dying – a Roman way. Antony enters the play in many respects as the ideal Roman hero, as Caesar's recollections suggest. If Antony cannot redeem himself by the high Roman fashion, then perhaps it is because the very premise is flawed. Garrett Sullivan suggests that "Antony's suicide can be understood as metaphorically suggesting his escape from Cleopatra/Circe and the threat of emasculation she poses" (Sullivan 91) as he begins to forget his Roman masculinity.

Sullivan proposes that we read his suicide as an attempt to create a unified, Roman identity, but contradicts Marshall by proposing that his suicide is an act of self-remembering, and a rejection of the emasculating figure of Cleopatra. Although Sullivan acknowledges Antony's aim in his death – to be remembered in a certain way – he doesn't consider the success of this act. In a sense, both critics are correct – Antony's suicide is an affirmation of Roman values, but by focusing on Antony's relationship to his Romanness, both critics are slightly missing the point. Antony is

defining himself by a flawed set of values – Roman values that privilege visible marks of honor over everything else. Antony's dying insistence that he "bid that welcome / Which comes to punish us, and we punish it / Seeming to bear it lightly" (4.14.138 – 40), assumes that his heroic endurance can surpass the pain his body suffers, enacting his honor through physical endurance. Antony is, in many ways, an exemplary Roman, but this is what destroys him. He strives to be the Roman of history books, defined by his sense of himself as a man of steel. His famous declaration that "I am Antony yet" (3.13. 97-8) is simultaneously a declaration of his greatness and an example of his limitation. He is Antony, a thing of its own color and form, yet he recognizes and fears his limitations. He retreats to Egypt because he knows that he cannot compete with the boy-Emperor, Octavius. Antony shows hints of superstition, such as when he worries that the soothsayer is correct is recognizing his weakness around Octavius. He says "the very dice obey him / and in our sports my better cunning faints / under his chance" (2.3.32 – 4), recognizing that even though he is the "better" man, his glory becomes negated in Octavius' presence. It is his awareness of his flailing nobility

that becomes submerged under his panic at the end of the play and he is forced into foolish declarations of grandeur, such as when he says,

Authority melts from me: of late, when I cried 'Ho!'
 Like boys unto a muss, kings would start forth,
 And cry 'Your will?' Have you no ears? I am
 Antony yet.

(3.13.95-8)

His authority is rooted in the fact that he is Antony still, the man whose voice could quell Kings and reduce great men to boys. Antony believes that he is the representation of his body – that the respect he commanded as a youthful and stronger man is enduring, even as he falls into middle age. He has succumbed to his own myth, one created by public adoration of his body, and he cannot acknowledge the frailty of such an investment. His aging flesh is in many ways, representative of a changing symbolic order in Rome, and Antony's denial of the progress of time is self-delusional and dangerous.

Critical thought seems to be divided in response to Antony's subsequent death – popular thought views this as a noble act of heroism, one that redeems his tattered

reputation, and restores him in the eyes of the audience to an oft-discussed former glory. Jonathan Dollimore proposes that the suicide is a deed that renders Antony larger than life, ensures his immortality (Dollimore 213), and asserts his autonomy, and Lisa Starks goes so far as to propose that we view Antony's suicide as an act that makes him an "exemplary hero" (Starks 244), implying a common belief in Antony's inherent nobility. Jacqueline Vanhoutte accepts Roman values as something admirable and celebrates his death, saying that "to encourage a wayward hero to kill himself in an ultimate tribute to the value of 'honor' is work fit for an emperor" (Vanhoutte 175). The idea that Antony can restore himself to "honor" by suicide is deeply problematic, as it not only ignores the bleak brutality of Antony's death, but validates the codes of honor that the Roman plays have consistently deconstructed. A growing number of critics are beginning to recognize the problems inherent in viewing Antony as a product of these values. For instance, Cynthia Marshall, points out that Antony's suicide is upstaged, not only by Cleopatra, but Eros, Antony's own assistant (Marshall, 401). Coppélia Kahn makes explicit what these critics are alluding to, in her suggestion that the failure of this

performance of suicide is important precisely because it exposes his death as a performance (Kahn, 132). The manner of dying becomes a central issue in *Antony and Cleopatra*, because, like honor, it is a performance and needs to be recognized as such before we can think about what it means, and more importantly, how it is received. Garrett Sullivan's idea that Antony's suicide is an affirmation of Roman values is certainly correct, but the underlying assumption that it is a success simplifies the issue, and ignores the deep skepticism towards Roman values that his attempted suicide reveals.

In Shakespeare's England, the increasing politicization of death had led it to become performative, and we can view accounts of those who died as a validation of faith or honor with a cynical eye. There was enough public interest in death to inspire canny pamphleteers to take political advantage of reporting these deaths, and to inspire the condemned to use their moment of death as a propagandistic platform. Antony recognizes that his suicide is a performance, but believes that by acting it to his fullest capacity, he has the power to invest such gestures with meaning. He asks Eros' assistance to ensure a witness to his

honorable act, to ensure his spoken legacy and redeem his name. Yet, even as he makes his decision to die, he claims to be doing so in defiance of Rome, claiming that "thy captain is / even such a body" (4.14.13), refusing to accept that his name could be recognized without the soldier's body to encompass it.

Cynthia Marshall's point, that Antony's death is simultaneously an attempt to reaffirm his Romanness, and to kill the unroman element within him (391), speaks to the heart of his confusion. Antony's inability to truly separate himself from Roman values leaves his corpse (and thereby his name) open to the same manipulations that Julius Caesar's body was subject to. The tragedy of *Antony and Cleopatra* is not the death of these two giants, but Antony's failure to secure the value from Rome that he covets, by his death. To accept Lisa Stark's assertion that "Shakespeare's Antony sacrifices himself for love" (Starks 244) is to succumb to the same idolatrous thinking that ruins the characters of the play. Antony has a clear sense of his identity, and like all of the Romans in the play, is driven by an acute sense of history, and often mistakes honor for reputation, finding his sense of worth and value in glory

days long gone. Antony's sense of self aligns exactly with the description Octavius gives of the man who endures hardship "with a patience more / Than savages could suffer" (1.4.63-4) in the name of Rome. Antony's self-worth is grounded in the public's admiration for his Roman virtues, yet, he simultaneously believes that his nobility is inherent, and that he can reject Octavius, the embodiment of the Roman political machine, and still be recognized as a great Roman. This is exemplified from the very opening of the play. When Cleopatra points out the messengers in the first act, Antony says,

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the ranged Empire fall! Here is my space.
Kingdoms are clay. Our dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man. The nobleness of life
Is to do thus – when such a mutual pair
And such a twain can do't, in which I bind,
On pain of punishment, the world to weet
We stand up peerless.

(1.1.33 – 40)

Antony's rebuttal is a deliberate affirmation of himself, peerless, yet standing alone outside of Rome. To view himself and Cleopatra as peerless is to implicitly

suggest that he has a natural, inborn nobility that stands him apart from the politics of the empire, emphasized when he declares "here is my space." He claims that nobleness is a virtue found outside of Rome, refusing to recognize his dependence on the Roman people to validate him, even though Cleopatra is evidently not enough to sustain his identity, evidenced by his continual returns to Rome and agreement to marry Octavia. His dismissal of Rome as a temporal thing eclipsed by his eternal glory is a public display of bravado, undermined soon after when he begs news of the gossip in Rome. As if to confirm the power that Rome holds, he will later ask that the messenger,

Speak to me home; mince not the general tongue

Name Cleopatra as she is called in Rome.

Rail thou in Fulvia's phrase, and taunt my faults

With such full license as both truth and malice

Have power to utter.

(1.2.106 – 110)

Antony alternates between conscious and deliberate self-delusion and the desperate need to be acknowledged by Rome. Even when publicly rejecting Rome, he actively seeks out information on his Roman reputation, and his

desperation to know all the details of his reputation suggest an identity defined entirely by its Roman context. Moreover, Antony defines himself purely in physical, military terms, labeling himself "thy soldier" (1.3.71) to his lover, Cleopatra. When going back to negotiate peace in Rome, he shows himself to be a poor politician in comparison to the tightly controlled Octavius. Antony's returns to Rome show his fall from greatness – previously, Rome had depended on his military brilliance, but a new era has been ushered in under the young Caesar, and Antony struggles to find his place in this new world. His declaration to Enobarbus that "I will live / or bathe my dying honor in the blood / shall make it live again" (4.2.5-7) echoes the martial inflexibility of Titus Andronicus and suggests that Antony is living in an anachronistic world of honor. Even Cleopatra's surreptitious negotiations with Thidias reflect on Antony's narrowness of vision, and Caesar outright mocks Antony when "the old ruffian" (4.1.4) challenges him to hand to hand combat, telling the messenger to "laugh at his challenge" (4.1.6). As he sinks, Antony clings desperately to Roman mythology to validate his greatness, assuming that "death and honor"

(4.2.44) are inextricably bound in contemporary Rome as they were in her history. Antony's devotion to Hercules places him in an unrealistic world of heroism and Gods, rendering him more naïve than both Cleopatra and Octavius. He worships obsolete icons of greatness, while the two politicians recognize the instability of spectacle and manage it accordingly.

Cleopatra, is, as countless critics have recognized, masterful in her manipulation of theatricality and she exposes Antony's flaws by her ability to create her own mythology.²⁹ The notion of visible honor that so many of the Roman soldiers cling to is based on an absolute

²⁹ Much of the criticism of *Antony and Cleopatra* acknowledges her superior theatricality. For a discussion of Cleopatra, see Linda Charnes, *Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare*, Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* and Richard Hillman, "Antony, Hercules, and Cleopatra: "the bidding of the gods" and "the subtlest maze of all"."

acceptance of the relationship between sign and signifier – a man is honorable, because the scars on his body say so – but Antony's affair with Cleopatra is in many ways a willing embracement of obfuscating images. Antony would rather be awestruck, and live under the delusions of greatness that he and his lover lavish on each other, than to return to the openly cynical maneuverings of Rome and have his honor presented in the "cold and sickly" (3.4.7) manner of Octavius. Cleopatra recognizes the importance of theatricality, and recognizes the extent to which her identity is constructed by the public descriptions of her. Thus she works assiduously to surpass the power of language to contain her. Enobarbus' famous description of Cleopatra is an example of Cleopatra's genius for creating a spectacle that she alone controls:

The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
 Burned on the water; the poop was beaten gold;
 Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
 The winds were love-sick with them; the oars were
silver,
 Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
 The water which they beat to follow faster,

As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
 It beggared all description: she did lie
 In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold of tissue,
 O'er picturing that Venus where we see
 The fancy outwork nature.

(2.2.201 – 11)

Unlike Antony, whose worth is defined entirely in terms of his body, Cleopatra is understood much more by the spectacle she creates. She beggars description – her body is entirely absent from the description. All we know is that she lay in her pavilion, more beautiful than Venus. She retains control of her image by the manipulation of idolatry, most obviously seen in her construction of her death. Cleopatra's greatest political asset is her capacity to understand the way in which others view her, and manipulate the Roman weakness for public spectacle – she embraces her dependence on an audience as a means of gaining autonomy. By begging description, Cleopatra ensures that no Roman can speak of her in any capacity – Jonathan Gil Harris notices that the description of her is empowering because of her body's absence (Gil Harris 418). She recognizes the power of language to contain and control spectacle, so makes every effort to transcend

what a watching Roman can describe. As Linda Charnes suggests "the key to power is to lay claim to everything produced" (126), including her own likeness. Moreover, Charnes points out that Cleopatra is the only one given license to describe her physical body, whereas others are left to narrate the effect that she has (Charnes 127). Unlike Antony, Cleopatra knows that spectacle is always open to interpretation, and does all that she can to contain the language that will be used to describe her.

The description of the ephemeral nature of Cleopatra goes to the heart of Antony's weakness, and exposes his ambivalence towards the mythology he has created around himself, which leads to his demise. Antony matches Enobarbus' cynicism about Cleopatra, who notes that she "hath such a celerity in dying"(1.2.149), but, as the play progresses, he becomes dependent on her as he fades. Enobarbus is quite right when he explains to Mecaenas that Antony will never leave Cleopatra, because,

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety: other women cloy
The appetites they feed: but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies; for vilest things

Become themselves in her: that the holy priests
 Bless her when she is riggish.

(2.2.245)

Cleopatra has the capacity to absorb the "vilest things" around her and draw them into her mystique by creating herself a reflection of what men want to see. She offers herself up to Antony as a meal fit for a king. By creating herself as icon, she invites her admirers to project themselves onto her; becoming Antony's "enchanting Queen" (1.2.133), Cleopatra allows Antony to construct fantasies of omnipotence around her, such as the spectacle they create in the marketplace, where they sit, surrounded by their children, and declare themselves rulers of the world.

Cleopatra's recognition of this power not only marks her as a politician equal to Octavius, but enables her to capitalize on Antony's weakness to ensure his loyalty. She continuously constructs him in the way that he would like to be seen, emphasizing his greatness through her lavish displays of devotion to him, found in her constant letters, her public acts of pining when he is away, and feigned swooning when he leaves her in the first act, to name but a few examples. Her most effective technique,

however, is to emphasize Antony's status as Roman hero on a public stage. During their first scene onstage, as Antony is attempting to return to Rome, Cleopatra continuously talks about the way the scene is viewed. She tells Antony that "at the first / I saw the treasons planted" (1.3.25-6), before chiding him for his lack of a public display over Fulvia's death, before turning to her servant, saying, "look, prithee, Charmian, / How this Herculean Roman does become / The carriage of his chafe" (1.3.84 - 6). Her emphasis on Antony's mythological heritage allows him to hold on to his Roman identity, even as he turns his back on the responsibilities his titles demand. Her deliberate inclusion of Charmian is a reminder of the power she can grant him, by calling him a "Herculean Roman" to their audience. Her word choice simultaneously flatters and threatens him. Continuously, the Romans emphasize an awareness of the continuity of Roman history, and Cleopatra is able to use this subjectivity to bolster her own position. At the nadir of their political status within the world, Cleopatra rejects self-pity, insisting on the continuation of their public identities when she tells him that "since my lord / Is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra" (3.13.191).

Others, such as Caesar and even Enobarbus, attempt to contain Antony's effusive mythologizing with reality – Enobarbus gently rebukes the rampant theatricality in the first act when he observes that he has seen Cleopatra die “twenty / times upon far poorer moment” (1.3.146-7), as a means of keeping Antony serviceable to the Roman state. Cleopatra, however, keeps him in thrall by creating spectacles of his greatness that reflect his belief in his own reputation, such as their display in the marketplace of Alexandria, when “in chairs of gold” they were publicly enthroned (3.6.4). These spectacles, however, are matched by other, more parodic images, such as when Cleopatra “put my tires and mantles on him whilst/ I wore his sword Philippan” (2.5.22-3). As she offers him public greatness, she also exploits him by creating images that undo his nobility, in an attempt to keep him dependent that ultimately leads to his choice of suicide.

Cleopatra is aware of the gulf that exists between his prior reputation and the Antony that is now, and uses his desperation as a tool to manipulate him. When others describe him objectively, such as when Enobarbus talks of “the diminution in our captain's brain” (3.13.203),

Antony is exposed as a spent force, and much of the play is spent desperately asserting himself against this encroaching reality. Antony's weakness is his dependence on his reputation, and Cleopatra's description of him as "the greatest soldier in the world / ... turned the greatest liar" (1.3.38 – 9) only serves as a reminder of his investment in their role-play by highlighting how quickly her glorification could turn to scorn. Antony himself shows how desperately he needs his lover's affirmation, when he follows Cleopatra in her retreat from Caesar, lamenting that in doing so, "I have fled myself" (3.11.7). In his despair at the retreat, he states that Octavius does not deserve the victory, due to Antony's prior acts of bravery outshining his. Antony muses that

He at Phillipi kept
 His sword e'en like a dancer, while I struck
 The lean and wrinkled Cassius, and 'twas I
 That the mad Brutus ended. He alone
 Dealt on lieutenantry, and no practice had
 In the brave squares of war. Yet now – no matter.

(3.11.35 – 40)

What appears to sting more than anything is that Octavius does not deserve victory because he is not a proven soldier. Antony is so invested in the right of reputation, that the prospect of defeat at the hands of the "young Roman boy" (4.12.48) enrages him. Antony's identity is shaped by awareness of history, causing Enobarbus to notice that "men's judgments are / A parcel of their fortunes, and things outward" (3.12.31 – 2). In this moment, Enobarbus recognizes the folly of investing one's subjectivity in reputation, and assuming a secure correlation between the sign and signified. Antony's assumption that the hardships his body has endured is enough to guarantee his veneration in later years is what makes him a great Roman, but also what makes him so vulnerable to destruction by Rome, even though he refuses to recognize such a weakness.

Throughout the play, Antony shows himself particularly susceptible to attacks on his reputation, alternating between humility at the loyalty he still inspires and grandiose spectacles of bravado. The constant emphasis on viewing – "behold and see" (1.1.13), Philo tells Demetrius in the first speech – creates a highly spectacular world in which every occurrence is

reported, and gossip is rife. Antony telling his messenger to "name Cleopatra as she is called in Rome" (1.2.110) and Enobarbus' description of Cleopatra's spectacular entrance create an environment in which rumor is given as truth, and spectacle becomes the currency by which good words are purchased. Antony is a heroic Roman, and fully aware of the theatrical nature of his world, telling Octavius, for example, that "I'll wrestle you in the strength of my love" (3.3.62) for Octavia. However, as his public reputation as a Roman begins to slip, he reacts with desperation, trying to create an heroic image around himself using language, because the sights we see on stage have become so dislocated from the Antony of myth.

Antony's suicide comes as a response to the realization that he lacks the military support necessary to win his war, and the language that he uses in this moment of crisis is rooted in mythology and superstition. Antony, blaming his loss on his "triple-turned whore" (4.12.13), perceives his loss in mythical turns – Cleopatra has abandoned him, and equally "fortune and Antony part here" (4.12.19). As with his honor, he sees his failure in corporeal terms, believing that once more

his nobility can be viewed through his endurance of
fleshly desecration. He tells Eros,

My good knave Eros, now thy captain is
Even such a body. Here I am Antony,
Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave.

(4.14.12-4)

To his understanding, Antony has failed at being Antony. Paradoxically, the only way to restore himself to substance is to mutilate his body. When he tells Eros that he is akin to the "cloud that's dragonish, / A vapour sometime like a bear or lion" (4.14.2-3), he persists in the belief that he is entitled to greatness, merely by being Antony. Suicide is precisely one of these signs that "mock our eyes with air" (4.12.7) because it offers Antony the illusion of honor, although ultimately his death will signify nothing. Yet, he recognizes that "there is left us / Ourselves to end ourselves" (4.14.21-2). In his moment of bravery, Mardian comes in and reveals Cleopatra's "death," telling Antony of her dying remembrance of her lover. The fact that such a revelation still has the capacity to hurt him continues to expose what he sees as his frailties, and his regret is expressed in typically military terms. He exclaims that

even "the sevenfold shield of Ajax cannot keep / The battery from my heart" (4.14.39). Antony's motives become mixed once he comes to believe that he has been surpassed by Cleopatra, and he dies embodying the ambivalence towards Roman values that has haunted his life. He tells Eros that he wishes to die in order to defy Caesar, so that no Roman shall see him,

with pleached arms, bending down,
His corrigible neck, his face subdued
To penetrative shame, whilst the wheeled seat
Of fortunate Caesar, drawn before him, branded
His baseness that ensued?

(4.14.74-8)

Like Cleopatra's resistance to witnessing "some squeaking Cleopatra boy/ my greatness" (5.2.219-20), Antony refuses to allow his body to be made Caesar's spectacle. Shame wounds him, rendering his body penetrable, and yet with an actual wound such humility can be cured. His request that Eros use the sword "which thou hast worn / most useful for thy country" (4.14.80-1), implies that assisting his suicide is simply one more patriotic act, supporting the death of a true Roman in defiance of a corrupt authority. Yet, Antony continues to undermine his

Roman martyrdom, by imagining how he will rest with Cleopatra in the afterlife. He tells Eros that he is shamed by the speed with which Cleopatra killed herself, which "our Caesar tells / 'I am conqueror of myself.'" Yet he imagines death to be an extension of the life he led with Cleopatra, picturing how they will recline "where souls do couch on flowers" (4.14.52). Even while committing to an act of Roman honor, the appeal of glory is matched with his desire to rest with his beloved, away from the battles that he wants to define him. As he prepares for suicide as a means of restoring his honor, his primary concern is reuniting with his lover, and "becoming "a bridegroom in my death" (4.14.101). He then goes on to equate himself with a student, telling the corpse of Eros that "thy master dies thy scholar" (4.14.103), believing himself further debased by his inability to take immediate action.

Not only does Antony survive falling on his sword, but he gets to experience the manipulation that his corpse will be subject to, much as he exploited Julius Caesar's in years past. Antony, lying on the floor, bleeding, says "him that loves me strike me dead" (4.14.108). He begs for assistance while guards around

him panic, refuse his request and flee the scene. Decetus, the only guard who remains, steals the bloody sword, which he brandishes, as Coppélia Kahn suggests, like a "precious relic marking the death of a Roman martyr" (Kahn 134) in front of Caesar. He makes a token excuse to the fallen general – that "thy death and fortunes bid thy followers fly" (4.14.111), before running away himself, leaving Antony flailing on the floor. Nobody will finish the job, and instead, they simply stand around him, lamenting. As he is dragged to the monument, Antony attempts to control the spectacle, declaring that "Not Caesar's valour hath o'erthrown Antony, / But Antony's hath triumphed on itself" (4.15.15-6). His insistence on describing his imminent death in the third person speaks to his desperate desire to be mythologized and remembered in Roman history for his triumph over Caesar. Cleopatra concurs, yet will not show him the respect of leaving her monument, and the guard is forced to watch this "heavy sight" (4.15.42). Antony attempts to claim victory with his dying breath, and write his own tribute when he tells Cleopatra that,

Please your thoughts

In feeding them with those my former fortunes

Wherein I lived the greatest prince o'th'world,
 The noblest; and now do not basely die,
 Nor cowardly put off my helmet to
 My countryman; a Roman by a Roman
 Valiantly vanished. Now my spirit is going; I can no
 more.

(4.15.55-61)

Antony attempts to eulogize himself in a speech designed to represent him as the embodiment of Roman dignity, in spite of the spectacle he has just created. Marshall defines this moment of death as something that simultaneously evokes "admiration, pity, embarrassment, humor" (Marshall 398), but I would argue that there is a significant absence of admirable behavior in Antony's death. His spirit gone, he is concerned with the fate of his name, and recalls his status as a noble prince o'th'world as the way in which he wishes to be remembered. Even his final words become a parody. While Brutus, in *Julius Caesar* is allowed a lengthy farewell, Antony must three times beg Cleopatra to "let me speak a little" (4.15.44), as her histrionics threaten to derail the scene. Cleopatra does, however, ultimately give him the validation he seeks, exclaiming as he dies, "noblest

of men, woo't die?" (4.15.61). Her response affirms Antony's Roman values, giving him a sense of honorable triumph as he fades. Anne Barton describes this attempt as "doggedly asserting an autonomy that the play repeatedly denies him" (Barton 143). It is mildly comforting, but in no way cathartic that Antony dies asserting his greatness – the play's continued undermining of Antony's attempts to sustain his identity reveals the inability of the Roman world to create heroes in the traditional mold, and ruthlessly mocks those who would try to become that.

To affirm Antony's death as a triumph would validate a belief in spectacle, and Antony's death shows how futile such an investment can be. Caesar's response to the spilling of Antony's "most noble blood" (5.1.26) is decidedly muted in its tenor. He laments Antony's death, but does not to ascribe him the nobility that is characteristically due a slain Roman in Shakespeare's plays. He says,

The breaking of so great a thing should make
A greater crack. The round world
Should have shook lions into civil streets
And citizens to their dens. The death of Antony

Is not a single doom; in the name lay
 A moiety of the world.

(5.1.14-19)

The true tragedy of *Antony and Cleopatra* is found at the heart of Octavius' speech. Caesar's response suggests that Antony died for nothing. As with Caesar and Antony's lament for Brutus at the end of *Julius Caesar*, Octavius recognizes Antony's heroism and greatness, and his speech suggests a great loss that creates an imbalance in the world. His observation that "the breaking of so great a thing should make / A greater crack" recognizes Antony's nobility, but looks ahead Caesar's inability to afford him the honor he deserves because of the political climate. Antony's actions had drawn him so far from Roman honor that not even his death could save him. Antony's name, synonymous with half the world, should shake the Roman world to its very foundation, but there is no response. Macenas' observation that Antony's "taints and honours / Waged equal with him" (5.1.30-1) means that Antony's attempt at martyrdom has failed. The taints and honours cancel each other out, and what is left is a zero sum total, onto which Octavius can project a more politically expedient reputation. Caesar, recognizing the

frailty of his position, begins to offer Antony a formal obsequy, asking for a moment to "let me lament / with tears as sovereign" (5.1.40 -1), but business interrupts and life must go on. Caesar's concern with Cleopatra, that "in her greatness, by some mortal stroke / She do defeat us" (5.1.64-5), shows more concern as to the impact that Cleopatra's death might hold, and rightly so.

The politicization of death is never clearer than in the closing lines of the play, when Caesar is forced to recognize the superior performance of Cleopatra. She has threatened to thwart his plan that "her life in Rome / would be eternal in our triumph" (5.1.65-6) by ensuring that any immortality of her name and Caesar must scramble to save face in light of her death. Octavius does so at further cost to Antony's reputation. Both Antony and Cleopatra die in defiance of the "wounding shame" (5.2.158) that Caesar will inflict on them by making them a spectacle in the Roman marketplace, and both deaths are predicated on the assumption that glory will be automatically bestowed on those who heroically take their lives. In one sense, this is true, but it is not without major caveats. Octavius reappropriates the meaning of

their deaths, and his closing words become their monument. He says,

She shall be buried by her Antony.

No grave upon the earth shall clip in it

A pair so famous. High events as these

Strike those that make them, and their story is

No less in pity than his glory which

Brought them to be lamented. Our army shall

In solemn show attend this funeral,

And then to Rome.

(5.2.356 – 363)

Antony's body will not be returned to Rome, but buried with Cleopatra, as her possession. He is not Rome's Antony, but Cleopatra's. He affords Antony enough respect to attend the funeral, but to celebrate Antony openly in Rome would be politically foolish. Instead, Caesar imagines the way in which their story is to be told – with Antony's fall being that of famous lover. In the official retelling of his life, admiration for Antony's glory will go hand in hand with pity. Through his death, Antony achieved the place he desired in Roman history, but his life story will serve as a cautionary tale, and his honor will be remembered only as a marker of the

heights from which he fell when he left Rome. Anne Barton explains the power structures that underpin Octavius' eulogy. She says that Octavius' speech "is taking in an unruly general he has been trying to reclaim, and a doubly unruly woman he has alternately regarded as a whore and a major political threat, and translating them into 'Antony and Cleopatra': legendary lovers" (Barton 138). Caesar's closing speech does more than that, however. It takes Antony's attempt at heroic martyrdom and weaves it into the ongoing continuum of Roman history. His reclamation of Antony as a great lover ensures that his devotion to Cleopatra, what Macenas, and certainly Antony, would regard as one of his taints, his flaws, will become his defining characteristic – in a sense, he takes Antony's Romanness away from him. Antony died in defense of his reputation, and in a few lines, Octavius has rewritten history and taken Antony's legacy from him. He has made a monument to love of the soldier's body, and made Antony's suicide meaningless.

At the end of the play, thanks to Cleopatra's superior theatrical ability, and Caesar's shrewd image-management, Mark Antony is to be remembered in Rome as a lover, not a soldier. Previously, when Antony had left

Cleopatra to fight Caesar, he had done so with a kiss, stating that "whate'er becomes of me / This is a soldier's kiss" (4.4.29 -30). His struggles with Egypt throughout the play continuously emphasized Antony's wish to be known as "a man of steel" (4.4.33), not the "strumpet's fool" (1.1.13), but in death, his reputation is beyond his control. Although he fluctuates in his desires between pleasure and duty, as many critics note, Antony's identity is stable, and fundamentally Roman. The tragedy that emerges from this play is one of the instability of signification. Antony's erroneous assumption that his death will earn him a place of honor in Rome is characteristically ambivalent towards Roman values, and foreshadows Coriolanus' outright rejection of the people who will confer glory. Caught between death and the prospect of shame, Antony mistakenly assumes that his death could overcome the increasingly degrading spectacle that was his life, and the tragedy of the play is his investment in the spectacle of death. In his desperation, Antony forgets that he will be forced to depend on those who are in a position to remember him, and Shakespeare deliberately constructs Caesar in a way that inspires cynicism and mistrust. Guards turn against

the dying man, snatching souvenirs to gain political currency, and Octavius appropriates his memory to reinforce his power as the undisputed monarch of Rome.

**Chapter Five: "He was a thing of blood": Language, Honor
and the Sacrificial Body in *Coriolanus***

The servingman who witnesses the reunion between Coriolanus and his master, wryly notes to his friend that had Aufidius " been cannibally given, / He might have broiled and eaten him too" (4.5.197 - 8) making reference to the savagery of the prior battles between the two men. This image is one that loosely hints at sacrificial pagan feasts and continues the commodification of the soldier's body that is the central source of tension in the text. Shakespeare's final Roman play deconstructs sacrifice at its most basic and primitive level, exposing the vulnerability of ritualized violence as a foundational myth of society. The instability of Rome in *Coriolanus* arises from the attempt to negotiate a path between autonomy of thought, and the overwhelming roar of tradition - the very contradiction that Debora Shuger believes is crucial to the problem of Christian humanism. The sacrificial imagery in *Coriolanus* is overwhelmingly seductive, even as the play's eponymous hero highlights its futility.

At the opening of *Coriolanus*, men are starving. Critics such as Andrew Gurr suggest that this hunger can be used to analyze contemporary critical events, such as the 1607 Corn Riots, but the religious undertones present in the Roman citizens' protests suggest a state of Rome that has reached a metaphysical crisis, in which blood can be the only resolution. Stanley Cavell argues that the hunger metaphor is crucial to understanding the negotiations of language within the play, and its relationship to a spiritual suffering. Cavell argues that the play, by starving us of words, reinforces a communal dependence on language, embodied by what he believes to be the failed sacrifice of Coriolanus. Cavell suggests that the play presents a parallel between words and food, noting the sacrificial quality of the text, but ultimately argues that the play enacts a Eucharist, that is, it aspires to "the condition of community" (Cavell 18). Yet Cavell believes the sacrifice of Coriolanus to be a failure, because of the breakdown in language that we see most succinctly in Coriolanus' silence during the fourth act, in response to the demands of his mother. While his is certainly a plausible claim, given the convincing correlation Cavell offers between language and ritual, the

play does not end at that moment of silence. After his submission to his mother, Coriolanus returns to the Volscians to justify his peace, and only after failing to do so is he brutally murdered. While I agree with Cavell's recognition that the play's moment of crisis is found in Coriolanus' silence, such a reading is incomplete. I would like to argue that the play is tragic because of the way in which it limps towards Coriolanus' ignominious death. What we see in the play is one protracted sacrifice, which effectively renders the moment of silence Cavell notes as a resolution to the impasse that has dominated the play thus far. Silence, as Lorraine Helms reminds us, is the marker of consent in sacrificial rites.³⁰ The sacrifice that the play presents exposes the brutality of ceremony in Rome and achieves no meaningful or edifying communion – it simply becomes the murder of an objectionable character that is

³⁰ See Helms, Lorraine, "The High Roman Fashion: Sacrifice, Suicide and the Shakespearean Stage" and chapter two of this dissertation.

justified with the imposition of ceremony. In spite of the religious rhetoric that runs throughout the play, there is no meaningful belief in Gods from any character, and religion is invoked as a means of ensuring conformity. The process of sacrifice we see operates on a purely anthropological level, and this process is destabilized by the civil unrest and factions that characterize Rome. The community of the play demands a sacrifice, and in spite of Coriolanus' violent resistance, he is forced to submit to their call, because to be outside of his society is to be nothing. In his final Roman play, Shakespeare explores the machinations of sacrifice, exposing the primitive cruelty that underpins the ritual, and condemns the community that enacts it, and it is in this respect that Cavell is incorrect. The play is a tragedy precisely because the act of sacrifice does not fail. In spite of Coriolanus' opposition, the ritual marches relentlessly on, and all that remains is for Coriolanus to recognize its inevitability.

In many ways, *Coriolanus* is a return to the ghost of the revenge tragedy that Lavinia first presented in *Titus Andronicus*. Tragedy is rooted in the myth of redemptive violence, and the assumption inherent in the genre, of

the validity of displaced agency, reflect the structure of sacrificial violence. The genre assumes that the mere act of violence can create its own ritual, that language and behavior (such as driving a man through town, raining down stones on his head, as the citizens of Rome do to Coriolanus) can validate brutality. In *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare demonstrated how unreliable this assumption can be, and in *Coriolanus*, the ritual threatens to collapse entirely under the weight of Coriolanus' refusal to participate. The eponymous hero is ambivalent in his rejection of the premise of cleansing violence, and in this play, the sense of community that Cavell sees the play aspiring to falls apart. Moreover, Coriolanus' arrogant refusal to recognize his dependence on his community to confer dative honor, that is, honor that is given to him by other people, exposes, in turn, the political powerlessness of the citizens, and marks him out as the sacrifice needed to re-establish the façade of Roman democracy.

The sacrifice we see in *Coriolanus* accomplishes no spiritual edification, and barely aspires to seek grace — it is simply a pragmatic solution to a political problem

Coriolanus' choice to separate himself from the rituals that define Rome marks him as the obvious outsider in anthropological terms. Girard talks at length about the way in which the scapegoat is selected from the outsiders who are threatening the hegemony of the given society. He says that,

All these crimes seem to be fundamental. They attack the very foundation of cultural order, the family and the hierarchical differences without which there would be no social order. In the sphere of individual action they correspond to the global consequence of an epidemic of the plague or any comparable disaster. It is not enough for the social bond to be loosened; it must be totally destroyed.

(Girard 15)

Girard's discussion of these "contagious crimes" (Girard 15) suggests exactly the way in which Coriolanus threatens the social order, by his refusal to participate in the political veneration of his body. Coriolanus highlights the impotency of the Roman citizens' voices, who, in turn, threaten the state with violence. Menenius, in spite of the skepticism of the citizens, offers at least the illusion that the Senate is listening to the

concerns of the masses: Coriolanus openly refuses to lend them his ears, and in doing so, contaminates the body politic by asserting the tyrannical rights of the belly that Menenius attempts to obfuscate. Coriolanus first establishes himself as an outsider in his refusal to capitulate to the demands of the starving citizens. This initial entrance aligns him with the Roman view of the sick body politic. He calls the people of Rome "scabs" and tacitly acknowledges the Roman need for a scapegoat when he observes,

You cry against the noble Senate, who,
Under the gods, keep you in awe,
which else Would feed on one another?

(1.1.184 - 6)

This observation recognizes the way in which his society operates, and almost prophetically looks ahead to the ritual devouring of his own body. By linking the way in which the Senators "under the gods, keep you in awe," he points out the anthropological basis of religion, and highlights the way in which these structures prevent the "bad" violence of Rome's citizens feeding on one another. By doing so, he inadvertently condemns himself. He exposes the politicians as dishonest, and the people as

willing to be deluded. As a result, Girard's suggestion that the bodies of the victim "suggests their guilty relationship with the crisis" (Girard 24) is excruciatingly worked through in *Coriolanus*, culminating in Coriolanus' attack on his former home.

Cavell's analysis suggests the possibilities to be explored in performative readings, and other critics, such as John Plotz and Stanley Fish, take up the argument in more detail, which can provide us with a means of thinking about the role of the body within the text. Linguistic readings focus on Coriolanus' inability to negotiate the meaning of words, suggesting that his refusal to participate in the system of language results in a complete breakdown of any successful system of communication in Rome. James Calderwood, for example, poses the crisis of the play thus:

Words lose their substance, drift free of meanings, and become merely noises or breath. Full of sound, the plebeians' words have no stable point of reference, cannot be relied upon at any given moment to mean what they literally say, and hence come dangerously close to signifying nothing.

(Calderwood 213)

This is a common critical argument, for *Coriolanus* and the Roman plays as a whole. Certainly, language is subject to many negotiations within the play, and at points, these negotiations fail spectacularly, most clearly seen in the image of Coriolanus, standing at the gates of Rome, screaming "I banish you!" (3.3.123) to the people. Yet, the breakdown of language in the play comes as a direct result of the refusal to recognize ritual, and an inability to bind together speech with the more potent form of communication in the play: the body. Coriolanus' body speaks in a manner more powerful than the words spoken by any character, and his reluctance to submit his body to a language that might usurp this power breaks the fragile system of ceremony in Rome, and condemns him to become the object by which the rupture is repaired. Looking back to the beginning of this project, allows us to recognize Coriolanus as the final part of a trajectory that traces an increasing resistance to the sacrificial ethos. Coriolanus is an extreme extension of Lavinia, not just asserting his agency, but insisting on its primacy. As a tragedy, *Coriolanus* goes further than *Hamlet* in its interrogation of a generic convention, because in *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare offers no comfort, or

cathartic resolution. Like Antony, Coriolanus dies for the sake of the preservation of his name, creating himself an imaginary martyr, confusing the need for testimony with the need for glory. As a result, his death is a suicide, and holds no more sanctity than any of the deaths we have witnessed thus far.

Cynthia Marshall has recently suggested that "the play encourages viewers to respond to character and spectacle more than to any underlying ideological significance" (Marshall 469), implying that the voyeurism within the play is merely a reflection of an audience's masochistic pleasure in punishment. Marshall recognizes the prominence of the onstage body within the play, but views it as supplemental to the language of the text. In *Coriolanus* the body challenges Elaine Scarry's assumption that pain destroys language by becoming a language in itself. However, this language is hampered by its need to be given a meaning, and in this sense, Shakespeare's Rome is caught in a vicious circle. Moreover, Coriolanus' refusal to participate in the traditional symbolic verbal exchange forces a regression in Rome that returns the city to the most explicit symbol of communal strength and unity - the sacrifice.

Eucharistic images feature heavily throughout the text, and in *Coriolanus*, we see a conflation of the imagery of blood and the diseased body with consumption of food. Bread and wine, the staples of the Mass, are referred to time and again, within the context of spiritual unrest. In the first scene of the final act, Menenius plans his approach to Coriolanus, and decides to wait until he has dined. He proposes this strategy because he believes that Cominius failed to reach the Roman General because Coriolanus was not sufficiently sated with food enough to be compassionate. Menenius says,

He was not taken well, he had not dined.
 The veins unfilled, our blood is cold, and then
 We pout upon the morning are unapt
 To give or forgive; but when we have stuffed
 These pipes and these conveyances of our blood
 With wine and feeding, we have suppler souls
 Than in our priest-like fasts. Therefore I'll watch
him
 Till he be dieted to my request,
 And then I'll set upon him.

Menenius, ever the epicurean, assumes that the path to forgiveness is a full belly. His speech, which assumes that carnal fulfillment is a means to satisfying the soul suggests that Menenius finds something sacred in this ritual of dinner that will grant the tribune access to Coriolanus' sense of community. He condemns the "priest-like fasts" as antithetical to forgiveness and the spirit of giving, and by locating the 'holy' in the image of the full-bellied body, Menenius underlines the excessively carnal nature of the faith of Shakespeare's Rome.

We are given the images of food from the onset, and it is this imagery pattern's cannibalistic intonations that subtly shift the audience's focus away from the imagery's original, secular context, into a language that infuses the socio-economic structures with religious undertones. In Plutarch's account of Coriolanus, he attributes the dissatisfaction of the working classes to extortionate interest rates, and in his narrative, it was the citizens who removed themselves from the city, leaving to sit on a hill outside of Rome and claim that "the riche men had driven them out of the cittie" (Plutarch 148). What is notable in Plutarch is the decision of the citizens to destabilize the economic and social system of Rome by

effectively banishing themselves. Their self-imposed exile is a statement of power, highlighting the dependency that Rome has on the working class through the removal of its members – a hint at the power of the mob that shall resonate throughout Shakespeare's play.

Shakespeare's inversion of his source requires the removal of the attributed cause of unrest, and the citizens make clear that a resolution cannot take effect until blood has been spilt demanding "let us kill" Coriolanus within the first ten lines (1.1.10), which creates an association between the idea of grain for bread and the body of Coriolanus, either of which will appease the hunger of the mob. Arthur Riss proposes that the hunger of the plebeians is too corporeal to hold any spiritual implication (Riss 60), but I would argue that the infusion of religious imagery in these scenes suggest that the carnal and the spiritual are interchangeable. Before ten lines are spoken, we are told that the angry citizens are starving, and for reasons not rendered entirely apparent in Shakespeare's play, Coriolanus is cited as the cause of the public famine. When we consider Coriolanus' hostile and undiplomatic response to the concerns of the people – he offers three variations on

his first curtly uttered "hang 'em" (1.1.189)- it is easy to understand the people's attribution of guilt to the unsympathetic patrician. Rarely in Shakespeare do we find a less sympathetic hero, and certainly there are few other characters so immediately alienating. But, it is important to note that the ferocity of Coriolanus' personality does not automatically constitute guilt; Menenius' speech and the tribunes' distain for the common people of Rome suggest a class warfare that is larger than Coriolanus' disdain. However, his abrasive personality isolates Coriolanus and distinguishes him as someone onto which the people of Rome can project their anger.

The citizens open the play publicly raging, declaring that "you know Caius Martius is chief enemy / To the people" (1.1.7 - 8). In advance of the soldier's first entrance, the First Citizen talks of Coriolanus having "faults, with surplus" (1.1.43) immediately reading Coriolanus in the same context of the corn that could end their famine and, subsequently, the civil strife. This scene evokes images of the medieval liturgical tradition, specifically, the Easter Mass of traditional religion, and such spectacle renders this communal demand for food a

call for a spiritual answer to the flaws in the Roman social system. The angry citizens enter the stage en masse, waving their pikes, and calling "in hunger for bread" (1.1.23) in an inverted image evocative of what Bevington calls the "dramatic liturgy" (Bevington 7) of the Easter pageant. This image is particularly evocative of the traditional Palm Sunday procession through town, in which the crowds are led, waving olive branches and calling out blessings, further linking the demands for bread to the physical body of Coriolanus. The citizens call for Coriolanus' life announcing "let us kill him and we'll have corn at our / own price" (1.1.110 – 1).

Holding Coriolanus accountable for the famine, they equate beholding his corpse with receiving the grain they need to survive, and by stating that "he hath faults with surplus" (1.1.44), the first citizen is directly equating Coriolanus with the excessive supplies of corn that is being withheld for their starving bodies. The leaders of the mob call questions to the crowd, who answer almost as one voice, evoking the tradition of *Quem Quaeritis* – but in this instance it is Coriolanus that they seek. Menenius' much considered fable of the belly further appropriates this Eucharistic imagery and illustrates the

political workings of Rome, as Zvi Jagendorf points out. He argues for a connection between Menenius' allegory and the writings of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians (461), which argues for bread, via the body of Christ, as a never-ending source of nourishment. Jagendorf suggests that this allegory creates a problem that can only be resolved with a Christ-like sacrifice, and Shakespeare builds much of his play around Coriolanus' inability to fit this role adequately. The fable relocates the political tensions of the play onto an approximation of the hungry body of the masses, and Menenius' rhetoric reinforces a reading of the state as a body politic, by using a political allegory that emblemizes all of the starving bodies of Rome as part of a whole. Cathy Shanks rightly points out that Menenius' speech reveals that Coriolanus is not isolated in his rejection of the common masses (Shanks 413). Moreover, she suggests that Menenius' fable is an attempt at social coercion through rhetoric, and reifies the already unbridgeable divide between the classes in Rome (413). Her observation exposes the way in which the Senators routinely attempt to deflect social tension through language that is loaded with spiritual undertones. Facing the angry and unsettled crowd,

Menenius immediately displaces the blame from the aristocracy, and recasts it on the hungry plebeians. The cause of their suffering, according to Menenius lies at their own feet. He informs them that, in spite of the apparent storehouses of grain that exist, for the dearth

The gods, not the patricians, make it, and
Your knees to them, not arms, must help

(1.1.70 - 2)

This is shockingly disingenuous behavior. Menenius argues that Rome is a society being punished by a vengeful god, and must redeem itself by piety, not purgation or rebellion. According to Alexandra Walsham, the threat of plague was one that was frequently used within Reformation literature as a threat to spiritual deviants. She argues that "plague was one of God's three 'mortal arrowes': along with famine, and war, one of the three 'deadly weapons' He held in His quiver, one of the three horses of death he periodically released to crush and trample sinners" (Walsham 156 -7) – notably, all of these threats linger around the edges of Coriolanus' Rome.

Menenius' speech creates an uncertainty as to who exactly is responsible for the withholding of the grain

and the lack of resolution creates a desperate tension within the city that must be rechanneled to prevent an outbreak of violence. Menenius, by implicitly rejecting any responsibility for this civil strife, suggests that there exists some form of corruption within the city (although the Senator alludes more specifically to within the masses) that justifies the divine punishment they have received. The difference in perspective becomes glaringly apparent in the allocation of blame: the senator suggests that it emanates from within, while the citizens read as a threat from outside. As Andrew Gurr suggests, the senator's speech is an "extraordinary demonstration of his contempt for his hearers and his faith in verbal smokescreens" (Gurr 67). By redirecting the focus in this manner, Menenius inadvertently creates the need for a scapegoat to bear the burden of Rome's ills, and capitalizes on a carnal mentality already present in the public mind. It is precisely this confidence in such smokescreens that separates the politician from the soldier, the latter causing dissent by his refusal to engage in theatrical but empty political gestures. Menenius' performance to the crowd is offered at the beginning of the play as an example of masterful,

albeit dangerous, political maneuvering, and stands as a foil to the stilted and uncomfortable attempts at diplomacy that Coriolanus will offer. The corn dispute sets up the need for a purgative ceremony in Rome, and Coriolanus' disdain marks him as a potential target, and the citizens despise him as much as they depend on him.

Throughout the early modern period, the military body was one that was fetishized and isolated as a visible emblem of honor. Coppélia Kahn, in *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds and Women* explains that the word "fetish," of Portuguese origin (*feticheria*), was a term used by European traders for a material object worn about a body "which, in itself, embodied actual power" (Kahn 17), in much the same way as the military body represents the power of the state. Kahn goes on to suggest that the wound operates as a fetish of

masculinity (17),³¹ and certainly, this fetish can be seen as a reflection of early modern values. John Norden's 1597 *Mirror of Honor* states explicitly that "to be wounded in the warres is glorie, and to dye in a iust cause purchaseth immortall memorie" (Norden 58). Fulke Greville's account of Sir Philip Sidney illustrates the investment in honor that dominated the chronicles of public figures. Greville says, "yet had the fall of this man such natural degrees, that the wound whereof he died, made rather an addition, than diminution to his spirits" (Greville 127). According to Greville's gushing history,

³¹ Central to Kahn's thesis is that these same wounds also represent a fetish of femininity, feminizing the bearer through their ability to be penetrated, and this perspective compromises the performance of masculinity within Rome. This feminist argument is an intriguing one, but the veneration that the wounds suggests, is, to me, more evocative of the clamor for relics and throughout these plays, wounds are routinely held up to be something admired as a symbol of a war-like mentality..

Sidney embraced the wounds that valorized him. Later, when the doctors explored his painful wound, he was cheered by the thought that "besides his hope of health, he would make this farther profit of the pains which he must suffer that they should bear witness, that they had indeed a sensible natured man under their hands yet one to whom a stronger Spirit had given power above himself, either to do, or suffer" (130 -1). Sidney's desire to suffer publicly was an idea that is reinforced on the early modern stage through the fetishization of military bodies³² and more notably, in martyrologies. In Foxe's account of the Reverend John Cardmaker, the watching crowd responded enthusiastically to "the elect soldiers

³² Mario DiGangi in his upcoming essay, "Wounded Alpha Bad Boy Soldier" discusses the fetishization of young Talbot's corpse in *1 Henry VI*, proposing that the liminality of the corpse is a space in which sexual energies can be refashioned into a patriotic sacrifice of the flesh. For further information, see Digangi, Mario, "Wounded Alpha Bad Boy Soldier."

and warriors of Christ" (Foxe Vol. 7 82), Cardmaker and his fellow martyr, Mr. Warne. Foxe describes the enthusiasm with which Mr. Cardmaker met his death, and the subsequent public response:

His prayers being ended, he rose up, put off his clothes unto his shirt, went with bold courage to the stake, and kissed it sweetly: he took Warne by the hand, and comforted him heartily: and so gave himself to be also bound at the stake most gladly. The people seeing this so suddenly done, contrary to their fearful expectation, as men delivered out of great doubt, cried out for joy (with so great a shout as hath not lightly been heard a greater), saying "God be praised; the Lord strengthen thee, Cardmaker! The Lord Jesus receive thy spirit!"

(Foxe Vol. 7 82)

Like Sidney, and any good military hero, Cardmaker embraces his fate, and the watching crowd admires this bravery and discover in him a source of inspiration. Shakespeare uses Coriolanus as an equally inspirational hero. His deeds inspire his armies to fight, and his willing embracement of physical injury stands as a

testament to his heroism, and the crowds in Rome recognize this, glorifying him excessively.

Kept in the public gaze, his exploits earn him back the love of the exceedingly fickle multitude of Rome, and the tribune Brutus complaint of their idolatry takes on a religious tone. Brutus recognizes that the power that Coriolanus' body holds borders on iconophilia, and bitterly bemoans, as he watches the citizens scramble to glimpse the returning hero, that,

such a pother

As if that whatsoever god who leads him
Were slyly crept into his human powers
And gave him such graceful posture

(2.1.213 - 6)

This statement is the description of the worshipping of an idol. Brutus grudgingly recognizes the divine qualities that the crowd imbues Coriolanus with in his triumphant return to Rome. Even Brutus succumbs to a rancorous sense of awe, when he acknowledges Coriolanus' "graceful posture" as divinely bestowed. Like Julius Caesar and Antony before him, Coriolanus is deified, and modeled in the style of a God. Like the prior Roman heroes, he is also susceptible to mistaking this

reputation for truth. Triumphant, and decorated with wounds, Coriolanus is god-like in his appearance, and it is this adoration that Coriolanus misunderstands as a recognition of his natural nobility. The celebrity that surrounds Coriolanus is almost entirely dependent on the awareness of his bodily sacrifice, and when he is put on display in the marketplace, the citizens clamor around him, begging to see his wounds, in order to access the divine. The angry protest of the citizens, that "he should have showed us / His marks of merit"(2.3.163 - 4) illustrates the extent to which his success is assumed to be a communal triumph, and his body public property.

If bread is the fuel of the mob, blood is the fuel of Caius Martius. Coriolanus is a "man in blood" (4.5.217) both spiritually and physically in the opening act of the play, and this combination of his vicious and proud temperament with his fetishized body of bloody honor marks him out as the Roman scapegoat. Stanley Cavell's rejection of Coriolanus as Christ surrogate is correct, but the images of him as a lamb to be devoured "as the hungry plebeians / Would the noble Martius" (2.1.9-10) undoubtedly carry sacrificial implications, and it is misleading to assume that a man who promotes the

spilling of his blood as a badge of honor is not objectified as a sacred relic of Rome. The prevailing images of Coriolanus in the play establish him as a "thing of blood" (2.2.109) and his body is fetishized as an instrument of war by his mother, who tells Virgilia that spilt blood "more becomes a man/Than gilt his trophy" (1.3.139 -40). Furthermore, while he is fighting battles outside of Rome, Volumnia fantasizes about her son's body, imagining "his bloody brow" (1.3.34) as he stomps in triumph on the neck of Aufidius, even going so far as to "thank the gods" (2.1.118) for the battle wounds inflicted on her son, reading them as marks of divine favor. Volumnia's exaltation of her son's wounds creates an ongoing glorification of the soldier's body, and she continuously reminds the other characters (and the audience) of her son's strikingly bloody visage. In the second act, we see Menenius joining Volumnia in tallying Coriolanus' wounds, and gloating over the extent to which "the wounds become him" (2.1.120). His mother's note, that "there will / be large citatrices to show the people" (2.1.147 - 8) reinforces the popular understanding of his body as Roman spectacle.

It is this idolatry of his body that Coriolanus confuses for inherent honor, and makes him believe that he can exist without Roman adoration. He revels in the sight of his own bloodied flesh, using it as a spur to incite the pride of his soldiers. Members of the Volscian army see witchcraft in the way military men treat Caius "as grace 'fore meat" (4.7.3), and on the battlefield, he welcomes such objectification, inviting soldiers to admire his wounds and aspire to receive honorable hurts of their own. Before the battle at Corioli, he calls to his soldiers,

If any such be here -
 As it were sin to doubt - that love this painting
 Wherein you see me smeared; if any fear
 Lesser his person than an ill report;
 If any think brave death outweighs bad life,
 And that his country's dearer than himself;
 Let him alone, or so many so minded,
 Wave thus, to express his disposition,
 And follow Martius.

(1.6.68-76)

One cannot help but notice the irony in this statement as we watch Coriolanus present himself to his men as a

symbol of the sacrifices of war. Caius' Martius' speech is prophetic as he calls attention to his body as a means of encouraging those who "think brave death outweighs life / And that his country's dearer than himself" to put themselves in danger as a patriotic act. Calling attention to his body only highlights his bravery to the watching crowd, and he is immediately lifted up by the men he was attempting to incite, causing him to holler, "O, me alone! Make you a sword of me?" (1.6.77).

Coriolanus is the sword of Rome — if we can apply Meneius' rhetoric, he becomes the crushing, war-like arm that protects the body and wields weapons yet, even here his speech is unsuccessful, inspiring not emulation, but adoration. Moreover, the fact that he is surprised to be elevated and turned into a weapon for Rome, shows the extent of his naivety when it comes to self-fashioning. When Coriolanus returns from the triumph against Aufidius' army masked in the blood of battle, the tableau is simultaneously a striking embodiment of his symbolic value to the community of Rome and a prophecy of what is to come.

Coriolanus is willing to sacrifice himself for the Roman Republic, proudly wearing gore as his medal, but

only as a means of ensuring his own glory. His observation that "the blood I drop is rather physical / Than dangerous to me" (1.5.18-9), emphasizes the purgatorial aspect of bloodshed, which in this case, washes away Coriolanus' distaste for the people of Rome and invigorates him to fight for the *idea* of his city. His suggestion that he is strengthened by bloodshed epitomizes the ambivalence that characterizes Coriolanus – these self-aggrandizing statements that are supposed to put him out of the reach of the common man are exactly what make the crowds believe that he is a public commodity, and what later identifies him as the ideal sacrifice. Coriolanus' behavior towards the Senate and his subsequent revulsion towards the ritual display of wounds reveal the extent of his ambivalence towards his own body as object of the popular gaze. His assumption that he has earned the right to bypass the custom suggests that he believes in a form of honor that is inherently private, and has no interest in dative honor – that is, glory conferred by people he despises. We cannot deny Coppélia Kahn's assertion that "when he rejects praises the wounds elicit, he does so in a way that recalls them" (Kahn 153). What Coriolanus does is glamorize his wounds in such a manner that abnegates

the use of him as a sword or a prayer, but, crucially, invokes them as an assertion of his autonomy, claiming the right that he had previously attributed to his mother - "the charter to extol her blood" (1.9.14), which glorifies his body in order to validate his claim to intrinsic honor. Because he refuses to recognize his dependence on others to gain honor, he is unable to see how politically vulnerable his pride makes him. When Coriolanus tells the Senate that "I had rather have my wounds to heal again / than hear say how I got them" (2.2.69 - 70) he reveals his conviction that what they symbolize for him is more important than what they represent to Rome. To put it another way, Coriolanus demonstrates an awareness that "deed, being named, passes into its opposite: voice" (Gordon 50). His desire to leave before his formal recognition of valor suggests his resistance to allowing others to confer glory upon him, and insists on the right to bear his scars as badges of his native honor. He believes that he has sacrificed his body for a higher ideal of Rome, but by insisting on the ownership of his body, he condemns his actions as vainglorious.

Coriolanus' obsession with honor manifests itself in his extremes of egotism, which emerges from his class-

based idea of valuation. Honor is something that Coriolanus assumes is obviously manifest in his brave actions - that is Coriolanus believes that his honor speaks for itself and is a quality that exists above the necessary politics of Roman life, and his rejection of ceremony accentuates the way in which the citizens have been excised from the political process. As Antony and Titus discovered, the embodiment of honor is necessary for a military man of action, but a dangerous liability in the Senate house, particularly when civil tensions are running so high. Coriolanus, rejecting political celebration of his wounds, openly refutes the logocentric emphasis on glory, and to do so is to destroy the tenuous balance between words and ritual in the play. Cominius exemplifies the way in which Rome operates when he begins his valorization of Coriolanus by stating,

I shall lack voice. The deeds of Coriolanus
Should not be uttered feebly. It is held
That valour is the chiefest virtue and
Most dignifies the haver.

(2.2.81 - 4.)

This flattering rhetoric, which feigns an awareness of the limitations of language is the beginning of a lengthy

speech in which Coriolanus' bravery is appropriated, contextualized and built into the fabric of Roman history. Although he claims humility, Cominius' speech insists that Coriolanus recognize his dependence on the political process for the confirmation of his honor. Coriolanus' refusal to stay for the official acknowledgment of his valor dismisses language, and makes necessary the marketplace ritual, to contain his presence. By insisting on the necessity of the marketplace ritual, the politicians are attempting to force his complicity, and ensure that this icon of violence is contained by the process of ritual. The feeble voices of the fickle masses want to read Coriolanus' body as an object of sensational, almost other-worldly interest, as one that represents their idea of what Rome can stand for. The image of Coriolanus, standing in battle, looking as if he is stripped of skin³³

³³ Cynthia Marshall, in "*Coriolanus* and the Politics of Theatrical

stands as a transcendent image, a "thing" that defies attempts at categorization but, once removed from its context, with only the wounds as evidence, requires an act of linguistic creation to invoke the honor that the image represents. It is this attempt at re-enactment through description that leaves Coriolanus squirming, as it entails an act of self-glorification on his part, of which he will not acknowledge himself capable, and an act of interpretation by another, which he finds intolerable. This dependence on negotiation of meaning is the fundamental objection of Coriolanus, when faced with the plebeians who want to create a communal glory out of his own personal triumph. Coriolanus does exalt in his

Pleasure" likens this image to the flaying of Marsyas. She suggests that "putting on and displaying a garment comprised of the body's interior, Martius recalls the mythic Marsyas, the satyr who was flayed alive for defeating Apollo in a contest"(459) drawing attention to the brutal masochism that the image provokes.

wounds, because to him, they are the visible mark of his innate, untouchable honor, the embodiment of this charter of blood that marks him as distinct from the unworthy masses who would not fight. His awareness of their fickleness renders him unable to civilly ask anything of the plebeians. The struggle for control of his body is based on an effort from the people to share the honor of Rome's heroic soldier, which Coriolanus cannot reject without rejecting Rome itself. After all, as the tribunes point out, "the people are the city" (3.1.200).

In Shakespeare's late portrayals of Rome, found in *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, the parallel of McCoy's argument that the aristocratic sense of self-esteem is dangerously at odds with a world that demands its supplication to a greater voice (McCoy 27) reaches breaking point. The tension between each side becomes volatile as both the plebeians and Coriolanus attempt to demand authority. This chivalric echo suggests that Coriolanus must submit to the plebeians - that is, his personal valor must be turned into Roman fame. The ritual in the marketplace is in some respect, a recognition of Coriolanus as Roman sacrifice. He is inescapably a member of a community and even an object of communion in which

the citizens have the right to "put / our tongues into those wounds and speak for them" (2.3.66 -7). This image, which looks back to the image of Julius Caesar's wounds in Shakespeare's earlier play,³⁴ emphasizes the body's need for contextualizing speech in Shakespeare's Rome. To speak for Coriolanus' wounds is to create a ceremony out of his battlefield actions, but in the most invasive and cloying manner. Not only does the request of the citizen suggest the assumed right to confer glory, it also marks the intent of the people to partake in the success of Coriolanus, and to speak on behalf of his body, which is an emblematic sacrifice that he openly rejects.

³⁴ Antony explains that displaying the body of the slain Caesar will make the wounds "like dumb mouths do ope their ruby lips / To beg the voice and utterance of my tongue" (*Julius Caesar* 3.1.260 - 1), suggesting the extent to which spectacle is dependent on speech in Rome. It is this assumption that Antony manipulates in the marketplace. This idea is discussed further in chapter three of this dissertation.

The wound ritual is a Roman institution that will turn Coriolanus into the object of the devotional gaze, and forces him to become supplicant to the people he despises. The observation of the third citizen that "if he tell us his noble deeds, we must also tell him our noble acceptance of them" (2.3.8 - 9) is a grimly amusing assumption of power that epitomizes the conflict that arises during this ritual, in which we see both the people and Coriolanus pulling against each other in an attempt to reassert their power of voice above the other. This ritual in the marketplace is constantly referred to as a custom, and it is through this custom that we see, like Menenius' speech, the methods by which the citizens are misled into believing that they have authority in this supposedly democratic incarnation of Rome. Coriolanus reveals his own awareness of the potency of tradition when he muses that,

What custom wills, in all things should we do't
 The dust on antique time would lie unswept
 And mountainous error be too highly heaped
 For truth t'o'peer.

(2.3.117-120)

For Coriolanus, tradition is a means of obscuring the truth. The power that the citizens wield is only when they operate as a violent mob to be directed by the corrupt tribunes. The ceremony in the marketplace reveals that there is as much autonomy in the common voice as there is in Coriolanus' desperate assertions of his own honor.

D.J. Gordon is not quite correct when he explains that in the context of the wound display the word voice "is an active word, containing act, situation, what utters, the uttering as well as the significance of being uttered" (Gordon, 43), because the ritual falls apart, and the failure of ceremony expose the voices as lacking power. As a result, in order to assert their strength, the voices turn into an angry mob and demand that the symbolic sacrifice that Coriolanus refused be enacted to the full. In the marketplace, it becomes evident that bodies are sacrificed to their symbolic political value – therefore, it can be no surprise to Coriolanus when this process that he unwillingly participates in blows up in his face. His reduction of the people to "moe voices" (2.3.124) is an attempt to repudiate the ritual that binds words and body – in effect, to reject the potency of

sacrifice when the citizens attempt to apply it to him. The crowd, however, insist on their ritual, as a means of restoring the power of speech and forcing his admission of their authority. By insisting that they will put their tongues into his wounds, the citizens of Rome are attempting to bind unreliable words to supposedly infallible ritual, and the futility of this gesture is found in Coriolanus' refusal to reveal his body. His enigmatic speech to the fourth citizen demonstrates his awareness that such a ritual is an inherently fraudulent spectacle. He tells them that,

you should account me the more virtuous that I have not been common in my love. I will, sir, flatter my sworn brother, the people, to earn a dearer estimation of them. 'Tis a condition they account gentle; and since the wisdom of their choice is rather to have my hat than my heart, I will practice the insinuating nod and be off to them most counterfeitly. That is, sir, I will counterfeit the bewitchment of some popular man and give it bountiful to the desirers. Therefore, beseech you, I may be consul.

For Coriolanus, ceremony is to bewitch a man into believing that popularity matters. This speech operates as an inversion of Menenius' earlier smokescreen, revealing Coriolanus' distain for politics and his rejection of the practices that would honor him as counterfeit and a popularity contest. His speech exposes the class discrepancies that Menenius earlier attempted to conceal, and furthermore, Coriolanus can only beg in such a way that makes clear his revulsion for the citizens, exposing both the custom of humility and the earlier fable of the belly as fraudulent displays of respect. Coriolanus' promise "to make much of your voices, and so trouble you no further" (2.3.108 - 9) contradicts the assumption of critics such as Shanks, who want to suggest that the people have a degree of political power. The people's imagining of democratic Rome is at odds with Coriolanus' fixation on oligarchic Rome. Like the body of Coriolanus, their voices are assumed, appropriated and reinterpreted on their behalf by the tribunes. The ownership of their voices, like Coriolanus' assumption of the ownership of his body, is an illusion. This façade of democracy is made explicit in the second act when Menenius tells Coriolanus that "*the*

tribunes endue you with the people's voice" (2.3.138 - 9, my italics). In spite of the repeated importance of custom, the democratic political system of Rome bypasses its citizens entirely, putting the power of the common mouth in the tongues of the tribunes, making the ritual of the wound display a pointless show of civic solidarity. The citizens are turned from physical bodies to voice, passed to the tribunes who then interpret this voice as they see fit. Later, the citizens will separate themselves even further from the body of power, labeling themselves no more than the hands of the abstract people. In a sense, this becomes an apt description, as all the people do is act out empty ceremony and offer themselves up as muscle in support of the tribunes.

When Brutus suggests that Coriolanus, in addition to having the citizen's voices, "may deserve your loves" (2.3.155), he draws attention to the complex manipulation of language that is at work within the play. By hinting that Coriolanus is not worthy of public adoration, Brutus immediately signals a division between words and intent. By assuming that the citizens have been manipulated into giving their voices against their better judgment, he diminishes the power of language as unrepresentative,

pointing out the fallibility of speech, and attempting to connect this powerlessness as bound to Coriolanus' abrasive personality. As a result, the citizens can only make themselves "heard" by descending on the Capital en masse, threatening violence through their overwhelming physical presence. What Brutus makes explicit (and in doing so, transfers his own culpability) is that by refusing to show his wounds, Coriolanus has emptied words of their signification and in order to become once again "moe voices," the people of Rome must use the threat of civil war that can only work through a show of bodies. Brutus' question to the people, "why, had your bodies / No heart among you? Or had you tongues for cry / Against the rectorship of judgment?" (2.3.201 – 3) offers once more the smokescreen of power, but only by ignoring the evident discrepancy between the political and mimetic representations of the people.

Coriolanus' resistance to communal use of his body is manifest in his language, and he argues that to allow his body to be used by the Roman citizens is a fundamentally dishonest act. He refers time and time again to his 'lying tongue' which he must induce to work

against what he imagines to be his noble heart, referring to his physical self-identity when he tells his mother

I will not do't
Lest I surcease to honour my own truth,
And by my body's actions teach my mind
A most inherent baseness.

(3.2.120 - 3)

Although, as Cynthia Marshall points out, such a speech recognizes the performative nature of the flesh, Coriolanus recoils from such an admission. He does not, as Marshall suggests, endorse the performativity of his body (Marshall 456), but he lies to himself when he so emphatically disavows such a practice. The "truth" that he resists confronting is that he does perform honor by cherishing his wounds, and to admit to his performativity would be to recognize his kinship with the Roman citizens, and more unpleasantly, his powerlessness. Arthur Riss notices that "strangely, Coriolanus and the plebeians share a remarkably similar understanding of the ultimate concreteness of the individual body" (Riss 64), and it is this understanding that repels Coriolanus, but drives him back to Rome in the wake of his sacrifice.

Coriolanus' blunt refusal to participate in this system of political reduction isolates him from all who live in Rome, even his mother. He mistakenly believes in an absolute correlation between his wounds and his honor that requires no interpretation, an assumption that everyone else in Rome seems to reject. Volumnia proves that even the charter of her blood cannot stand without the necessity of being read through this custom, when she asks him to submit his body to the idolatrous gaze, explaining that to do so,

no more dishonours you at all
 Than to take in a town with gentle words
 Which else would put you to your fortune and
 The hazard of much blood.
 I would dissemble with my nature where
 My fortunes and my friends at stake requir'd
 I should do so in honour.

(3.2.5-64)

Volumnia is here defining honor as renown, glory conferred by the people. The "hazard of much blood" is the threat of violence that underpins the call to ritual. A political mind to rival any in Rome, Volumnia recognizes the performative nature of the body and tries

to illustrate to her son the extent to which the path to honor begins with role-play. In Shakespeare's Rome spectacle repeatedly insists on its own space within speech, and the bloodied bodies of *Coriolanus* make visible the abstract notion of honor, and attempt to "speak" for themselves. In spite of their self-imposed identity as voices, harbingers of language, the citizens of Rome are dependent on visual symbolism, such as Coriolanus' wounded body, for visual validation of Rome's spoken and unspoken ideals. Coriolanus insists that his body is his badge of honor and requires no interpretation, but his nominalistic society requires that virtue be conferred in speech, and this speech is found in a ritual. He is as blinkered as the citizens of Rome in this respect, and ironically, the disastrous ceremony of wound display makes clear this similarity between Coriolanus and the citizens. His attempt to reject the power of the citizens to confer honor threatens to negate the efficacy of sacrifice. In response, both Coriolanus and the citizens retreat to the threat of violence as a means of asserting their authority.

In an arrogant and misguided attempt to lead the state to 'truth,' Coriolanus delivers a speech that echoes the inspirational words he had previously offered to the soldiers. He calls upon the spirit of sacrifice to recognize these Roman fictions, and by doing so, he ensures that the city is brought to its knees. He argues that the spectacle of the body and the impact of language exist separately, and reads this difference as one between politics and action. Coriolanus openly rejects,

This double worship,
Where one part does distain with cause, the other
Insult without all reason; where gentry, title,
wisdom,

Cannot conclude but by the yea and no
Of general ignorance – it must omit
Real necessities, and give way the while
To unstable slighness. Purpose so barred, it
follows

Nothing is done to purpose. Therefore beseech you –
You that will be less fearful than discreet;
That love the fundamental part of state
More than you doubt the change on't; that prefer
A Noble life before a long, and wish

To jump a body with a dangerous physic
 That's sure of death without it - at once pluck out
 The multitudinous tongue; let them not lick
 The sweet which is their poison. Your dishonor
 Mangles true judgment, and bereaves the state
 Of that integrity which should become't,
 Not having the power to do the good it would
 For th' ill which doth control't.

(3.1.141 - 60)

This speech is worth quoting at length because it reveals the impasse to which Coriolanus has forced Rome. To Coriolanus' mind, the playing of politics simply delays action and guarantees that "nothing is done to purpose." Coriolanus rejects what he sees as a dangerous submission to an ignorant mob when he scorns the work of the senate that "cannot conclude but by the yea or no / Of general ignorance." In his desire for absolute rule on behalf of the patricians, Coriolanus has highlighted the social problems of Rome, and when he demands that the senators "pluck out / the multitudinous tongue" (3.1.155), he encourages the return to an obsolete social order that returns the symbolic power to the hands of the patricians - an order that requires no justification, no

interpretation. The speech echoes the earlier speech to his soldiers, in which he challenged those who admired his blood to put their sense of honor first, and his relocation of this idea to the political realm is the chief reason for its failure. Such rhetoric belongs on the battlefield and has no place in the Senate. In suggesting that "nothing is done to purpose," Coriolanus calls to those who "love the fundamental part of the state / More than you doubt the change on't" challenges the patricians to abandon the charade of democracy and return to a Rome that is dangerously tyrannical. Moreover, by isolating those who love honor over survival, citing only these men as brave enough to ensure the certain death that will come out of plucking the "multitudinous tongue" of the hydra-headed Roman beast, he inadvertently marks himself out as the necessary scapegoat.

Although the Senators seem to endorse Coriolanus' point of view, the threat of violence keeps his dangerous proposal in check. They inveigh the people, both literally and figuratively, not to "unbuild the city and lay all flat" (3.1.199), suggesting the extent to which Coriolanus' rebellion has incited "bad" violence that can threaten the stability of Rome. In order to escape this

building strife, Coriolanus is rightly identified as the source of the crisis. He is simultaneously the source of contamination within the body politic and the valued offering given to save the community. Coriolanus' speech in response to the citizens' calls for blood further highlights his ambivalence to the power of his body. Still insisting on his inherent nobility, he rejects any authority that the citizens claim to banish him, while showing himself to be deeply invested in the sacrificial ethos that has condemned him. He declares,

Let them pronounce the steep Tarpeian death,
 Vagabond exile, flaying, pent to linger
 But with a grain a day, I would not buy
 Their mercy and the price of one fair word,
 Nor check my courage for what they can give,
 To have't with saying, 'Good morrow.'

(3.3.88 - 93)

In this speech, he effectively announces a willingness to sacrifice his body in order to preserve the equilibrium of Rome, and unwittingly re-imagines himself as the fractured body politic. Coriolanus believes that he will sacrifice his body for his *own* honor, but there is little difference between his martyrdom and Rome's required

sacrifice. At this moment of crisis, Menenius asks the citizens to "think / Upon the wounds his body bears" (3.3.49 - 50) attempting to exploit the fascination of the citizens with an imaginary display of the body, in order to keep the peace. Ultimately, Menenius' speech is a futile gesture, as the attention drawn to the carnal body reinforces the public's need to destroy the body of Coriolanus in order to restore the broken metaphorical body of Rome through a ritual of expulsion.

In an image evocative of the Passion, he is driven out of the city, chased through the streets, with abuse raining down on his head from the people of Rome. Leviticus describes how, in the Mosaic ritual of the day of Atonement, a goat shall bear the burden of the sins of the children of Israel and "shall send [him] away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness" (Leviticus, 16.10). Coriolanus is banished into the wilderness, driven from the city by the people who lay the sins of Rome on his head to take to a land elsewhere. The theatrical display of sacrifice is a satisfactory substitute for the actual death of

Coriolanus and his ceremonious expulsion reasserts the symbolic value of images and gestures to the Roman people. Coriolanus' famous rebuttal to the people of Rome - "I banish you!" - is a final attempt at self-exaltation, yet, paradoxically accepts the definition laid upon him of his own body as the broken body of Rome, but, as Fish rightly suggests, exposes the extent to which Coriolanus is a product of his own society (Fish 219). The fact that Sicinus leading the crowd chasing Coriolanus requests "a guard / Attend us through the city" (3.3.139 - 40) implies that in spite of his sacrifice, nothing has changed and the threat of violence remains. This should be the end, but Coriolanus is left alive and, like Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*, Coriolanus becomes a ghost of his own agency. Coriolanus now exists as an unwilling sacrifice who continues to exist and serve as a representation the futility of ritual violence. Unlike Lavinia, however, Coriolanus attempts to insist on his right to his own hagiography, and returns as a raging emblem of his authority, intent on punishing Rome for her appropriation of him. However, in order to do this, Coriolanus has to reclaim his identity as a noble Roman by making his body an idol once more. This can only be

achieved by warfare, and so he turns to his enemy. It is fitting, then, when the ragged and beggarly Coriolanus arrives at the door of Aufidius, he is unrecognizable without the trappings of his glory. His dismay at not being recognized by his physical appearance is evident when he says

If, Tullus

Not yet thou know'st me, and, seeing me, dost not

Think me for the man I am, necessity

Commands me to name myself.

(4.5.58 - 61)

It seems that unless coated in blood, Coriolanus is physically unremarkable before his Volscian counterpart. Coriolanus' unwillingness to be recognized by name alone, however, seems to be a dreadful prospect, and Aufidius is forced to ask no less than five times before Coriolanus grudgingly announces himself, declaring that his body is bereft of its intrinsic sense of value, and "only that name remains" (4.5.77) by which he can be identified. Sean Benson correctly explains the extent to which, at this moment he becomes a cipher – "as such, his story is written by others" (107), and back in Rome, we see the extent to which the glory of Coriolanus' body has been

defined by reputation, as the name alone holds the same power over the people as his actual presence would. He has been reduced to only a name used superstitiously by the tribunes, paraded in front of the citizens as a reminder of their current peaceful status. But to the man himself, the word has been emptied out and bereft of the potency that comes through being inhabited by his wounded body, and the necessity of defining himself by name is a bitter blow. Coriolanus' explanation to Aufidius that "the drops of blood / Shed for my thankless country are requited/But with that surname" (4.5.73 -5) reveals the disgust he feels at being given a name but denied the tangible political power that name might suggest. In order for the body of Coriolanus to re-inhabit his title, he must change sides and become that which they see him to be and make his name synonymous with the scourge of Rome. Much has been made of the parallels between Aufidius and Coriolanus, and the subsequent comments by the serving men as they gossip about the way in which Coriolanus' body suggests his nobility, suggests a parallel fetishization of bodies that exists among the common people. The star struck serving man falls into familiar Roman rhetoric when he notes that "before Corioles he

scotched him and notched him like a carbonado" (4.5.195 - 6). These observations are reactions to the way that Coriolanus offers his throat to Aufidius, in a ritualistic show of submission, and suggests that Coriolanus continues to offer physical imagery for interpretation, viewing the only appropriate response as something dictated by the value of his flesh. The return of Coriolanus to a martial environment offers a belief in the security of shared value of honor and as the play continues, Coriolanus attempts to move further away from any involvement with misleading words, relying more heavily on his mother's mantra that "action is eloquence" (3.2.76) to express himself.

The final act obliterates any hope the audience might have for a more conventional cathartic resolution. Coriolanus, already dead to Rome, returns like a ghost of vengeance to wreak havoc on those left behind. He discovers the extent of his dependence on Roman recognition, and for validation, he must submit to his mother's demands for compliance. This realization ruins him. The final act brings us full circle. Coriolanus has become a literal outsider to the community and a very real physical threat to the city that must be purged.

Coriolanus recreates himself as the scourge of Rome not only by the obvious act of raising an army, but by refusing to allow any meaningful interaction between himself and the citizens of Rome. Cominius' failed attempt to subvert the war illustrates the extent to which Coriolanus attempts to retreat to a place invulnerable to Roman politics. Cominius unsuccessfully attempts to invoke a sense of Roman honor by calling on "the drops of blood / That we have shed together" (5.1.10 - 1) as a means of gaining access to the general. In his failure, he describes how Coriolanus

forbade all names:

He was a kind of nothing, titleless,
Till he had forg'd himself a name o'th'fire
Of burning Rome.

(5.2.12-5)

Withdrawing into the extremes of his self-aggrandizement, Coriolanus has turned his back on the language of Rome and its people, and is trying to exist in a world that finds meaning in rituals of violence. In shedding his name, Coriolanus is also attempting to shed any meaningful connection to his Roman society, to define himself as part of the world elsewhere - a deed undermined somewhat

by the context of his planned invasion of Rome. In the next scene, Menenius also attempts to approach Coriolanus, only to discover that "the virtue of your name / Is not here passable" (5.2.12 - 3). In Rome, names, like wounds, are used to make the abstract virtue of honor visible, and Menenius is subjected to an evaluation of merit based on labels, which he fails. Coriolanus' belief that words cannot adequately carry the potent meaning that the body does is continuously undermined by his vulnerability to the notion of Roman glory. Coriolanus remains deeply invested in his own sense of worth, and continuously demands validation by others in order to give himself meaning. He demands that Aufidius "report to the Volscian lords how plainly/I have borne this business" (5.3.3 - 4) aiming to be defined solely by his deeds, yet continuously demanding confirmation of his worth. His proclaimed autonomy is a fantasy, and in this world elsewhere, which Shakespeare locates merely on the other side of the gates of Rome, his anger simply pays tribute to the power that the city continues to hold over him. It is significant that Coriolanus, bereft of his Roman context, continues to view himself through the eyes of an observer. His explanation

to his mother of his spiritual state takes on a theatrical flavor, and his self-evaluation maintains an emphasis on the body as spectacle as he imagines himself to be an embarrassed performer on a public stage. He tells her that,

I am a dull actor now
I have forgot my part and I am out,
Even to a full disgrace.

(5.3.40-2)

Robert Ormsby proposes that "*Coriolanus* not only represents onstage audience response shifting between an awareness of distance and the collapse of that distance, but also how their fluctuating response affects the iconic identity of bodies within the fictional world of the play" (Ormsby 52), yet at this moment, *Coriolanus* has lost the will to perform. Finally, he recognizes that he, a puppet of state, is already in some sense, dead –that he has already been sacrificed, and he has no other purpose than to submit to this demand. *Coriolanus* here views himself as a foolish actor, acutely aware of being observed by an audience as he struggles to find the reason for his presence on the stage and justify his scripted speech. This heartbreaking image reminds us once

again of the fraudulent theatre found in the rituals of Rome, and the comprehension that he has a role that he is playing badly contributes to this feeling of inevitability. If, as Sarah Covington suggests, public martyrdom acts as some form of liturgical passion play (Covington 174), or, as I would argue, shadow of such, the collective bodies of Rome cannot rest easy until Coriolanus has rediscovered his role and submitted his body to their demands. I would propose that this moment of crisis highlights the true tragedy of sacrifice, in which violence becomes a necessary gesture at unnecessary human cost.

Even though Volumnia barely needs to speak to impact her son, she nevertheless launches a full scale attack, combining the idea of social roles and responsibilities with physical imagery, in an attempt to communicate with her son but on her terms. She declares that

should we be silent and not speak, our rainment
And state of bodies would bewray what life
We have led since thy exile.

(5.3.94 - 6)

Her speech forces her son to view the physical spectacle of his tattered family in the posture of supplication. The image of her and his family shaming him with their knees, evokes Antony's horror of "bending down / His corrigible neck, his cace subdued / To penetrative shame" (*Antony and Cleopatra* 4.14.74-6) in the traditional Roman triumph. By evoking custom, Volumnia makes it clear that he must choose between the sacrifice of his own body and that of his city – ritual will not be denied, nor does Coriolanus have the strength to resist. His family's willingness to sacrifice themselves is symbolized by their silent kneeling, as though in prayer, forces him to choose between their "unnatural" sacrifice and fulfilling his socially destined role at the expense of his own life. In this moment of decision, Coriolanus recognizes the futility of attempting to define himself against the definitions of the Roman citizens, and it is this acknowledgement that renders him wordless as he comprehends his defeat. At this moment, Coriolanus recognizes that his sense of corporeal honor has not achieved anything but his own death, a fact he acknowledges when he informs her that

You have won a happy victory to Rome;

But for your son - believe it, O believe it! -

Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,
If not most mortal to him. But let it come. (5.2.186-9)
This moment of silence constitutes spiritual death for Coriolanus. This speech, with the resigned permission to "let it come" constitutes a formal recognition of the inevitability of his death and his submission to the sacrifice demanded of him. His body, which he had sought to preserve as an emblem of his honor, must return to Rome, to give the citizens the body they need to consecrate their violence.

Although it is evident that in the very moment of admitting the women, Coriolanus dooms himself, it is in the silent gesture that Coriolanus accepts the inevitable. By quietly taking the hand of his mother, in a tableau of gentle submission, he relinquishes any control over his actions, and implicitly acknowledges his own responsibility for his fate. Coriolanus' defeat needs no rhetorical flourish and Shakespeare, learning from the powerful figure of Lavinia, recognizes that by withholding language this icon of despair will be unmistakable. In a brutal irony, only in his moment of acquiescence can Coriolanus indisputably physically

represent what he is. Furthermore, through his rejection of words, he becomes like Lavinia by condemning his mother's calls for his compliance, Menenius' blustering politicking and all the citizens of Rome who demand access to his body. Coriolanus' silence is simultaneously the silence of consent and a repudiation of those who wish him to submit to their calls for capitulation.

All that remains at this point is for Coriolanus to die, and his ignominious and undignified end becomes a coda to the tragedy. There is little nobility in this final submission of Coriolanus, and although he attempts to control his death, the frenzied and haphazard nature of his slaughter undermines its purgative value. Moreover, his undignified end suggests a final reluctance on the part of Coriolanus to finally commit to the action that will restore his name to its former glory. The acknowledgement of Coriolanus that he is choosing the body politic over his own physical being comes from the awareness of having betrayed his promise to Aufidius, and his belief that some kind of sacrifice is necessary to atone for this decision. Aufidius seems to be in agreement, choosing to murder the Roman soldier in the marketplace, as Coriolanus feebly attempts "to purge

himself with words" (5.6.8) – an effort that history tells us is doomed to failure. The return of Coriolanus to the marketplace is deeply symbolic, and returns his body to the site of the original failed ceremony to offer what is left of himself, but as the sacrifice has already been made, all that is left is the slaughter, which Coriolanus attempts to fashion as a martyrdom. Coriolanus finds himself unable to abandon the rhetoric of disease, which illustrates his continued distaste for the body politic of Rome. Upon his return, Coriolanus announces that he is "no more infected with my country's love / Than when I parted hence"(5.6.71). In these plays, Rome is a place that demands the body and soul of its inhabitants, engulfing their identity, and contaminating any objective sense of self. His speech implies that Rome itself is an infection, weakening the bodies of those who live within her walls. Certainly, the inevitability of Coriolanus' death implies that it is the infecting love he bears for his city that cripples him.

Even though it succeeds in its basic aim of removing the immediate threat of violence from the city, the death of Coriolanus nonetheless exposes Roman ceremony as bathetic and grotesque. The accusations of Aufidius

reveal to Coriolanus that his own sense of nobility is the charter of his blood, and makes it evident that he will never be content to live mildly under the gaze of the Roman masses. Realizing this, Coriolanus finally welcomes his death, ferociously inviting "men and lads" (5.1.111) to smear their swords with his noble blood. As the Roman plays have repeatedly illustrated, in Shakespeare's Rome bloodshed is the key to the assertion of nobility, no matter what the cost. Coriolanus' invitation to the people amassed to "stain all your edges on me" (5.6.111) is a futile attempt at gaining autonomy of meaning – by stirring the anger of the people, he attempts to create a martyrdom by fashioning himself as a lone voice of defiance. To die thus, however, is to mistake vainglory for testimony, and Coriolanus dies an ignoble death, stabbed and trampled underfoot in the marketplace. In this moment of death, Shakespeare exposes the myth of sacrifice as irreligious piety – there is no ceremony as the conspirators strike him down, just a frenzied chorus repeating the same order – "kill, kill, kill, kill, kill him!" (5.6.130).

Like Antony, Coriolanus does not account for the necessity of reliable witnesses to testify to the

nobility of the fallen soldier and his intention is swiftly undermined. That the death of Coriolanus transforms him from boy of tears to "the most noble corpse that ever herald / did follow his urn" (5.6.142 - 3) in a matter of minutes, illustrating the potency of the image of the soldier's broken body in Shakespeare's Rome, and attesting to the intoxicating effect of spectacle. But even this glorification is not straightforward. The unnamed Lord's assertion that "his own impatience / Takes from Aufidius a great part of the blame" (5.6.144 - 5) reminds us that his body, as it is paraded through Rome, will be subject to the interpretive stare, and like Antony, he will be remembered with faults to equal his glory. In death, Coriolanus will be subject to everything he despised in life, and his demise becomes a sacrifice for a deeply flawed and corrupt vision of Rome. J.L. Simmon's proposal that Coriolanus does not rise above Roman history (Simmons 16) does not go far enough — Coriolanus is crushed by the weight of tradition.

What we see in Shakespeare's final Roman play is an ambivalent examination of the workings of sacrifice. *Coriolanus* accepts the collapse of the principles of sacrifice even as the mechanism works. The ongoing

exaltation of Coriolanus' body, even by the audience, marks him out as the inevitable scapegoat for a brutally nominalistic Rome, but his death denies us the security of belief that it was worth anything. Coriolanus is unwillingly sacrificed for Rome – twice – and the noble memory promised by Aufidius is guaranteed by no-one. Coriolanus' death eradicates the reasons for which he died, because the witnesses to his experience have learned nothing. In spite of the removal of Coriolanus, Rome will go on as before, and nothing has been gained through this death. The tragedy of Coriolanus arises out of an inability to concede any level of responsibility for interpretation. The citizens assume the right to read the spectacle as they see fit just as much as Coriolanus insists on the supremacy of his intention. Coriolanus finds his honor in the drops of blood shed for his country. Without Rome, he is nothing, reduced to a hollow name that means nothing when there is nobody there to hear it spoken.

The exposure of the traditions that underpin Rome as instable and irrelevant forces the Roman citizens into dependence on a regressive, carnal notion of sacrifice, which fails because all parties are not in agreement as to

who should be the beneficiary of such an action - the people, or the idealized state of Rome, each side refusing to recognize the interdependence of these two concepts. The Eucharistic context only highlights the inadequacy of Coriolanus' sacrifice by reinforcing his unwillingness to become the public scapegoat, knowing full well his dependence on the citizens of Rome for his hagiography. Such ambivalence is encapsulated neatly in his earlier outrage at having to participate in the marketplace ritual:

To brag unto them, this I did, and thus,
 Show them th' unaching scars which I should hide,
 As I had reciev'd them for the hire
 Of their breath only!

(2.2.147 - 50)

Coriolanus' indignation misses the point. Everything he does is for the hire of their breath, and the tragedy of the play stems from his refusal to recognize this fact.

Ultimately, Shakespeare seems to suggest that the gulf between autonomous desire and public recognition is unbridgeable. The residues of earlier meanings can never entirely leave the public imagination, and in denying ritual its space, Coriolanus closes himself off to the

possibility of ever returning from the metaphorical land
elsewhere.

Conclusion

In the fourth act of *King Lear*, the blinded Gloucester proclaims the pointlessness of violence when he observes that "as flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, / They kill us for their sport" (*King Lear* 4.1.38 – 9). Gloucester is the victim of one of the most horrific acts of cruelty throughout all of Shakespeare's plays, and what makes the plucking of his eyes even more appalling is that it is an action committed out of pure malice. If the gods are involved in this "horrid act" (3.7.86), they have no higher purpose than mere "sport." Throughout Shakespeare's non-Roman tragedies, there is an awareness that in the face of injury and death, redemptive meaning cannot be made out of maimed flesh.

When Othello tells Desdemona that she makes him commit "a murder, which I thought a sacrifice" (*Othello*, 5.2.65), he reluctantly acknowledges the brutality of the act he is about to commit. His concession allows us to recognize the traits that make the Roman plays so singular. As he comes to recognize the enormity of his crime, Othello still wants to think of himself as an "honorable murderer" (5.2.293), but his final self-image is even less exalted. Unlike Antony, who sees himself as

"A Roman by a Roman valiantly vanquished" (4.15.57-8), Othello denounces himself as "a malignant and turbaned Turk" (5.2.352). Othello describes his own suicide as an execution of a depraved outcast rather than a noble self-immolation. His "bloody period" (3.2.356) becomes an "object [that] poisons sight" which must "be hid" (363-4). The sorrow, horror and even revulsion that mark the bloody climax of *Othello* and other tragedies distinguishes them from the Roman plays. In *Macbeth*, the protagonist is unceremoniously denounced as a "dead butcher" (5.8.69). In *King Lear*, the surviving witnesses to the "general woe" (5.3.293) refuse to indulge in ritual speech, speaking only "what we feel, not what we ought to say" (5.3.298). And in *Hamlet*, Horatio's oratory and Fortinbras' tribute are overshadowed by Hamlet's final insistence that "the rest is silence" (*Hamlet*, 5.2.364).

By contrast, the Roman plays are distinctive in their attempt to justify the brutality we see onstage as sacrificial rituals, and to infuse that brutality with religious intonations. Brutus wants his fellow conspirators to be "sacrificers and not butchers" (*Julius Caesar* 2.5.165) in the murder they commit. Titus

announces that he means to martyr Chiron and Demetrius, drawing Lavinia into his ritual, by asking her to "receive the blood" (*Titus Andronicus* 5.2.197) of her attackers. Antony suggests that "with a wound" (*Antony and Cleopatra* 4.14.79) his broken honor can be repaired, and Coriolanus is forced to submit to a ceremonial displaying of his body, in order to have his bravery validated. Brutality is pervasive in Shakespeare's works, but in the Roman tragedies, the characters want to believe that the violence can somehow be sanctified, that it can mean something redemptive for themselves and the state. Violence, in the Roman plays, is offered as an act that strengthens the social body. To die in the high Roman fashion is habitually presented in sacrificial terms, as a gesture that ennobles the victim and benefits the community by enhancing social bonds. The submission to death is seen as laudable, and as an echo of the heroic sacrifices of antiquity. The most potent example of such a model death, according to Catherine Edwards, is the death of Cato, who killed himself as a political statement in spite of attempts to revive him and stitch up his wounds (Edwards 3). Shakespeare's Roman plays are singular because of the characters' investment in this

sacrificial ethos, which infuses violent acts with a drive for communion and envelopes cruelty with pious rhetoric.

In Shakespeare's Roman plays, classical ideals of self-sacrifice elide with Christian notions of martyrdom, and both are tainted by associations with Roman Catholicism. It is important to recognize the differences as well as similarities between sacrifice and martyrdom in both ancient and early modern cultures. There are two ways in which we can view sacrifice, both of which are predicated on a system of exchange. The first, most obviously, is the idea of an oblation made to a presiding deity – an offering of something valuable, in exchange for forgiveness, or prosperity. It is in this sense that the death of Jesus operates – he offers his life in exchange for God's forgiveness of humanity's sins, one man taking responsibility for the failings of his community. Reading the sacrifice as an intermediary between a society and its deity, Hubert and Mauss identify a kinship with the divine, or a holiness that must characterize the sacrifice, to make it amenable to the God receiving the offering (11). Significantly, they highlight the social aspect of the sacrifice when they

emphasize the need for the consent of the participant: "above all, it must be persuaded to allow itself to be sacrificed peaceably, for the welfare of men and not to take vengeance once it is dead" (Hubert and Mauss 31).

René Girard's study of the ritual works along similar principles – that something of great value is exchanged for the benefit of a given society – but he proposes that sacrifice originates in primitive impulses towards violence. Girard points out the paradox of these violent ceremonies when he says that "the religious and moral authorities in a community attempt to instill nonviolence, as an active force into daily life and as a mediating force into ritual life, through the application of violence" (Girard 20). Arguing that the aim of religious ceremony is to "forestall a series of reprisals" (25), Girard suggests a distinction between the types of violence, which can be identified by the use of ritual. Violence, Girard suggests, is contagious because it is self-propagating. He says that "everyone wants to strike the last blow, and reprisal can thus follow reprisal without any true conclusion ever being reached" (26), reaching catastrophic proportions. In order to control this spiraling brutality, this "impure"

or "bad" violence, religion tries to purify violence, to promote "good" violence that can be executed without fear of reprisal. Hence blood "can contaminate or purify, drive men to fury and murder or appease their anger and restore them to life" (Girard 37). Religious ceremonies of violence strive for the latter condition, to promote "good" violence. In this sense, both anthropological and theological perspectives offer up violence as an act that strengthens communal bonds. What matters in sacrificial rites is the communion that is achieved through these ceremonies that can galvanize a society and repair the fractured body politic.

The difference between a sacrifice and a martyrdom is quite simply the reliance on ritual to validate the act, and this complex distinction is at the heart of the confusion Shakespeare charts in his Roman plays. A martyr which derives its etymology from the Greek *μάρτυρ*, meaning witness, is "a person who undergoes death or great suffering for a faith, belief, or cause, or (usu. with *to*; also with *of*, *for*) through devotion to some object" (OED), yet this idea is complicated. A martyrdom is an act of devotion, or a testimony to the strength of spiritual belief, and therefore almost impossible to

define from ritual. The validity of the testimony can only be known by accessing the innermost thoughts of the persecuted, and the only audience necessary to confirm its validity is divine, making the success of such a gesture almost completely unknowable. From a more dispassionate or skeptical perspective, martyrdom can be seen as a gesture that is perilously close to a vainglorious act of suicide. When John Donne in his seventeenth-century tract, *Pseudo-Martyr*, condemns those who are provoked "to a vicious affectation of imaginarie martyrdom" (Donne 96) by the Catholic Church, he emphasizes the inherent instability of martyrdom by highlighting its dependency on conflicting interpretations. Thomas Freedman explains how such a system is rife for manipulation and susceptible to the cynical eye: "the claim that a person who died for his or her beliefs was demonstrably a martyr because those beliefs were true had no efficacy with those who believed they were false; some external verification of martyrdom was needed" (Freedman 36). That external verification is provided by martyrologists, polemicists and religious writers whose accounts make martyrdom a performance to be admired by a community and to inspire its devotion. By

making martyrdom a social performance, these accounts conflate the testimony of the martyr with the communal ideology of sacrifice.

We must recognize martyrdom, then, as simultaneously deeply private and necessarily performable, subject to public interpretation. This complex notion of martyrdom in many ways parallel the idea of performative honor that runs throughout Shakespeare's Roman plays. Honor, in these plays, is defined in military terms, through a willingness to sacrifice one's body in battle. Coriolanus rejects the opportunity to display his wounds on the grounds that he might "surcease to honor mine own truth / And by my body's action teach my mind / A most inherent baseness" (*Coriolanus* 3.2.121 – 3). Imagining his nobility to be something borne about his body, Coriolanus fetishizes his wounds as a marker of his inherent value. Octavius Caesar defines Antony's honor in terms of his willingness to suffer physical hardship in the Alps, noting that "it wounds thine honor that I speak it now" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 1.4.70). Titus kills his son Mutius, because he "hath dishonoured all our family" (*Titus Andronicus* 1.1.350). Titus' sense of honor causes him to lose his hand, and drives both his and Lucius'

vengeful actions. Brutus slays himself on the battlefield in order to ensure that "I shall have glory by this losing day" (*Julius Caesar* 5.5.34) and is honored according to his desire, by Octavius and Antony. The Roman plays thus present honor as a military virtue, as a quality that can be borne about the body in the shape of wounds that symbolize a willingness to suffer for Rome.

As a result, honor operates on nearly identical principles to martyrdom, and parallels the concerns with performativity. The logical end of honor is a willingness to die for Rome, to die as a testimony to Rome's greatness, but also to ensure the status of one's name, and a place in history. The concept of honorable sacrifice becomes contested, as it relies so heavily on outside interpretation, and this concern, which replicates the uncertainties that characterize the definitions of martyrdom, forms the central ideological conflict of these Roman plays.

In each play, the protagonists attempt to ritualize their own death and define its meaning, but meaning is generally appropriated and distorted by the survivors. In Shakespeare's narrative poem, "The Rape of Lucrece," the heroine pulls off the most successful suicide. The

generic distinction may be a factor in this success, for narrative verse tends to be more static and less conflicted than drama. Spectacle is more easily managed in verse description than on stage, and the poem's imagery is more fixedly emblematic and contained by rhetorical language. Tarquin, for example, is not inspired to rape Lucrece by actually witnessing her beauty, but by Collatine's awe-struck description of "the clear unmatched red and white; / Which triumph'd in that sky of his delight" ("Lucrece" 11 -2). Lucrece's beauty is primarily emblematic, contained in the conventionally symbolic colors of red and white. Lucrece dies so that "[her] blood shall wash the slander of [her] ill" (1207). Lucrece dies as a testimony to her purity, which will strengthen the community by affirming the familial bonds she has created. Her death affirms her chastity so that her husband can trust that his children are his own. Moreover, this gesture will become the impetus for driving the tyrannical Tarquin from the city of Rome. In order for Lucrece's sacrifice to be effective, however, it needs to be recognized as a symbolic act, and the presence of her blood threatens to overwhelm the meaning Lucrece intended. Collatine swoons into "key-cold

Lucrece' bleeding stream" (1774), wallowing and weeping in the pool of blood, overwhelmed by the horror of her death. Only Brutus sees Lucrece's suicide as an opportunity to "clothe his wit in state and pride"(1809) and recognizes the opportunity to use the narrative of Lucrece's death as a means of political ammunition. He declares Lucrece to be the embodiment of Rome, wronged by Tarquin, and parades her bloody corpse through the town as a means of raising support for Tarquin's banishment. By tying her violated chastity to the image of the ravished body politic, Brutus is able to capitalize on her violation by turning her death into a sacrifice made to preserve Rome's integrity.

Lavinia, the violated daughter of Titus Andronicus, follows a similar path, but with far more mixed results. Raped and mutilated by Chiron and Demetrius, she becomes an emblem onto which the Andronici project their communal sorrows, and the men of the play continually refer to her as a martyr. Titus, for example, declares that he can interpret "her martyred signs" (*Titus Andronicus* 4.1.36). This insistence on Lavinia's martyrdom undermines her attempts to act on her own behalf. Lavinia mutely resists for a time, and, by continuing to live, helpless

and tongueless, a ghoulis spectacle, she challenges the symbolic currency of violence by reminding us of its cruelty. Moreover, by attempting to write in the sand, she repudiates anyone's attempt to speak on her behalf. Still Titus is determined to make her a martyr to ease his own sorrows, and insists that she submit to his symbolic code. Lavinia is finally made into a sacrifice, but her efforts to retain her own agency render the sacrifice questionable. In this sense, the play critiques a society's hold over the female body that begins with Lavinia's rape and ends with her death at the hands of her father.

Julius Caesar offers a sacrifice whose meaning is no less contested, and the core of the play is spent attempting to claim the symbolism of Caesar's body for competing political purposes. Caesar is killed by the conspirators in an act that Brutus attempts to define as a sacrifice, asking that he be carved "as a dish fit for the gods" (*Julius Caesar* 2.1.172). By making a ritual out of the murder of Caesar, Brutus is hoping to contain the spectacle of the corpse and control the symbolic value of what the public sees. However, he is out-performed by Antony, and he underestimates the extent to which the

spectacle of bloodshed can inflame the watching crowd. Antony's elaborate performance in the marketplace puts Brutus' cool rationality to shame, and Antony's masterful revelation of the body turns the slaughtered flesh of Caesar into a holy relic, inciting the crowd to violence. Both Antony and Brutus try to make Caesar's body into a sacrifice, but both ultimately fail. Antony's brilliant funeral oration overwhelms the intention behind Brutus' oblation, but even though Antony succeeds in discrediting his rival, the murder simply whips the crowd into a violent frenzy. Such "bad" violence can only be appeased by a sacrifice, and Brutus is forced to fall on his sword. He dies to quell the civil strife by offering himself up as a sacrifice that will return peace to Rome, even though he is equally motivated to "have glory by this losing day" (*Julius Caesar* 5.5.36) and save his name from becoming synonymous with the rise of civil discord. Like Lavinia, Brutus' agency is crushed by the weight of tradition, and he finds that he must submit himself to the ceremonious "Roman" death that the city demands.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the tables are turned on Antony. After suffering repeated defeats, he finally offers himself up as a martyr in defiance of Octavius

Caesar, only to find himself memorialized as a mere object of his powerful lover, Cleopatra. Antony's decision to end his life is in no way an attempt to heal the wounds of the Roman Empire, but a vain-glorious attempt to preserve the integrity of his name and stave off "th'inevitable prosecution of / Disgrace and horror" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 4.14.66-7). Octavius' lament that "the breaking of so great a thing should make / A greater crack" (5.1.14 -5) is cruelly played out in Antony's death, which denies him the gravity and dignity he had aspired to as he is dragged, bleeding, up to his lover, only to be engulfed by her histrionics. Antony's hope that his death will be celebrated as a heroic and symbolic act is dashed when Octavius refuses to grant him symbolic value, declaring him to be no more than a lover, Cleopatra's Antony. Antony's attempt to cement his agency with his death fails spectacularly, and he becomes neither a martyr nor a sacrifice, simply a foolish lover whose "taints and honors / Waged equal with him" (5.1.30-1).

Coriolanus' death is the most painful of all, because he so adamantly resists the sacrificial demands placed upon him by the people of Rome. Coriolanus

attempts to reject any form of communion by refusing to acknowledge his relationship to his society, and he dies inviting men and boys to "stain all your edges on me" (*Coriolanus* 5.6.112), repudiating the power his community can hold over his spirit. Coriolanus, exiled from his community, attempts to refute Rome's hold over him by declaring war on the city, and when that fails, he attempts to die as he has lived, raging and defiant. However, by declaring him the "most noble corpse that ever herald / Did follow to his urn" (5.6.143 – 4), the Volscian lords read his attempted martyrdom as a sacrifice, conflating the sacrificial ethos with the warrior ethos, assuming his death to be an illustration of the same commitment to shedding his blood for Rome that Coriolanus had so eagerly embraced throughout his life.

What remains consistent throughout all of Shakespeare's Roman texts is the belief that sacrifice, although powerful, is ineffectual. The spectacle of blood has the power to arrest the sight of those who witness it, and frequently transcends those who would attempt to impose their own symbolic code on the sight. The sacrifice of Julius Caesar fails to achieve anything

beyond further bloodshed. Antony calls attention to the power of these wounds when he says that all he does is

Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor poor dumb
mouths,

And bid them speak for me. But were I Brutus,
And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
Would ruffle up your spirits and put a tongue
In every wound of Caesar that should move
The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny.

(*Julius Caesar* 3.2.218 – 23)

Antony attempts to turn Caesar's body into a sacrifice by making the body an emblem of the voices of Rome. This image is used to call on the city to rise up and restore justice to the corrupt authorities. Yet, all he unleashes is violence, as shown in the death of Cinna the poet. The crowd call for Cinna to be slaughtered for his role in the conspiracy, and when the hapless poet points out the mistake, the mob simply responds, "It is no matter, his name's Cinna" (3.3.33). The blood of Caesar has simply created chaos. Caesar's wounds have not spoken to the crowd in any meaningful way, but instead have simply awakened a thirst for blood. The efforts at sacrifice in the remaining Roman plays are equally

unsatisfying. Coriolanus is killed for highlighting the inadequacies within the Roman state, and his death simply masks the tensions that continue to exist. Neither political nor spiritual discontents are resolved, and nothing is learned by his death. In this sense, he is like Lavinia, who is murdered to assert a flawed vision of Roman identity that is defined by honor. Both Coriolanus and Lavinia attempt to assert their agency by maintaining control over their bodies, and this autonomy is violently wrested from them by people who seek to appropriate their agency on their own behalf. In *Titus*, Lucius' closing denial of Tamora's burial rites reaffirms the link between honor and the body that condemned both Coriolanus and Lavinia to death under the guise of civilizing ceremony.

Nor does martyrdom work in the Roman plays, because of its dependence on those left behind to interpret one's legacy and testimony. Octavius' skillful presentation of Antony's *memoriam* denies the Roman general the soldier's identity that is so integral to his sense of self. In spite of his defiant claim that "Not Caesar's valour hath o'erthrown Antony / But Antony's hath triumphed on himself" (4.14.15-6), there is no accomplishment in his

death. His name is claimed by Caesar, and Antony's fear that he might "lose himself in dotage" (1.2.121) becomes actualized by the legacy Octavius bestows on him. His claim to testimony is overruled by the narrative of those who outlive him, in much the same way that Brutus's narrative fails to impact the crowd as much as Antony's theatrics and rhetoric do. These competing narratives destabilize any ritual potency that sacrifice might hope to achieve, and supercede any testimony left by those who aim to die as martyrs. The verisimilitude of the deaths we witness throughout the Roman plays is entirely defined by those who observe the corpses that litter the stage, and as these witnesses become increasingly unreliable, the efficacy of these gestures wane.

Critical approaches to the Roman plays have routinely recognized the ritualistic elements in many of the plays, asking whether or not ritual "succeeds" or "fails." Stephen X. Mead, for example, proposes that the problem of ritual in *Titus Andronicus* is no more than its improper application, suggesting that a new "series of sacrificial events" (Mead 476) is needed to restore the community to stability. René Girard himself, in *A Theatre of Envy*, suggests that the ceremony of Caesar's murder is

"the pivot upon which the violence of the crisis slowly resolves in order to generate a new Roman and universal Degree" (Girard 202), seeing the ritual as the resolution to the dangerous violence that Brutus unleashes. Naomi Conn Liebler's excellent study, *Shakespeare's Festive Tragedy: Ritual Foundations of Genre*, notes the extent to which ritual "persisted in social practice and in the commemorative performances of Shakespearean tragedy" (Conn Liebler 228). She suggests that "the anxious legacy of communal ritual insists upon itself" (231), even though its relevance is often defined by the breach of ritual as much as its observance. Ritual remains indelibly in the minds of both playwright and spectator.

Conn Liebler's assessment is worth considering in greater detail, as it offers much of value to this summation; yet, I propose that we can go further. Conn Liebler suggests that ritual, which protects human bonds by reaffirming the principles of a community (8), is well suited to tragedy. She explains that

The 'restoration of order' in tragedy amounts to much more than burying the dead and patching up the wounded (person and kingdoms alike); it reflects, among other things, the (over) determined and driven

choices that people in communities – collectively and individually – make towards survival, and the price, again collective and individual, of those choices.

(7)

That is to say, tragedy interrogates the values that ritual is supposed to affirm. It asks us to evaluate what is worth preserving and look towards the restoration of social order, through a communal bonding over such ideals. In tragedy, a community is broken, and ritual (or the absence thereof) allows a means of reconstituting social structure. Yet, a sacrificial subtext underpins this argument. Conn Liebler says of tragic heroes that "their removal, or sacrifice, in turn, reconfirms or reinscribes the community in the image it has chosen for itself" (7). She goes on: "it is in the community's best interest that the tragic heroes appear to "fail"; and yet their defeat and death represents a huge loss to the community" (16), implying the self-delusional nature of ritual that makes it so attractive, and yet so unreliable. She imagines sacrifice to be a necessary part of the tragic genre because such a death holds meaning for the watching community, whether that be the

characters within the play, or the early modern Shakespearean audience. Conn Liebler here suggests that even if ritual "fails" (as indeed she proposes it does in *Titus Andronicus*), the sacrifice is still necessary to sustain the fiction of community.

It is exactly this fiction that Shakespeare condemns throughout the Roman plays by his use of blood. A shadow of ritual endures, continuing to insist on its relevance, and can neither "fail" nor "succeed." Ritual becomes a testimony to the ongoing need for *communitas*. And yet, as Conn Liebler suggests, in tragedy, ritual is defined by its need for a sacrifice. When she offers the caveat that the heroes must appear to fail, she recognizes the necessity of bloodshed to consecrate the values of a society, perpetuating the myth of "good" violence. But her idea must be taken further, in light of a new understanding of martyrdom. Through the Reformation conflation of martyrdom with sacrifice, there exists an

implicit acknowledgment of theatricality,³⁵ and such awareness must surely change how we understand ritual to work in these plays. Can ritual ever “work” when both participants and receivers of the gesture, consciously or unconsciously, know it to be a performance? This question evokes Donne’s concern about “affectations of *imaginarie martyrdome*” – how can a community possibly endorse, or hope to benefit from an affectation of sacrifice? Ritual becomes a meta-theatrical performance in the Roman plays, and the blood that is continuously shed in order to sustain such fictions is a powerful reminder that too high of a price is being paid.

³⁵ Thomas Freeman puts pressure on the assumption of an implicit acknowledgment, when he talks about the fashioning of secular criminal executions in the image of religious persecutions by suggesting that “any criminal could subvert the symbolism of his or her punishment by invoking, consciously or unconsciously the similarity of their fate to the passion of Christ” (Freeman 40)

I have departed from the critics who consider the power of ritual in these plays, by looking at the bodies that are forced to bear the weight of these still powerful fictions. Ritual is an overwhelming force that drives the violence we see in the name of piety. Moreover, I argue that ritual is the root of the tragedy in these plays, if we are defining tragedy as the death of a protagonist who, in some way or another, appears to reconfirm social values, as Conn Lieber does. It is worth repeating Terry Eagleton's somewhat grandiose claim that "tragedy ennobles suffering... at the cost of truth" (Eagleton 29) because it goes to the heart of this project's thesis. There is neither "good" nor "bad" violence in these play, only violence, and sacrifice becomes not an emblem of community, but a contest of narratives striving to claim meaning for what is seen. Suffering is encouraged and validated by ceremony, in spite of its human cost, and that is why critics such as Stephen Mead, who says that ritual fails because it is too static for the changing Roman world (Mead 478), miss the point. Ritual is dangerous, because it holds great power over the minds of Shakespeare's Romans, even though it has no clear meaning. Ritual neither succeeds nor

fails, but it is simply a tool for propaganda, offering up every act of brutality for interpretation by the most politically savvy.

The contextualization and framework imposed on these deaths, however, is consistently negated by the onstage presence of the bloodied body. In *The Medieval Theatre of Cruelty*, Jody Enders explains that "if torture somehow assists in the formation of civilized Christian communities, then it does so on the backs of mutilated bodies" (Enders 21). In his Roman plays, Shakespeare foregrounds these mutilated bodies, and encourages his audience to view any attempts to rationalize them through skeptical eyes. The ritual in the marketplace at the heart of *Coriolanus* is one that is deeply valued by the people of Rome, even though it simply offers the illusion of political power. The mutilation of Lavinia is turned into a symbolic act of desecration that the men of Titus Andronicus appropriate as an impetus for their revenge plot. Brutus misunderstands the importance of ritual to the Roman people, and his defeat in the marketplace is a direct result of his underestimation of the theatrical power that bloodshed holds. What I hope to have proved in this project is that sacrifice fails, not because ritual

ceases to matter, but because employing ritual creates the problem of interpretation. This project argued that Shakespeare, with characteristic coolness and ambivalence, uses the Roman plays to chart this growing crisis, finding sacrifice increasingly hollow as a means of gaining communion or strengthening a community. Those who attempt to use ritual are shown as creating imaginary ceremonies, betrayed by the bloodied flesh that their rites depend on.

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 lately prisoner in the castle of Worcester, hath
 gathered out of Sanders, Bellarmine, and others, for
 the auoyding and discrediting of sundrie allegations
 of scriptures and fathers, against the doctrine of
 the Church of Rome, concerning sacraments, the
 sacrifice of the masse, transubstantiation,
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