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### Trauma of Death and Decorum in *Titus Andronicus*: The Tomb as Ahistorical Reality

William Shakespeare's revenge play *Titus Andronicus* has been garnering much attention recently, and is the focus of nuanced criticism from the schools of feminist studies, trauma theory, postcolonial and empire studies, to name only a few.<sup>1</sup> While the gamut of such new studies has recovered the text from near obscurity, it tends to revisit the play on seemingly predictable pathways, like the mutilation of Lavinia, the otherness of Aaron and his ultimate revenge, the monstrous/maternal woman as exemplified by Tamora, the ritual murders enacted as foundational sacrifices, and so on. Scholars have given close scrutiny to both the tombs and the pit as compelling metaphors for the interment of a culture in all its tragic grandeur and pathos.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the "pit" as a site of trauma, in its textual and narrative connections and connotations to the voracious womb, has attracted much attention to the near occlusion of the more authentic site of trauma: the family sarcophagus. For it is here, after all, in an act of extravagant performativity—the funeral ritual for the fallen son—that the protagonist sets the revenge tragedy in motion, bringing down the house of the Andronici. Whereas most scholars tend to treat the tomb as a specific, sacred, or cultural site, symbolic of an unraveling or imploding society, I suggest that we read the family tomb instead as ahistorical, traumatic memory-site that unleashes repetitive fury in a protagonist given to ritual and decorum, and who is therefore undone by it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Marguerite A. Tassi, *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare: Gender, Genre, and Ethics* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP, 2011); Deborah Willis, "The Gnawing Vulture: Revenge, Trauma Theory, and *Titus Andronicus*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53.1 (2002): 21-52.

<sup>2</sup> See Helga L. Duncan's essay "Sumptuously Re-edified: The Reformation of Sacred Spaces in *Titus Andronicus*," *Comparative Drama* 43.7 (2009): 425-543, for a discussion on the significance of the spatial metaphors of the tombs and the pit in the play as sites of martyrdom and dramatic conflict.

<sup>3</sup> See *Studies in Hysteria*, by Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, Trans. A. A. Brill, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 1-8, for the clinical processes of traumatic hysteria and the causative psychic trauma. They explain that when the reaction to trauma is suppressed, the affect remains united with memory. In their opinion, this suppression often results in a silent suffering that is a "grievance," which is recognized by language as having a "cathartic" effect only if it is expressed in an adequate reaction like revenge. Freud calls this expression "abreaction" (German *abreagieren*) — a catharsis offered by the medium of language.

For this study, I am drawn to the school of memory-sites that sprang up from Pierre Nora's *Realms of Memory*, which documented the haunting memories of the Second World War. Nora draws our attention to certain painful sites of memory or *lieux de mémoire*, symbolic spaces that are inextricably intertwined with emotional trauma and that he thinks get an exaggerated ritual status which might actually impede healing.<sup>4</sup> In his opinion, these ritualized memory-places displace actual memories, creating a rupture in equilibrium in those affected and overwhelming any attempts by them to absorb or process trauma. I suggest that in *Titus Andronicus*, the family tomb in its role as the ritualized site of collective memory and as an actant in the narrative presents Titus with a similar rupture of equilibrium, denying him the necessary healing, and by crystallizing paradoxically into ahistorical memory-site for repetitive psychic trauma, it leads him to his tragic end.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the family tomb as a holy monument to the dead, along with the ritual sacrifice of Alarbus, does not allow the hero a reconstruction or a reconstitution of the self; instead, this symbol of decorum and tradition becomes the vault that literally and metaphorically swallows him. Additionally, the destabilizing trauma is experienced both by the protagonist and the audience/reader through a series of splits or binaries in the play that create textual instabilities: history-memory, self-other, text-hypertext.<sup>6</sup>

In *Titus Andronicus*, the precipitous actions of the hero can be attributed to a selective recollection brought on by the faculty of imagination—perhaps excessive imagination—that associates a particular *locus*—in this case, the family sarcophagus—with the memory of his sons. “*Hysterics mainly suffer from reminiscences*,” say Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, establishing the causal link between trauma and memory as they discuss one particular case (7, emphasis in original). The fading of memory and the losing of its affect depend on the reaction to the original event, according to Breuer and Freud, who assert that any suppression of reaction to the original trauma results in silent mortification of the sufferer, who must seek therapeutic revenge later as a means of survival. In *Titus* we see a hero exhibiting all the classic

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Detailing the causal relationship between the psychical trauma and the hysterical phenomenon, they suggest that the memory of the trauma acts like an *agent provocateur* or a foreign body, keeping the original suffering alive in memory. For this paper I look back to Freud's early works on hysteria and trauma that helped found modern trauma studies, in particular, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. C.J.M. Hubback (London and Vienna, 1922).

<sup>4</sup> See Pierre Nora's magisterial *Realms of Memory: Construction of the French Past*, (Trans. Arthur Goldhammer, New York: Columbia UP, 1997), a multi-volume construction of the French past which examines the critical sites of French history—both physical and symbolic—and what they represent in particular moments in time and the memory for the French people.

<sup>5</sup> Narrative theorists like A.J. Greimas and Vladimir Propp explain the word “actant” as being specific to narrative theory, and functioning within a binary of subject-object, self-other, giver-receiver etc. In regard to the play *Titus Andronicus*, I see the tomb as a giver of pain, an actant.

<sup>6</sup> See Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1991), where Genette explains intertext as the connection between a previously existing text (Text A) and the present one being studied (Text B), i.e., “a text derived from a previous text” (5). He says further that correspondences connect the two in intimate ways such that text B will be unable to exist without text A.

symptoms of the tormented victim, suffering in silence as a warrior when his sons fall in battle, but feeling the compulsion to work through his trauma in acts of repetitive vengeance later. Trauma theory in literary and critical studies has shifted attention from the etiology of traumatic hysteria as introduced by Sigmund Freud in the nineteenth-century to its effect on consciousness and sensibilities, especially those of the listener/reader. Freud himself was compelled to move away from a mere “pathogenic analogy between simple hysteria and traumatic neurosis,” which informed his analysis in *Studies in Hysteria*, to develop a more nuanced psychoanalytical approach that focused on the process of traumatic events and the mind’s recursive attempts to manage them in his later works (3).

The twentieth century saw a new group of scholars like Geoffrey Hartman, Cathy Caruth, and Shoshana Felman who critically examined the intersection of history, literature, and the concept of trauma while seeking new interpretations of old texts. In addition to the work of Pierre Nora, this article is inspired by the theoretical lens of Cathy Caruth for revealing the performative aspect of Titus’s trauma and of Geoffrey Hartman for the intricate connection between memory and geography. Hartman’s preoccupation with memory-landscapes, as evidenced by his studies of Wordsworth, informs his reflection on the transmission of trauma and its relationship to specific geographic spaces. He thinks that location plays an important role in both the original event of trauma and in the healing, thus inalterably linking memory and place. In this context, his work overlaps with that of Caruth, who relies on the significance of revisiting and haunting as ways for the psyche to work through the pain. Both these critics, in my mind, offer a counter-argument to Nora, who insists that excessive association with a particular place or *lieu* hampers authentic memory, and by extension, healing. Since my article suggests that the attachment to the family tomb causes multiple trauma and destabilization for Titus, I find their work useful. In addition, the work of Shoshona Felman is important for anyone interested in trauma and performativity. Felman, writing along with Dori Laub, M.D, has transformed trauma studies in her insistence on testimony and transference as curative devices that shift the burden from narrator/victim to the reader/listener, who in turn experiences cathartic self-restoration in the process. I suggest later in this paper that Titus shifts the burden of his trauma to the audience, paradoxically rendering them collaborators in his abhorrent acts. Bearing witness gains new meaning then, as subject and the other blur, conflating perpetrator and victim in one macabre embrace.

Funerary monuments from ancient Greece and Rome that commemorate heroes stand witness to the custom of honoring the sacrifices of fallen soldiers. Even though communal mourning was not part of the Roman tradition, as noted by Valerie Hope, the Romans still built

grand monuments to celebrate their warriors.<sup>7</sup> The cultural symbolism of sacred spaces for public memory cannot be ignored even in a Rome that preferred to honor the returning heroes rather than the fallen ones. Scholars have noted the cultural differences in the way the Greek differed from the Romans in their memorialization of wars and warriors. Susan E. Alcock observes that the tomb of the ancestors becomes the locus of power, especially for people during times of social unrest and war, and this was true for ancient Greece.<sup>8</sup> For the purpose of this paper, the Roman ideology of war and its impact on the monuments it erected to commemorate the heroes is important. Both the public commemorations for the returning soldiers and the private mourning for the dead mark specialized territory as sacred geography for an entire community.<sup>9</sup>

Place or *locus* was very important in the memory traditions of the ancients, according to Frances Yates.<sup>10</sup> She begins her study with the story of the poet Simonides, who is said by Cicero to have invented the art of memory, in which he laid down the rules regarding the mnemonic of places and images (*loci* and *imagines*) (*The Art of Memory* 2). In connection with this, Yates makes the following observation: "It is not difficult to get hold of the general principles of the mnemonic. The first step was to imprint on the memory a series of *loci* or places. The commonest, though not the only, type of mnemonic place system used was the architectural type" (3).

This architectural type of memory aid was the one given by Quintilian to rhetoricians, Yates says, and this is the well-known building image where the orator moves through different rooms of an imaginary building, creating associations between them and parts of his speech. Every vivid detail of the rooms in the building is stored in memory, and later he is able to automatically recall all the details of his speech when he remembers the different rooms.<sup>11</sup> The classical art of memory, suffice to say, emphasizes places or *loci*. Thus, selective *loci* or geographical spaces play important role in preserving memory, helping us make the connection

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<sup>7</sup> See "Trophies and Tombstones: Commemorating the Roman Soldier", *World Archaeology* (June 2003): 79-97, where Hope explains how the Greeks and Romans differed in the ritual honor accorded to the fallen. She compares the Greek soldiers whose deaths were accorded individual records with the Romans' tendency to celebrate only the victories in battles, which often obscured individual deaths and sacrifices, thus, subsuming individual identities to the state in times of war.

<sup>8</sup> See Alcock, "Tomb Cult and the Post-Classical Polis," *American Journal of Archaeology* (1991): 447-467, where she says that the "Greeks constantly made 'myth out of bones,'" and through time the remains of the ancestors served in many capacities: as political weapons, as territorial markers, or as legitimating devices. Yet while this theme may not be novel, neither is it exhausted. A new variation upon it will be presented here, one derived first and foremost from archaeological evidence. An implicit reliance upon the "past in the present" is now manifested by the practice of tomb cult in the post-Classical polis".

<sup>9</sup> See David Lowenthal for a finely articulated exposition on how particular spaces accrue symbolic meaning in "Past Time and Present Place: Landscape and Memory," *The Geographical Review* 45.1 (1975): 1-36. See also Geoffrey Hartman, *The Fateful Question of Culture* (New York: Columbia UP, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.

<sup>11</sup> Yates says that the anonymous Latin text *Ad Herennium* formed the main source for the classical art of memory both in Greek and in the Latin world (*The Art of Memory*, 1-27).

to the tangible past in the living present. When it is an entire community trying to remember a particularly painful episode memorialized in one special place, it becomes sacred space. Yet for Pierre Nora, this special role of the *loci* as memory aid loses its healing quality when a community conflates mere commemoration with true memory.

For critics examining this play, the classical precedents set out by the ancients are significant, since emulation of earlier traditions, as exemplified by classical texts, often directs the actions of the characters in *Titus Andronicus*. Hence the rules about preserving memory, as laid out by the ancient texts, are pertinent to understanding the particular trauma brought on by selective memory as suffered by Titus. Yates talks about the unknown author of the *Ad Herennium* who established two kinds of memory in rhetoric—natural and artificial—the latter benefiting from training and acting as a supplement to the former. Like Quintilian’s mnemonic scheme, the author of the *Ad Herennium* speaks about the primacy of *loci* in helping preserve memory. It may be important to ask here if memory that can be trained is ever involuntary. And can this trained memory be authentic when it merely follows classical dicta?<sup>12</sup> In *De insomniis*, Aristotle also cautions against relying too much on artificial memory and the mnemonic system. In this connection, Yates says that Aristotle, in the *De memoria*, underscores the fact that “imagination is the intermediary between perception and thought,” and he states how the faculty of imagination helps in processing the sensory impressions (*The Art of Memory* 33). In *Titus Andronicus* artificial memory or memory that is nourished by imagination is the motivational force for violence, and Aristotle’s cautions are ignored as Titus recalls the memory of his sons repetitively in order to justify his thirst for revenge. The family tomb becomes the artificially constructed memory aid, and memory recall here is a deliberate choice. Yates says that for Aristotle, memory belongs to the same part of the soul as imagination, but he also holds that Aristotle thinks that the intellectual faculty plays a significant role in how we recall memory. Distinguishing between memory and reminiscence, he builds on the idea of association without naming it so (34). If reminiscence or recollection for Aristotle is sifting through the box of memory, as Yates suggests it is, then we can see how selective memory or recollection owes at least in part to the faculty of imagination in the way Titus performs his revenge acts.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Vernon Guy Dickson, “‘A Pattern, a Precedent, and Lively Warrant’: Emulation, Rhetoric, and Cruel Propriety in *Titus Andronicus*,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 62:2 (2009): 376-409, for an imaginative argument as to how humanistic notions of the Self get short shrift in the play, which seems to encourage emulative and imitative self-fashioning. Dickson pays close attention to how the characters vie with one another in quoting from classical texts in order to justify their actions.

<sup>13</sup> See Yates for the common element in both Aristotle’s theory of knowledge and the mnemonic theory in the centrality of imagination in how the mind creates images.

Speaking about Plato, Yates says that he despises artificial memory as a technique used by the sophists, because it desecrates true memory (37). For Plato, the aim of rhetoric is not to persuade but to search for truth, and so memory must be arranged as close to truth as possible without recourse to mnemotechnics (38). This is curiously very close to Pierre Nora's position about the validity of authentic memory in reconstructing history when compared to artificial memory, which is sustained, according to him, by excessive commemorations.<sup>14</sup> Nora suggests that with consecration, history displaces memory as an inauthentic reconstruction of what is not there, especially in connection with the reshaping of a nation or a people's past.<sup>15</sup> Using the recent French phenomenon of commemorating all things connected to the Second World War, Nora mounts a fascinating critique of archival history as an artificial construct. He says that it arose out of people's worship of their past, which displaces more authentic *lieux de mémoire*. In Nora's opinion, history is static and inauthentic, giving room to intellectual and secular analysis and criticism, while memory is magical and affective, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, and thus ever changing and evolving. This history-memory split is brought home to us if we see Titus as the last standing warrior in a dissolving, unraveling Rome, whose *romanitas* compels him to perform ritual memorialization for the sons who will not get their due honor in a public ceremony.<sup>16</sup> Valerie Hope suggests that public displays of mourning for warriors are a recent phenomenon, as is the tendency to consecrate the dead individually. In her words, "Rome and its empire were littered with reminders of battles, but it needs to be emphasized that these 'war memorials' celebrated conquest, victory, and power, rather than death, grief, and individuality."<sup>17</sup> The sumptuous Roman ceremonies celebrated only triumphs, leaving behind, physically and emotionally, the dead.<sup>18</sup> This particular Roman custom of ignoring the dead marks *Titus Andronicus* in especially brutal ways. The unraveling of the protagonist is set in motion at the precise moment when the burden of consecration falls heavily on the returning general Titus, who is also a grieving father.

In Act 1 Scene 1, Titus addresses Rome in the evocative "Hail Rome, victorious in mourning weeds!" speech that contains the enumeration of his loss in "Romans, of five-and-twenty valiant sons," when the eulogy moves from pride in his sons' honorable death for Rome to raw grief. Chiding himself in "Titus, unkind and careless of thine own" (l. 86), he exhibits the ambivalence of the inner split of a father-general who must be witness to the deaths of his own in the line of duty. I will deliberate more on the inner split later in the paper. His lines, "These that survive let Rome reward with love; These that I bring unto their latest home" (l. 83-84), recall the Roman custom to commemorate only the victorious, which justifies Titus' decision to

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<sup>14</sup> See Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-24.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>16</sup> See Hope, "Trophies and Tombstones," 79-97.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>18</sup> Hope, "Trophies and Tombstones," 83.



create his own personal tradition to honor his fallen sons and thus consecrate the family history.<sup>19</sup> Rome will reward the victoriously returning sons of Titus, whereas he must honor the dead as well. This painful duty adds to his anguish and propels him to perform the ritual murder of Alarbus that he mistakenly imagines will be an appeasement to the shadows. At the very moment when we identify ourselves with the protagonist and his humanizing and universalizing grief, he alienates us with this brutal murder and thus begins the inevitable isolation of the tragic hero. Lucius becomes his officiating priest in this macabre ritual, intoning “Ad manes fratrum,” with Titus answering “I give him to you, the noblest that survives/ the eldest son of this distressed queen” (l. 101-2).

According to René Girard, foundational violence forms an integral part of all ancient or “primitive” societies, and the Roman Empire was no exception. Foundational violence is the “paramount event” that triggers a transformation of the society in crisis and must be performed unanimously by the collective against a single individual.<sup>20</sup> Thus the foundational murder or sacrifice plays a decisive role in the genesis of a new order. Building upon his earlier work on European novels, Girard studies the plays of William Shakespeare using the same theory of mimesis that he made so famous in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*.<sup>21</sup> He speculates in *The Theater of Envy* that mimetic desire turns to mimetic rivalry when individuals desiring the same thing are thwarted in their desire.<sup>22</sup> This mimetic rivalry becomes the foundation for all conflicts, its destructive force propelling a society toward a periodic (re)constructive sacrifice, usually in the form of a foundational violence enacted on a heroic figure, which eventually heals the fissures in the community (3). Girard insists that “sacrifice is the original purgation or purification of human communities,” even if it is not seen as being rational, and it is essential when societies face what he calls a crisis in degree (214). A crisis of degree can be interpreted as an existential crisis faced by an imploding society. Studying the play *Julius Caesar*, Girard establishes the escalating mimetic rivalry as the catalyst that brings the conspirators together in the foundational murder of Caesar. Mimetic rivalry in this scheme must have a scapegoat, according to Girard, and here, it is the figure of Caesar, and the rivals double one another, each acting as the model for the other.<sup>23</sup> However, the foundational murder or collective sacrifice fails in uniting the people, and hence Brutus and the conspirators fail. One is tempted to see Titus’s murder of Alarbus in line with this tradition of the foundational or necessary sacrifice, as it tries to appease the “shadows” in its aim to divert

<sup>19</sup> See Tonio Hölscher’s essay “Images of War in Greece and Rome: Between Military Practice, Public Memory, and Cultural Symbolism,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 93 (2003): 1-17, for a comparative study of the very different approaches that the Greeks and the Romans employed in commemorating their fallen soldiers. The Greek art depicting wars did not shy away from showing their heroes in glory and in defeat, for glory in war was not in just victory but in manhood, whereas the Romans celebrated their brave and their fallen not in private spheres, but in public monuments. As a result, the Romans did not like to show their fallen, for it was shameful to lose battles, and so they only commemorated victories.

<sup>20</sup> René Girard, *A Theater of Envy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991): 203.

<sup>21</sup> René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965).

<sup>22</sup> Girard, *A Theater of Envy*.

<sup>23</sup> See Girard’s introduction to *A Theater of Envy* where he says that in the mimesis of desire two rivals pursue the same object of desire; following the same scheme, in the mimesis of rivalry the rivals focus their energy on a scapegoat as the object of their violence or thwarted desire (3-7).

the crisis of degree that the society faces after the hero returns from the battlefield with his fallen sons. Like the conspirators in *Julius Caesar*, Titus too fails. Why? If collective sacrifice as real historical beginning must be piously reenacted as Girard says, then the ritual sacrifice or foundational violence should have brought lasting peace.<sup>24</sup> However, because Titus resorts to an individual murder rather than a collective one, it brings about the inevitable chain reaction of deadly vengeance. Lacking the unanimous mimetic polarization that brings a group together against a single victim (or a few victims), Titus is isolated by his unilateral decision to kill Alarbus at the start of the play. What might have been an act of solidarity in mimetic rivalry becomes instead a catalyst for violence and disorder. Titus imagines, wrongly, that this solitary act of murder symbolizes a mimetic desire on the part of his people.

Additionally, the fear that his sons would lack public recognition for their heroism creates a monstrous desire in Titus to displace an intensely private act of bereavement in favor of a public display of pomp and ceremony that overturns the piety and decorum contained therein. The family tomb then assumes gigantic proportions as a *lieu de mémoire*, changing from what would have been a symbolic space of intimacy into a grand documentation of the historical past of the Andronici, a site of collective memorialization whose ahistorical symbolism propels the revenge motive forward. In this connection, it is worthwhile to look at Geoffrey Hartman's important study on trauma and geography, especially his nuanced articulation of how Wordsworth constructs a new vision of community in his memory-landscape poems as a compensation for the loss of nature that was starting to happen in the newly industrializing England.<sup>25</sup> He says:

Wordsworth always means by nature an entire complex of feelings and perceptions; precisely what we would now call a culture. But the changes in that culture, as the enclosure movement gains momentum and industrialization transforms country into city, do not signal something new that has its own integrity. Instead, they prompt the fear that nature as a whole will fade from human imagination, that an immemorial compact between mind and world, nature and imagination, is in danger of being dissolved. (71-72)

I suggest here that Titus, similarly, in the face of disintegration of his world, wishes to construct a new community of Romans and falls back on the age-old tendency of adhering rigidly to tradition and customs as a preservation model. The family vault then becomes part of the memory-landscape, irrevocably binding the wounded Titus to the disease of nostalgic pain—past time merging with present geography, both colluding to prevent healing for the hero. Thus

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<sup>24</sup> In the chapter "The Founding Murder: *Julius Caesar*" from *A Theater of Envy*, Girard argues persuasively that the notion of the *foundational violence* in *Julius Caesar* is discussed as having historical precedent by both Cassius and Brutus in Act II, i. The mimetic model that they discuss is the expulsion of Tarquin, which was a deliberate violent act by an entire community. The expulsion of Tarquin was met with the unanimous approval of the entire community, and thus had its desired cleansing effect, whereas the murder of Caesar was the decision of a few and thus failed in its end. Girard emphasizes that the "unanimous mimetic polarization" is essential if a foundational sacrifice is to have its resolution (202-203).

<sup>25</sup> Hartman, *A Fateful Question of Culture*.



the collapse of authentic memory that Nora speaks of is witness to an artificial reconstruction of the family history, as evidenced by the family tomb which leads to the protagonist's trauma and tragedy.

Unlike Sophocles' Antigone, whose dirge to her unburied brothers brings us closer to her suffering, Titus remains curiously split from the audience on the emotional level. Antigone's humanizing grief leads to a catharsis for the audience as they experience healing through her intensely private mourning, whereas the ritualistic public sacrifice of Alarbus that Titus resorts to in order to appease the "shadows" in the family tomb is destabilizing for the audience/reader. For both Titus and his audience, the tomb never goes away. This is the trap of history that Nora speaks of in his essay "Between Memory and History" (13). "The sacred is invested in the trace that becomes its own negation," says Nora about the historiography of memory (8). This trap by history becomes clear when we look at Freud's later work on hysteria and trauma, where he sees psychic trauma as a punctual incursion on the mind, which, having "disassociated" consciousness from itself, installs an unprocessed memory-trace that returns unbidden, as delayed affect, in an effort to digest this previously unclaimed experience.<sup>26</sup> He calls this "repetitive compulsion": the reliving or reenactment of past psychic events that disrupts the present with terrifying nightmares, flashbacks, and dreams. In my view, Titus is performing or enacting revenge and pain on others to relieve the effects of the original psychic trauma, as he suffers from deep trauma and repetitive compulsion. If we see his role as performance, then he is trying to transmit to others the destabilizing experience and hence becomes an alienating figure.<sup>27</sup>

This is the "crisis of the subject" that Lisa Dickson speaks of in her essay, where she details the gratuitous violence in the play, which she says is at stake in the cultural and theoretical discourse that surrounds it.<sup>28</sup> Dickson elaborates this point by saying that the subject formation in the discourse of violence is always formed in conjunction with its abjected

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<sup>26</sup> Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 28.

<sup>27</sup> See Cathy Caruth, *Performativity and Performance*, ed. Andrew Parker and Eve Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 1995): 89-108. Caruth analyzes Lacan's reading of Freud's theories of accidental trauma in the dream sequence of a sleeping father who sees his dead child on fire, but is helpless to save him. Lacan reads this dream in terms of survival and subject formation; in other words, the father's trauma of death is bound up with the knowledge of his own survival, and is experienced as a double wounding when he is unable to save his already dead child who comes to him in the dream, burning and calling for help. This is the performative aspect of the subject's reenactment of the tragic actions, explains Caruth, especially its movement from the trauma of accident to the trauma of ethical choice that is at the heart of the reenactment. Using the dream of the father who sees his dead child burning, Freud, says Caruth, marks the ethical dilemma of the survivor whose realization of his child's death is a redramatization. I see Titus' extravagant performance of the ritual sacrifice as expressing a need for cathartic revenge, for he experiences the repetitive trauma of his dead sons as well as the mutilation of his daughter. Thus the dilemma of survival compounds the father's grief and pushes him to seek bloody revenge.

<sup>28</sup> "'High' Art and 'Low' Blows: Titus Andronicus and the Critical Language of Pain" *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 26.1, Spring 2008: 3.

“constitutive outside”.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, in this essay Dickson utilizes the works of Elaine Scarry as a fulcrum to look into the different aspects of violence and power in the semiotic of the body in pain. In her reading of the play, she says that all value is displaced from the moral, the transcendent, the figurative and placed on the immoral, the physical, the literal. This gets reversed only through the enactment of the redemptive revenge of Titus at the end of the play, and what is revealed through the uses of violence in the play is the dichotomy of the transcendent and self-consolidating subject and its necessary Other, the body that is violable, mute, and base. Here, we see in performance Shoshana Felman’s theory about the transference of trauma, which happens when the victim transfers his/her pain to the witness—here, the reader/audience—who bears the responsibility of testimony.<sup>30</sup> The burden of trauma has subtly shifted to the unsuspecting reader/audience, thus turning the narration/performance into a therapeutic necessity. This is the aesthetic of wounding and survival, and in this testimonial, the witness becomes the unwilling Other. Felman’s theory holds that the primary trauma is of the subject and the secondary trauma is of the listener, and that both are brought together in the bond of testimony. Massive trauma imposes an unbearable responsibility on the listener, making him/her a participant in the registration or inscription of the trauma as event.<sup>31</sup>

Cathy Caruth, when examining Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, studies his analysis of Torquato Tasso’s epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*, whose hero Tancred suffers deep trauma when he kills his lover Clorinda unwittingly and later wounds the tree that hides her soul, thus doubling his trauma.<sup>32</sup> Clorinda’s soul calls out to him, complaining that he has wounded his lover twice, and Tasso’s hero suffers double anguish as his beloved’s voice bears witness to the past.<sup>33</sup> According to Caruth, Freud, through the telling of this story, wonders at the peculiar pain suffered by some people who seem destined to suffer the same trauma multiple times. For Freud, trauma is a wound inflicted upon the mind rather than the body, and because it is not processed by the consciousness, returns to haunt the sufferer (3). Tancred hears his lover’s soul call out in pain from the tree, and this call of the voice is experienced as the unprocessed reality of the original violence. The trauma of survival follows the original wound with the encounter with death. Caruth wonders thus: “Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?” (7). Here, the philosophical question is compelling, for when

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>30</sup> Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, foreword to *Testimony: Crises in Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992): vii-xx.

<sup>31</sup> Dori Laub, “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening” in Felman and Laub, *Testimony*: 57.

<sup>32</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996): 2. Caruth analyses “insistently returning itinerary figures” that stubbornly persist in bearing witness to past wounds in some selected literary texts and films. Freud and Lacan provide Caruth with the foundational texts for this trauma study, as she analyses works by Paul de Man, Marguerite Duras, Alain Resnais and others.

<sup>33</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 2.

Tancred hears the suffering voice call out to him he is forced to relive the trauma of his own past. I would argue that in the case of Titus, the voices calling out to him are muted—Lavinia’s and his buried sons’—yet these mute witnesses cause in him repetitive trauma as he must grapple with the violence unleashed as the result of his own original brutal sacrifice of Alarbus, the burial of his dead sons, and Lavinia’s silent suffering of her rape and mutilation. The return of the repressed gains new meaning as his thirst for revenge grows in the face of the silent voices calling out to him.

However, the repetitive trauma curiously seduces Titus into believing in the possibility of a reconstruction of the self, for it is through the performative aspect of the revenge acts that Titus tries to gain self-restoration. In this context, Paul de Man’s master trope of *prosopopeia*, which de Man defines as “a fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter’s reply and confers upon it the power of speech,” is very pertinent.<sup>34</sup> *Prosopopeia* is the linguistic trope of the fictional voice that returns to help the subject gain self-configuration in the face of disintegration through autobiographical narrative, according to de Man.<sup>35</sup> In *Titus Andronicus*, the dead sons buried in the family tomb and the mute figure of Lavinia are the voiceless entities or *prosopopeia* whose suffering Titus must address, and he responds through the only method available to him—revenge. Desire for revenge here becomes the driving force of the autobiographical narrative even if the restoration fails, and, sadly, only alienation remains.<sup>36</sup>

This alienation from others, a constructed binary for the purpose of the enactment of violence, is clearly at play here. “For now I stand as one upon a rock/ Environed with a wilderness of sea,” he cries out in Act 3, Scene 1, when he learns of the brutal mutilation of Lavinia. His searing pain is isolating and not universalizing. Furthermore, this alienation is from Self as well, and this split is experienced by Titus in strange and grotesque ways. When Tamora pleads “Andronicus, stain not thy tomb with blood” (Act 1, Scene 1, l. 116) and later in her pithy

<sup>34</sup> Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984): 76. See also *The Resistance to Theory* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1986).. In the former work he explores generic implications of autobiographical narratives in connection to this haunting figure from the past, and in the latter book he studies how theory is born out of historical and cultural contexts, which in turn implicates the self, rather than as a result of impersonal impulses.

<sup>35</sup> See Geoffrey Hartman, “Of Traumatic Knowledge and literary Studies,” *New Literary History* 26:3 (1995), where Hartman muses about the usefulness of trauma theory when reading literature. Hartman’s theory holds that the knowledge of trauma, or the knowledge which comes from that source, is composed of two contradictory elements. One is the traumatic event, registered rather than experienced, bypassing perception and consciousness and falling directly into the psyche. The other is a kind of memory of the event, in the form of a perpetual troping of it by the bypassed or severely split (dissociated) psyche. On the level of poetics, literal and figurative may correspond to these two types of cognition—in other words, it is when the Freudian repetitive trauma takes place. I read de Man’s *prosopopeia* and Hartman’s troping as one and the same, especially for understanding the split inside of Titus, whose trauma is associated with the family tomb that becomes for him the haunting of the figurative.

<sup>36</sup> In French *aliénation* means madness, and this adds another layer of complexity as to how we interpret the hero’s suffering.

aside, “O cruel, irreligious piety” (l. 130), there is a warning that perhaps Titus is becoming a stranger to his own tradition and family honor. Here the cleansing effects of the foundational sacrifice that René Girard speaks of never materialize; on the other hand, what we see is the deliberate retelling and reliving of personal trauma in the performance of the sacrifice, and later, in the series of revenge acts. Titus is unmoved by Tamora’s eloquent words precisely because the tragic interment ceremony isolates him completely from one and all—Romans, family, and the Goths. The tomb in its role as “the receptacle,” which swallows his sons, again and again, creates the repetitive incursion of the original trauma that will eventually swallow him. Unlike Antigone, who is a tragic heroine, Titus, through his actions that lead him to his own personal tragedy, does not come through to us as a tragic figure, because Antigone dies for something grander than herself, and the audience is purified through their role as witnesses to her suffering. Nevertheless, we are moved by Titus’ vulnerability, watching him endure unspeakable pain and suffering, and the feeling of alienation is thus mitigated.

We can see the split inside of Titus in yet another painful episode in his slaying of his own son, Mutius, which elicits this horrified response from his brother Marcus: “O Titus, see! O see what thou hast done!/ In bad quarrel slain a virtuous son!” (Act 1, Scene 1, l. 348-9). The Titus who comes in at the very start of the play, the king-maker who draws the tribunes’ support and approval, has already become isolated, introverted, and brutally focused on what constitutes family honor. In order to understand Mutius’s killing one must go back to the previous scene when Titus is king-maker to Saturninus. He revels in this “fathering” so much that we believe Saturninus when he says “Thanks, noble Titus, father of my life” (Act 1, Scene 1, l. 225). Saturninus has replaced Mutius in this scene—the folly of blind adherence to the diktat of tradition is here for all to see. It all happens quickly, but even if we could delay the action and watch it all happen slowly, we realize that Titus would not have flinched. Adding to our pity and horror is Titus’ refusal to bury his son with the proper honor due him. To Lucius’ plea “But let us give him burial as becomes/Give Mutius burial with our brethren” (l. 354-5), Titus responds in a grandiose manner: “Traitors, away! He rests not in this tomb/ This monument five hundred years hath stood/ Which I have sumptuously reedified” (l. 356-7). The history of the vault overtakes all other consideration, for Mutius had directly challenged family decorum, and hence he will not get proper burial in the family tomb, which now has become the grand monument to collective honor.

The progression of linear time presents an insurmountable difficulty for victims of trauma, who tend to revisit the original wound both in the remembering and in the narrating. They resort often to an artificially reconstructed time, and Titus exemplifies this fracture or breach of time in every revenge act. Julia Kristeva in *Intimate Revolt* argues that a breach of time is a therapeutic necessity—both in structural retelling of the story and the subjective

retelling of it in memory recall.<sup>37</sup> In her study, the linear temporality maintained in the narrative breaks the power of the memory-trace, where the act of repetition is unaware of time and marks the psyche in an unsettling and disturbing atemporality.<sup>38</sup> I would argue that Titus works his way through the destabilizing linear temporality by actively seeking revenge and violence even on his own children, thereby seeking therapeutic comfort.<sup>39</sup> While we flinch in horror at such unnatural acts, we need to realize that, for Titus, public honor has gained ascendancy over private emotions. Mutius, as a stain to the family's honor, and Lavinia, as an unprocessed symbol of collective trauma, exemplify the inner split in Titus. Lavinia's body becomes a spatial object, a desecrated family site in need of the ultimate act of purification—death. His own children have become painful mnemonic devices that intensify his pain and memory, and hence must be destroyed. “My grief was at the height before thou cam'st,/ And now like Nilus it disdaineth bounds—” says Titus when he first encounters the mutilated Lavinia in Act 3, Scene 1. Later he wonders aloud: “What shall I do,/Now I behold thy lively body so,” and it is clear to us that this abjected body of Lavinia has become a dilemma to Titus. His line, “Gentle Lavinia, let me kiss thy lips,” is suggestive of the last kiss placed on the loved one before the tomb is closed. Her death is sealed in this scene. By now, grief-stricken and possibly destabilized internally, Titus is firmly on the path of self-destruction.

Yet another instability, or what I call split, is at the textual level, and this is experienced both by the main characters, especially Titus and Lavinia, and the audience/reader—but in very diverging ways. Critics like Danielle A. St. Hilaire have noted the polyphony of the many embedded texts in this play that I think create a palimpsest-like quality, especially for the reader of the text.<sup>40</sup> For the audience of the performance of the play, the multiple allusions sprinkled throughout create an audible meta-theatrical effect, multiplying and enlarging the text to include past texts, which act like prescriptions to both the audience and the characters enacting the tragedy. I see the many allusions and the “hypo-hyper text” connections of Genette adding yet another layer to the construction of the play, as the audience/reader must

<sup>37</sup> *Intimate Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 2 (New York: Columbia UP, 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Kristeva says: “I am among those who believe that alongside remembering, which inscribes the past in the flow of consciousness (in linear time), alongside repeating, which signals the indestructible drive or the wish for pleasure, working-through is the central process around which the other two are articulated” (*Intimate Revolt*, 36).

<sup>39</sup> See David Lowenthal's essay, “Past Time and Present Place: Landscape and Memory,” *Geographical Review* 65.1 (Jan. 1975): 1-36, for the centrality of the need for maintaining the collective past as way of preserving individual memory. According to Lowenthal, memory not only conserves the past, but adjusts recall to current needs. Instead of remembering exactly what was, we tailor the past to fit the present.

<sup>40</sup> See “Allusion and Sacrifice in *Titus Andronicus*,” *Studies in English Literature* 49.2 (Spring 2009): 311-331. For St. Hilaire, Titus's action is consistent with other classical heroes, like Aeneas and Achilles, and thus Titus marks his action on classical virtues set forth by his forerunners in the epics. In this reading of the play, the ancient texts act as prescriptions for the characters, who must use the older narratives to guide their own actions, especially since Shakespeare situates the play outside any historical moment. The characters' allusions to the older texts reveal to the audience the precedent set by the ancients in their seeming brutality that actually brings forth peace and stability.

deal with many meta-narratives at the same time. The earlier texts seem to have inordinate influence over the characters, as in Act 2, Scene 4, where Marcus quotes Ovid's *Metamorphoses* when he sees Lavinia soon after her rape and mutilation. He recalls the rape of Philomela by Tereus, and this retelling of the classical precedent seems to add, curiously, some kind of stability to his lamentation and ours.

Is a Roman hero's *romanitas* and *virtus* always tethered to his ancestors, and if so, does it absolve him of all responsibility in the present? The characters' use of literary texts to guide their thoughts and actions does complicate the text for the audience/reader, who must sift through the multiplying voices of authority. If Alarbus' sacrifice was indeed predicated upon the classical tradition set forth by Aeneas, should it alter our reaction to the hero's tragic decision? In Act 5, Scene 4, Titus, just before killing Lavinia, consults another Roman, Saturninus, on the right course of action regarding the problem of Lavinia: "Was it well done of rash Virginius/ to slay his daughter with his own right hand/ Because she was enforced, stained and deflowered?" to which Saturninus responds: "It was Andronicus." This calmly acquiescing voice seals Lavinia's fate, for Titus' next lines applaud this august tradition: "A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant/ For me, most wretched, to perform the like." This gives the audience/reader enough guidance to anticipate Titus' killing of Lavinia. Thus the earlier texts, and the decorum set by them, prepare us in advance for the inevitable tragic action. In this pact between the two men, we also confront the patriarchal attitude that Deborah Willis speaks of in her essay on the feminist reading of the killing of Lavinia.<sup>41</sup> As St. Hilaire suggests, Titus's actions, however bloody, are correct and follow the earlier texts and must be seen as the only options available to him. He has no choice but to perform and follow the script.<sup>42</sup> Paradoxically, the textual split has the effect of aligning Titus Andronicus firmly with other epic heroes, like Achilles and Aeneas, creating a precedent, and thus offering some sort of stability to the audience/reader.

While the sarcophagus as the ahistorical memory site that stirs the revenge motive in Titus is the force moving the narrative forward, the many instabilities in the text mirror very real historical turbulences of the age. The text parallels history, leaving behind an uneven play. The dialogues and stage directions transition abruptly, and seem to lack sophistication to the point that they give birth to speculations about authorship. The fractured text and the fragmented hero further create complications for the reader/audience. Thomas Page Anderson suggests that editorial and stage direction for this play unconsciously register the historical

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<sup>41</sup> Willis attempts to redress what she sees as feminist misreading of this play in this paper by placing the revenge play in a dialog with the trauma theory that helps her study of the main characters' engagement with what she calls a "perverse therapy of revenge" as they attempt to process the violence done to them ("The Gnawing Vulture: Revenge, Trauma Theory and *Titus Andronicus*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53: 1 (Spring 2002): 21-52).

<sup>42</sup> See Vernon Guy Dickson, "A Pattern".



anxieties of the Reformation.<sup>43</sup> In particular, Anderson emphasizes the relationship between the performing of certain types of violent acts, oaths and promises, sprinkled throughout the play, that seem to have unintended consequences in the play, which Anderson says are in place as a way to compensate for the gaps in history. Thus the disjunctions in the performance break our conscious registration of history as a transcendent past waiting to be unearthed, to one that is ahistorical and disrupted. Here, the text at once mirrors the outside reality, yet follows its own scripted connections to its antecedents, or Ur-texts. Most importantly, the collective historical imagination that had given birth to this text would have had to deal with its own traumatic past, and hence would have had to accommodate it, even as it moved ineluctably toward the progressive future.<sup>44</sup> This unresolvable paradox could be seen as the crisis of degree that Girard thinks affected ancient societies and cultures, which then resorted to foundational sacrifices as atonement. If, as Anderson says, the play both registers the trauma of history and memorializes that trauma in the body of the mutilated body of Lavinia, then Titus has no recourse but to “keep vigil” for the past, and it is this burden that finally unravels him (21).

Nora says the acceleration of history causes the present to collapse into an irretrievable past, and we see this force acting upon Titus to experience repeatedly the original trauma at the site of the family tomb. It also binds him out of the restorative warmth of memory. Nora eloquently describes authentic memory as containing the “warmth of tradition the remnants of which is in the silence of custom and in the repetition of the ancestral,” which gets lost inside a historical sensibility.<sup>45</sup> It is clear that an excessive sensibility to history and tradition robs Titus of a meaningful mourning through his attachment to the ahistorical memory-site that the family tomb is. *Romanitas* is the burden that every Roman hero must carry, often at a heavy price, and we expect Titus to exemplify this. However, complicating his *romanitas* is the problematic nature of his grieving, for the intense bereavement experienced by Titus and the grand public ceremonial burial for his sons hark back more to the Greek rather than any Roman custom. Scholars who study ancient burial customs of both the Greeks and Romans, like Valerie Hope and Susan E. Alcock, note the stark contrast between the two societies.<sup>46</sup> Tonio Hölscher, studying the symbolism of the images of war and memory in the two cultures, suggests that their very distinctly different burial traditions reflect Greek idealism and Roman realism.<sup>47</sup> Hope echoes this same notion, saying that the muted burials accorded to the fallen soldiers by the

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<sup>43</sup> See “Reading Martyred History in *Titus Andronicus*” in *Performing Early Modern Trauma from Shakespeare to Milton* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006): 19-57, where Anderson suggests that the play interrogates the desire for the Roman legacy as a disavowal of the Protestant present.

<sup>44</sup> Anderson, “Reading Martyred History,” 1.

<sup>45</sup> Nora, “Between memory and history,” 14.

<sup>46</sup> See Hope, “Trophies and Tombstones” and Alcock, “Tomb Cult.”

<sup>47</sup> Tonio Hölscher, “Images of War in Greece and Rome: Between Military Practice, Public Memory, and Cultural Symbolism,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 93 (2003): 3.

Romans reflect their pragmatism, rather than a lack of respect.<sup>48</sup> The potentially destabilizing effects of a grand public mourning during wartime cannot be overstated and perhaps played a role in the Roman restraint. This in turn corroborates Nora's cautions against excessive mourning and commemoration. "We speak of memory because so little of it is left," says Nora, and I could not agree more with regard to Shakespeare's tragic hero Titus. The tomb, which for Titus is the embodiment of family and history, is thus an actant in the play, denying the hero a reconstitution of the self; instead, his rigid adherence to a personal decorum, along with the tomb that symbolizes this fixity, buries him alive. If there is no catharsis for the audience/reader, it is because there is no healing or restoration for the hero. Strangely this recognition becomes a bond between the hero and his audience/reader. This, then, is the essence of this particular tragedy: that despite Titus' isolating revenge and violent actions, the audience/reader feels intimately connected with the tragic hero's plight—if not in empathy for his acts of violence, at least for the pain and suffering he undergoes.

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<sup>48</sup> Hope, "Trophies and Tombstones," 87.

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