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Necessity of Sacrifice: Female Martyrdom and the Heroic Figure

Modern media is saturated with images of heroism steeped in expectations of sacrifice and loss. Though some aspects of the traditional hero have remained (masculinity, power, and narrative centrality), sacrifice is a distinctly modern aspect of heroism. It is a concept that manifests in modern day representations of war and patriotism more than anywhere else. Growing up in post 9/11 America, the most I ever heard of the word hero was on the news and when people talked about how many Americans were dying in Afghanistan and Iraq. They were heroes who had gone to fight “for our country” and were willing to die so we could be safe. This rhetoric is not unique to early-2000s America, but growing up in it did mean that the culture of sacrifice began to feel the same as heroism to me. Alongside news outlets, a large amount of the films I grew up with, both Science Fiction and more realistic genres, centered on self-sacrifice as a heroic enterprise. War was a harsh landscape on which heroes were born. The moment I realized what being a hero meant was watching *The Iron Giant*. To be a hero, you had to be willing to give up everything for your country. It is a quite limiting definition, one that mostly serves to complement war narratives centered on glory and patriotism, but it was the one I thought was standard.

The figure of a hero is one we come to expect in a story about adventure, morals, or patriotism. He is a figure that motivates his own narrative, pushing those around him to make way for his storyline. The concept of heroism has changed overtime, now focusing heavily on the concept of sacrifice. In the eras that will be analyzed in this paper, however, the concept of

sacrifice was not vital to the concept of the hero, but was rather relegated to the female martyr. As the martyr is a figure necessary to the progression of his narrative, she becomes a figure more utilized for plot progression than on personal growth or fulfilment. This conflict stems from the gender expectations placed on women. Women are restricted to passive participation in the narrative plots they are a part of. Women are even necessary to many of these plots, however, their role is restrictive even though it garners some respect. A woman can be necessary and be respected for performing her necessary role, but she can never be recognized as a hero because she is simply doing what is expected of her. Even her valorous acts are not heroic because they are performed by a woman, usually in support of something outside of her personal narrative. It seems to me that women are not represented as heroes precisely because people do not expect them to be heroes. Part of the narrative fulfillment of the heroic figure is the recognition of heroic status. Modern heroism is defined and recognized immediately upon the report of someone's death. There is very little grey area in regards to whether a soldier fallen in war is a hero or not, it is just so because they died in the way that they did. Martyrdom becomes synonymous with heroism in modern war narratives, so in my first encounters with the role of the female martyr in pre and early modern narratives, I read them as heroes. It took further analysis to recognize the stark difference between a martyr and a hero: a hero drives the story, a martyr makes way for that story to progress.

The role of the martyr is passive, something that draws on the tradition of narratives about women. Women were thought of as passive, in everything from politics to conception. This was largely because it was beneficial for a patriarchal power structure to take away women's reproductive power in order to maintain the social order as it was. Women were told

that they should be passive, as that is how they were by nature. In literature, this is complicated by the role of the female martyr. How could a woman be both passive and entirely necessary for the plot? This contradiction is resolved through the introduction of narrative necessity. When the martyr's death is understood as "necessary" it is easier to accept because it is motivated by an outside force. The hero may be alone in what he can do, but he blazes his trail with others at his side. Characters are drawn to him and he has the luxury to let them be overtaken by his own plotline. The martyr, however, dies alone. She is reminded, throughout the process of her long and drawn out death, that she is dying so someone or others do not have to. For her death to have the proper impact, she dies alone as she is the only one whose death can make the impact needed for the narrative to move continue. This solitude points back to the lack of heroic recognition. The martyr will never be recognized until after her death, and the recognition is usually minimal.

In modern discourse, the martyr's death is not a woman's job. It is, at this point, rather genderless. The point of a modern hero is that they have martyred themselves, something *they should not have had to do*. The heroism lies precisely in the fact that they did not have to do it. This active choice remains constant from pre-modern discourse in dialogues about heroism. Now, though, the role of the martyr is virtually non-existent. As heroic narratives shifted to reflect modern day attitudes about war, fiction followed that same trend. The martyr became a hero and the roles lost distinction of gender. Of course, modern fiction still relies heavily on the concept of the male hero, but the role of the women around him shift. Take James Bond: the women around him do in fact die to serve his narrative, but they are killed by others rather than taking their own lives in a recognition of the role they serve. These women are not recognized as martyrs, though this role could certainly be seen as stemming from the martyr's earlier roles.

Instead, it is a role that goes largely ignored while becoming one of the most ubiquitous tropes in films that play into a male power fantasy. Media has held onto the concept of the woman dying to assist the heroic narrative, but that role is no longer read as a claim of responsibility. For this reason, it can be hard to look at the martyrs of the past and understand how they were robbed of their agency, as they seem to have much more than the women in a comparable position now.

The distinction between the reception these women experience can be boiled down to the cultural value of the act. When women die in action movies and war novels, it is to propel their men into action, but it is not seen as something she does; rather, it is something that happens to her. It is not the woman fulfilling a narrative position, it is usually the villain killing her that is given credit for this act. In the stories this paper will analyze, this is pointedly not the case. Shakespeare's *Lucrece*, Verdi's *Leonora*, and Sophocles's *Antigone* all not only die to move the story along, but they commit suicide themselves in a way that eliminates the possibility of another character getting the credit. This is rectified by the texts' implications that the action is motivated by a greater narrative force. Still, these women are offered a certain amount of respect for submitting to this narrative role. Their deaths represent a taking up of duty. For them, it is honorable (though only to the extent submission can be) while in these modern narratives, it is mostly just sad. We mourn for these women, but modern audiences rarely view them as vital.

This distinction is perhaps less damning than it seems at first glance. At least, it is less disrespectful in comparison to the martyrs of the past when viewed with a careful eye. For example, it is no longer considered the woman's job to die. This means she does gain less respect, and the respect that she garners will have come from a recognition of women doing their duty, which is far less substantial than the respect for the hero. The martyrs I will examine are

respected, but perhaps not in a way that we would like to think. It would be convenient for modern readings if these women could be viewed as heroes, but this reading is specifically withheld by their narratives. To read them as heroes, though nice for them hypothetically, ignores the restrictive roles women were allowed to play in these stories.

This paper seeks to investigate the troubled relationship between the figure of the martyr and the characters who turn out to be martyrs. Lucrece, Antigone, and Leonora all kill themselves in a move that furthers a grander action that they have no control over. Their roles in these plots are absolutely vital and their deeds are valorous, so it is left unanswered why they cannot be the heroes of their stories. Their texts largely lack heroes, so the role of the martyr becomes a much more troubled one. The martyr with a hero can die for him, alongside him, or in support of his efforts. The martyr without a hero dies for narrative fulfilment. Either way, she plays an essential part of the plot. These texts take this necessity and turn it into a means of claiming that she never had any agency, and was instead a pawn in a larger game. These women all seek ways out of martyrdom, one of which uses heroism as a way to leave behind that duty, but ultimately, the figure of a martyr is restricted to her role as support, no matter how valorous her actions.

The theory of action is an essential aspect of this paper. Though I read multiple accounts and theories of this action, I found Wagner's account to be the most helpful. While many texts focus on the nature of what gives an action value, Wagner talks in depth about where the true motivation of an action comes from and how that affects the meaning of the act. In her book, *Bound to Act*, Wagner addresses the question of whether an act can be stopped. Her argument traces theories regarding the compulsion to act in the context of performance and narrative

satisfaction. Wagner starts her chapter, *The Harness of Necessity*, with an overview of Locke's concept of consent. She reviews his concept of consent as a shift from performativity to performance. When someone consents to something, a compact is created, so their fulfilment of the action has more to do with a social responsibility to the outside force of the agreement than the initial desire to commit the act. There is a difference, here, between committing an act for an internal reason and committing an act for an external reason. Aristotle argues that man acts according to his character, meaning that actions are internally motivated, while Hannah Arendt says that this kind of compulsion to act comes from principles. Principles are distinguished from motives in that they are not, in fact, inwardly motivated, but motivated by a desire to perform.

This concept is well discussed in the instance of Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter. When Agamemnon makes the decision to sacrifice Iphigenia, he does so by convincing himself that there is one acceptable outcome: he has to win the war. As Wagner points out, however, he could have chosen to turn back and leave his daughter alive, rather than sacrifice her to appease Athena. Once the deed is done, the course of the story demands that Iphigenia have already been sacrificed. The act is one of a narrative necessity in which Agamemnon performs the role of enabler- he makes way for the narrative to unfold, rather than claiming the narrative through an active choice. These are all concepts that I will apply to my readings of my primary texts.

While her analysis of Prometheus and his betrayal of the Gods in order to help mankind is interesting, it is less relevant to my argument. According to Wagner, his choice is motivated largely by an innate desire to bring a kind of justice to the two worlds- Zeus's law sought to destroy the humans so they could not ascend in the same way he had, thereby fighting for a kind

of celestial fairness. This argument is closest to Antigone of all my texts, but her struggle for justice is starkly different as she fights to do right by the gods rather than by mankind .

A key word that this article brings up is “necessary.” Necessary does mean that something is the only answer in an active decision, but that the act was necessary by the end of the narrative. Once the narrative is set, it becomes *necessary* that events unfolded as they did. It was necessary for Iphigenia to be sacrificed by the end of the story so that the story could unfold. By establishing their actions as necessary, they become enabling agents of the plot. The women I’m analyzing work as enabling agents (and Lucrece consciously does so, planning the narrative in her head before committing the act) rather than working as commanding agents. These concepts are important in the analysis of agency, a concept with a fairly fluid definition. Wagner raises the important question of whether something “necessary” can truly be driven by a character’s own agency.

This concept of necessity is also closely tied with one of responsibility. When women are required to fulfill expectations, that fulfillment is just a continuation of following through with responsibilities rather than being considered a part of the greater plot. The chapter “Only Women Bleed” in Peggy McCracken’s *The Curse of Eve* deals with the nature of women’s blood in medieval literature and whether it holds the same meaning as the blood of men. McCracken shows that the blood of women is associated with the body and bodily sin or sacrifice, while the blood of men is associated with battle and war. For this reason, the blood and sacrifice of/by women cannot bring real, lasting change. She uses the example of Perceval’s sister, who gives her blood to a leprous woman in order to cure her. She does cure her, but the woman is shortly thereafter killed as punishment for the people she had previously killed in search of virgin blood.

This sacrifice, though noble, was not heroic, largely because it did not last long enough to warrant a real change. Women's blood cannot bring about lasting societal or personal change when offered by the woman herself. For this reason, the sister's sacrifice is sidelined as a well-intentioned but ultimately futile effort. McCracken goes on to explain how parental sacrifices are only considered "sacrifices" rather than murder when committed by the father. Many of her arguments are relevant to the topic of martyrdom in general, but I will not discuss most of them other than the one just described as they have more to do with the connection between the body and the spiritual sacrifice than the figure of the hero. McCracken avoids the word "hero" when referring to martyrs, drawing a distinction between the women who sacrifice themselves in personal ways and men who sacrifice themselves in battle. This is a distinction most of the authors this paper deals with make, which is a pattern I will examine. Why is this distinction drawn? How is one sacrifice different from another? This text offers one compelling possible answer: the blood of the woman is associated with the body, and the death of a hero can bring about something societal. The blood of a female martyr is tragic while the blood of a male hero is profound. This is an argument I will use in my analysis of Leonora.

As the central figure in this discourse, many of the articles I consulted for this paper center on Leonora in particular, though the arguments can range for any woman who fills her same archetype. *My Honour I Bequeath Unto the Knife* by Camino deals with the question of how the readings of Lucrece are used to perpetuate the beliefs of the culture that reads it. Camino argues that Lucretia's representation throughout her literary lifetime are both political and gendered. She argues that Lucretia was represented as either a plot device that Brutus took

advantage of, a warning for women to stay in their places, or a player in a patriarchal power fantasy.

Lucrece grasps at power but it is only through the patriarchal system she occupies. One manifestation of her compliance is the idea that she and Brutus worked together to bring the fall of the Tarquins. If this is the case, she holds as much of the responsibility as Brutus does, and therefore as much of the heroic valor. At the same time, the message this leaves for other women is not one of political revolution. Her role in the war is only accepted as long as she is not the acting agent in it. She is, according to Richard Beacon and Machiavelli, more of a plot device than an actual character. Camino presents Lucrece as a tool used by critics to support their own patriarchal views. These vary slightly, but ultimately she is both vital to and excluded from the revolution. Of course, Lucrece must be raped, Machiavelli argues, but she herself is not responsible for Brutus's decision to overthrow the Tarquins. Rather, he argues that Brutus used her as a tool to accomplish his goal. The version of this story that features a hero cannot feature a humanized Lucrece. Her prominence in the tale makes it impossible for the audience to see Brutus as a true hero. After all, wouldn't the hero of this story have saved Lucrece? Reading *The Rape of Lucrece*, Brutus recognizes Lucrece as an actor in the plot, but seems disappointed at her decision to take her own life rather than the life of Tarquin's. He does not understand her reasoning, seemingly mistaking his plot for hers. She was forced to decide between dying and ruining the narrative in which she has some value, whereas the narrative he reads is one of heroism and revenge. Brutus's reaction is not appropriate to her story, but he only exists in an important way in a heroic narrative. This author uses the word heroic in a way I will likely not. She seems to define heroism through the model of accomplishing big things through good deeds.

It's relatively vague, and her choice of calling Lucrece heroic for her act in bringing down Rome seems to set aside the contemporary feelings about Lucrece. She was not considered a hero alongside Brutus, and was fairly separated from his "heroic" actions. I will mostly be focusing on her analysis of Lucrece in relation to Brutus, and not using the parts in which Camino argues that Lucrece is taking a kind of phallic power in killing herself with a dagger in order to operate in a patriarchal power structure.

This question of how Lucrece operates in her narrative is often boiled down to whether she qualifies as a virtuous martyr or a valorous hero. Lee Edwards writes *The Labors of Psyche* in response to the question of who qualifies as a hero. Edwards postulates that the definition of a hero we tend to lean towards is more of a guideline, though her definition does not line up with that of my argument. The definition she claims to be traditional is that of a physically strong, well-born, ambitious, and sovereign man. These are, indeed, things we see often in stories that feature heroes, but as she points out, they don't come close to encapsulating all of the people we would consider heroic. Edwards examines the shortcomings of this model of heroism, using examples such as Christ, Joan of Arc, and Antigone in her initial questioning. She seems to ask, how can we truly buy into a definition of a hero that doesn't include these figures? She then goes on to break down the story of Psyche and Amor to reshape the concept of a heroic quest. She uses an essay by Erich Neumann to frame her argument, utilizing his structure of analysis but pushing back against his thoughts on gender. He argued that Psyche stood in as an example of the feminine while Amor was the masculine. Edwards points out that Neumann fails to recognize his cultural biases in his analysis which leaves his analysis of gender and sexuality outdated. Edwards argues that three elements of Psyche's story concretize her position as a hero: She is

marginalized by virtue of being a woman, she sets out against a kind of communal law which sets love as a force only used to maintain social structures, and she attempts to liberate love from these constructed confines. This, Edwards argues, is a truly heroic quest. With a heroic mission, she then reads Psyche as a hero in herself.

Saunders, like Camino, traces the history of Lucrece, but focuses equally on the authors that wrote her as philosophers and moralists that wrote about her. In her chapter titled “Legendary History: Lucretia and Helen of Troy,” Saunders argues that the rape of Lucrece as a foundational moment in Roman history means that sexual assault is vital to Roman existence. Saunders points out that in order to avoid praising someone for committing suicide, a violent sin, Saint Augustine argues Lucretia committed suicide because of guilt (meaning she was guilty of adultery) rather than to show her purity. This argument surfaces in many different different forms, but in general it serves to turn her story from one of pagan virtue to one of sin. Saunders uses Lydgate as another thinker who tries to reexamine the morality of Lucretia’s tale. He presents two readings of Lucretia, seemingly presenting as an unbiased source, but gives a very sympathetic translation of her story that focuses on the feminine tragedy, making it difficult to condemn Lucretia. Christine de Pisan reads Lucretia’s rape as a direct dialogue with the debate over the victim’s guilt having been raped. She reads it as a key moment in the discourse over pleasure derived from rape, using her reputation as a paragon of virtue as proof of her innocence. Lucretia’s role is blurred by the inconsistency of her readings. When she is read as guilty, the story of her action in terms of Roman history is washed away in favor of one about guilt and suicide. When she resisted being overcome by the rape, however, she stands in with many chaste heroines.

The primary texts this essay works with grapple with unspoken social and narrative expectations. This is based on a mixture of the horizon of expectations held by the readers (in which they expect certain heroic deeds to be fulfilled because they are reading about a hero) and the authorial interactions with those expectations. The conflict within these stories often has to do with a character's misunderstanding of the narrative roles she is fulfilling. Their assessments are often wrong or misguided, leaving them feeling betrayed when they realize the function they will actually be serving. There are unspoken expectations that guide the actions of characters in stories. Often, for heroes, it is an expectation of the hero by the audience regarding what the hero will do and what the audience will see. Or perhaps, there is an expectation of the audience that the storyteller will have the hero follow a certain narrative path. These expectations can be formed between characters, but they are most relevant to this discussion when they are made between a character and some notion of Fate, Time, God, etc. It is often the kind of expectation that "If I perform X, I will be rewarded with Y." If you are virtuous, you will be rewarded with joy or freedom; if you are loyal, you will be remembered as a martyr; if you rebel against a corrupt government, you will be rewarded by the Gods.

There are also expectations that the characters assume that are then broken by the non-human entities. If Fate, Time, or God promise a period of time or space as a sanctuary from danger and then the character is violated, the violation goes past the aggressor to the entity that promised safety. If these expectations are violated, the character seems to the audience or admits in the text to feeling betrayed. This feeling is based on the characters subjective experience, as there was never any promise actually made; often, there is an understanding that the characters simply misunderstood their role in the narrative they occupied. In *The Rape of Lucrece*, Lucrece

uses the word “enchained” to characterize her position in her narrative. This is a helpful way to think about each of the inescapable ties between secondary characters and the heroes’ narratives that pull them along. She recognizes her literary position, but sees it as a betrayal of the expectations she had of Time. She describes her enchainment as “endless” in her outcry to Time. Lucrece uses the word to quantify her imprisonment in the narrative she was forced into: it has a direct beginning for her, the moment of her rape, but once it has begun, it is clear to her that the story of her suffering and of her sacrifice will be told moving forward in history. The positioning of herself in an endless story not only denotes the length of her suffering, but that she has a responsibility to suffer. Legends are “endless” because they are continually told and manipulated in different ways.

The position as a figure is often accompanied by a audience expectations related to the figural roles. The audience expects a series of figures that occupy narrative roles, and the storyteller is all but obliged to include them. The figure of a hero is a mix between expectation and precedent. A useful comparison is tropes in film genre: a Western usually has horses, cowboys, and stetsons because they are recognizable, and because creators learn what to be by watching what has been done before. A hero takes control of the narrative and drives it towards something that is considered morally good or productive. The figure in this case is an open position. The audience understands the figure of a hero before entering into the narrative, and the characters largely understand the figures that they are. This unspoken expectation binds characters to a narrative in a way that means that their actions are locked into a certain story, irrespective of their individual motivations.

The definition of a hero I will be using is a narrative figure who leads the narrative and disrupts the temporal flow of the world the rest of the characters participate in; he is usually the only character that could be described as having “agency”. These figures can be supported or hindered by the others in their narrative, but ultimately they emerge victorious, and usually alive. However, the part more important than their staying alive is that their death causes change. This is an important distinction: The hero’s death creates immediate change, the martyr’s death creates space for other people to make change. This key distinction is where female martyrs are caught.

Modern discourse prioritizes self-sacrifice when defining heroism. Often, the clearest path to the title of hero is to die in battle, or in the act of saving someone else’s life. This means that with the right timing, anyone can be a hero. This sentiment was not shared in the eras I will be analyzing, and was especially not extended to women. However, this definition, though modern, will still be helpful in unpacking the treatment of these women. The hero is possibly the only figure in its narrative structure that is able to take action that disrupts the narrative flow. Women are relegated to the positions of martyrs in the texts I will be analysing— a kind of consolation prize for their valor. Though some are comfortable with this relegation, others are not. Why is it that the figure of the hero is such an unattainable position for women in these narratives? And how does the figure of the martyr further distance them from achieving this title?

In *The Rape of Lucrece*, the narrative centers on a stiff shift in Lucrece’s perception of her role in the story. Her story begins with her mythic virtue, continues to her rape, then to her suicide, then ends again with that same mythic virtue. This cycle is locked into a specific pattern,

generated through the relationship between her story and the audience. Lucrece occupies a position not only in this poem, but in a legend that has existed for centuries and will continue after this version is told; she is bound by the fame of her own story. Storytellers use her story differently, and Shakespeare seems to use it here in order to critique or question the use of Lucrece as a tool without many empathetic readings of her as a character. Lucrece spends much of the poem engaged in a battle between herself and the narrative thread she's been trapped in throughout every iteration of her story. In a more meta sense, her past (meaning the portrayal of her by Ovid, Chaucer, etc.) hang on her as she feels the tremendous weight of this story that she will not be able to escape. She refers to it as "endless" because even when she dies, her story will continue. This frustration stems from a conflict between her expectations and desires and the unavoidable pull of the narrative. She expected to have, if not control over her narrative, at least an understanding of it. This is quickly broken off when she is raped and it is exposed that she is crucial to a narrative in the history of Rome, but this requires that she commit suicide. She is, in her words, "enchained" to this fate, and she is not happy about it.

The meat of this poem lies in between the rape and the suicide. She has fought with the story in which she must kill herself, and realized she is trapped and will not be able to reason her way out. This is because her actions are not conducted by reason, they are conducted by, as she calls them, Time and Opportunity. Characterized most clearly in her imagined argument with Time, Lucrece is caught in a story where she has to play the martyr, a role she does not want. Her narrative would go as follows: she is raped, she kills herself, Rome falls. As she laments her fate, Lucrece asks why she has been chained to this narrative. She says:

"Why hath thy servant, Opportunity,
Betray'd the hours thou gavest me to repose,
Cancell'd my fortunes, and enchained me

To endless date of never-ending woes?
 Time's office is to fine the hate of foes;
 To eat up errors by opinion bred,
 Not spend the dowry of a lawful bed." (Shakespeare 932-938)

She was supposed to have a life of "fortunes," but that life has been "cancell'd." She implies that a trust has been broken, claiming that Time had promised her hours to "repose" and that promise had been betrayed by Opportunity. To Lucrece, Opportunity, as a servant of Time, is also betraying this trust.

Lucrece has a very strong sense of justice, one in which she should be rewarded for her good actions. Her sense of justice has a lot to do with how she addresses Time and Opportunity. It is unjust that she has been robbed of what she thought was her own narrative. For her, she was fulfilling the role of loyal wife, so Time should have been doing its job and bringing to justice "foes" without punishing those who have not committed any sin. She says that "Time's office is to fine the hate of foes;/ To eat up errors by opinion bred." Lucrece refers, once again, to her assumed structure of the world. Time should be assisting the protagonist of the story, "Not spend[ing] the dowry of a lawful bed." She wants time to make bad things fade away. If time were to "eat up errors by opinion bred," she would be able to function despite her rape. Perhaps her shame would be the greatest error, as she did not transgress. Were time to function as she wishes, her story would not necessitate suicide. The shame culture surrounding women in Rome would not drive her to death and eventually, she could be forgotten and have the ending she knows now will never be in reach. Her perception of Time's office is that it should be an ultimate force of justice.

Lucrece's rape is, in her view, not only an act on behalf of Tarquin, but one on behalf of the narrative operators. She asks Time why Opportunity "Betray'd the hours thou gavest me to

repose.” It is precisely because she is promised hours for repose by Time that Opportunity is able to set this series of actions into motion and make way for Brutus’s political narrative. This is not merely a rotten hand she has been dealt, but one that caught her by surprise; for this reason, it was a betrayal. Lucrece thought she had been doing everything right, but she was not even granted the opportunity to take agency and transgress before she was punished. Once it has happened, there is no way for her to back out and try to occupy a different narrative position. Lucrece does not commit any crime, and yet she is punished for a crime done unto her. The moral code she had been relying on promised reward in return for virtuous behavior. Instead, even her “lawful bed” is not enough to save her from the shame culture that would force her to take responsibility for Tarquin’s actions. This represents a breach of social expectation as well as one of moral expectation. Lucrece wants to live in a world where she is responsible for her own actions, and not those of others. This restriction is in part due to her gender. Her narrative entrapment here references the real social control of women. As much as Shakespeare’s Lucrece wants to leave behind the shame culture that was already antiquated (though still often lauded) in Renaissance culture, she is trapped by her ancient predecessors. As a historical Lucrece was shamed into committing suicide to maintain her chaste reputation, this one must as well.

There was a distinct beginning to Lucrece’s legend, one Shakespeare’s Lucrece does not participate in, but there will not be an end. Her story will continue to be told and she will continue to be recalled as a paragon of suffering. Lucrece’s sacrifice was not strictly necessary until it happened; in a more open reading of the text, Lucrece could have survived and killed Tarquin herself, as Brutus later recommends. Had this story and this character existed in a political and literary vacuum, she could have ended this story with revenge. There are infinite

ways to imagine how this could have gone differently, and she spends time on a few, but this passage makes it clear that it is all impossible. Because Lucrece's suicide is necessary to this long lasting legend, it takes away the opportunity for an active choice or sacrifice. Her death is performative as much as it is symbolic. Lucrece is not "acting" in any sort of active sense, but rather has been "enchained" to this fate. Now, she must kill herself, and she will be rewarded with a delayed and indirect revenge, and a legacy as a virtuous martyr.

The rape is the beginning of Lucrece's story in almost every iteration of its telling; it moves her from a timeline into a space without time, and therefore without an ending. Lucrece before the rape is not tied into this story largely because that is not a part of her story that most authors have any interest in telling as anything but exposition. It is not until the rape itself that it is clear exactly which narrative she is locked into. In her role as martyr, Lucrece is not allowed to disrupt the temporal flow offered to her. The hero is the only one who could do that, and the hero seems largely absent from this story. Lucrece is the protagonist of her story, but without agency, she cannot occupy the role of hero. Instead, she has been relegated to the role of martyr, a role which fulfils a narrative necessity. Like Christ, who dies because he must die, once the story of Lucrece is told, it requires that she die in order to fulfil the following events. It is, to early readership, more important that Tarquin be overthrown than any aspect of Lucrece's life. Her story is about the actions that follow the rape and suicide, so once she is raped, she must commit suicide. These figures died in the past, and recognized the necessity that they die, so that the contemporary audience can appreciate that they made something possible.

Much of her resentment comes from the fact that Lucrece functions with a misunderstanding of her narrative. It is not her job to interact with the temporal flow, and it is

certainly not her job to be forgotten. Rather, she is a part of the narrative that has to press forward in a specific way. The role of Time in stories is not to help characters, but rather to push the narrative along. It is the heroes job to try and disrupt some temporal flow. The hero seems to guide the narrative, while the martyr must make way for the heroes path. This is a pivotal moment for Lucrece because it seems to be the moment when she realizes that her situation is not the one she expected, and it is not exactly fair. Of course, fairness is a constructed concept, but this story does seek to occupy the mindspace of a character without agency, so it is a concept she engages with. The structure of this poem walks the fine line between tragic and comic. Her straddling of the narrative she expected and the narrative expected of her can also be seen in the divide that Shakespeare straddles between the comic and the tragic. She has moments that are ironic and almost funny, but to descend into comedy would be to step into a world where she is allowed to live, which cannot happen. There is a liminality of this text that plays with the concept of her being allowed to cross into a different narrative and a different genre, but it is ultimately concluded that that is impossible. We cannot laugh at Lucrece, and she cannot live.

Lucrece's focus on her inability to choose her own fate centers on her expectation of agency. With agency, she might be able to act as the figure of the hero, but instead she works as the martyr. Agency does not have to be represented by an act against something, but the easiest way to recognize her lack of agency is her inability to act against her expectation. Lucrece's actions are not new nor are they motivated by any reactionary measure. Rather they are reflections of past actions. She is "enchained" to this pre-written narrative, existing both in a legend of a grander scale and this one telling. This section of the text is a representation of her realization that she is not the unique Lucrece. Rather, she is the figure of Lucrece. In other

words, she occupies this legendary role as a mythic figure of virtue and therefore is not able to occupy a human role with self contained motivations and freedom of action. Lucrece is bound by her legend: in a micro sense, the narrative of this poem, in a macro sense, and restrictions of her gender. Lucrece's position as a figure restricts her. Unlike the figure of a hero, who is made to resist the temporal flow, the figure of the martyr is made to assist. She can assist the narrative, the temporal flow, or, most importantly, the hero.

Lucrece falls well into the structure for a modern hero. It is even possible for her action to be read as just as crucial in the history of Rome as that of Brutus. In that case, she would be just as heroic as he is. In her self-sacrifice, Lucrece makes way for other people to do very important things. In the context of these stories, however, the position of the martyr is very important but also very distinct from that of the hero. The role of making the narrative possible is not that of the hero. The hero drives the narrative and he makes others make way for him. Lucrece's death is valorous, but she would not be allowed the kind of narrative recognition that the hero is granted. Lucrece is not a hero in the traditional sense, and this is largely because she is a woman; her death is not so much heroic as it is necessary. It was her responsibility to kill herself, so she is not praised for it in any manner past a recognition of her virtue. In this narrative, however, we are left without a hero really worth rooting for. By the end, it is clear that this iteration of Brutus is rather Machiavellian and takes hold of the opportunity granted him by Lucrece. He is not the hero the reader wants to root for-- she is. It is difficult to avoid sympathizing with Lucrece, which makes it even more difficult to support Brutus's cold and unempathetic words. Lucrece's words express anger that she is not allowed to maintain control of her narrative as a hero, and the poem expresses that same frustration by refusing to give us anyone to fill that narrative role. This

is a story traditionally about a hero, but here, the figure of the hero is absent. This leaves us to wonder why the figure of the martyr cannot step into that role.

Antigone's sense of justice is exactly as strong as Lucrece's. She sees herself, like Lucrece, as being punished for having done the right thing. The major difference between them lies in the fact that Antigone is very active in blaming Creon for her death, and blames the gods for being passive bystanders. This is a kind of flip from Lucrece who primarily blamed Time and Opportunity, with Tarquin as a monstrous, though ultimately human, transgressor. Antigone turns to the gods in frustration at this point in the text because she has done exactly what she was supposed to, and still they have not come to rescue her. Her moment here is frustrated and hopeless, and more than anything she feels alone. Antigone willingly takes on the mantle of martyr, another distinction between her and Lucrece, but she is more concerned with the justice of it all than with her legacy. Antigone's death would ultimately be used to turn the tide of the culture that punished her, but she does not get to see it.

“And what law of heaven have I transgressed? Why, hapless one, should I look to the gods any more, -what ally should I invoke, -when by piety I have earned the name of impious? Nay, then, if these things are pleasing to the gods, when I have suffered my doom, I shall come to know my [fault].” (Sophocles)

When working through the nature of her condemnation, Antigone asks how exactly she transgressed. Since, as she understands it, she is functioning in a corrupt political environment, she can only adhere to the laws of heaven. And yet, that political environment is winning over her. The men that surround her all seem to know that she is right, and yet they do nothing. She asks “what law of heaven have I transgressed?” and the answer is that she has not. Antigone sticks fast to her morals, fearing the gods more than she fears Creon. She plays a larger role in the punishment of Creon. The gods will punish him for his transgressions, but they will not save

her, and, like Lucrece, she feels betrayed by these entities. She has done her duty (piety) and they have not done theirs (to reward her). Her sense of justice is put into question by this situation, and she is forced to confront the reality of her morals. There is no easy way to follow morals in an unjust world so in this way, she is experiencing exactly the thing many martyrs are subject to: being asked to die rather than submit to an immoral culture. It is a difficult request to make, but her ultimate willingness to die rather than abandon her morals ultimately leave her in the right. This being said, her position has also completely isolated her.

Antigone's isolation contributes to her feeling of injustice. She looks around and sees people holding the same ideals she considers to be universal, but no one is willing to speak up. She asks why she should "look to the gods any more" when she is already being punished for her piety and virtue. Her valor has so far gone unrewarded, so who can she possibly turn to? It seems in this moment, as she stands, about to be sentenced to a slow death, that both the men she broke the laws of and the gods she stayed loyal to have abandoned her. Going back to the concept of trust, Antigone feels a sense of betrayal similar to that of Lucrece. The system she thought she was working in included rewards for valorous and virtuous behavior, but instead she is being used as a catalyst for Creon's suffering. Her death is used to teach those around her a lesson. As important as that is to the narrative, it is not a very rewarding role. This martyrdom creates a shift in the way the people think about Creon and about the laws he has established. Antigone asks who she could possibly turn to "when by piety I have earned the name of impious?" a sentiment shared by Lucrece. She is not only being punished, but completely isolated from the people and the gods. Her punishment extends past her death, and she seems to realize all at once that she is going to die and the gods are not going to do anything about it.

Her death, though seemingly entrenched in a stark contrast between the laws of morality and the laws of the land, has a universalizing effect. Before she dies, everyone is afraid to save her. After she dies, the whole world turns to punish Creon. She asks “what ally should I invoke,” making it clear that she is sure that not only does she have no allies, but that she has no options. The only way to achieve strength in this kind of system is through power in numbers, something that Creon takes advantage of. She, alone, cannot create change alive. She does create change in her death, but it is something that would have seemed very unlikely to Antigone in this moment, especially considering her later suicide. She, like Lucrece, will never see the rewards of her death. The narrative turn from the world being united against Antigone to it being united against Creon not only comes from the men he surrounds himself with, but seemingly the gods as well. What is made very clear in this passage is that Antigone is not going to see the moment that the world turns in her favor. In her mind, the world is corrupt and the gods are just, though even that thought begins to be tinged with doubt in that moment.

A part of her willingness to die seems to stem from this isolation, paired with her frustration at not understanding how justice is supposed to proceed. There is one strong advantage in her death and it is that she will finally know what was going on. She struggles with her inability to understand how justice played out in the first part of this passage, but ends up reluctantly accepting that this is not something she can know while she lives. She says, of her own execution, “Nay, then, if these things are pleasing to the gods, when I have suffered my doom, I shall come to know my [fault].” Antigone has been actively trying to sort through how the vision of justice being executed can be just, and eventually settles on the fact that she cannot figure it out. It is not Antigone’s role to be the arbitrator of justice. Her role as martyr is perfectly

defined: she will die in a valorous vision of ultimate justice and it will bring on the ultimate suffering of Creon. She dies to make this man learn his lesson. Her fault is difficult to quantify, though perhaps unnecessary as the gods seem to be on her side. Antigone tries to quantify her fault because to her, the only way this could be just is if she had faltered. In her worldview, this is impossible since her only deeds were set to serve the laws of the gods. Even as she accepts that she has done no wrong, she admits she could not know until her death.

Like *The Rape of Lucrece*, this text lacks the figure of a hero. Creon is a dynamic central character, but he is not a hero. Antigone is the closest we come to a heroic figure, but her role as martyr is quite overwhelming. She moves through the rest of the text like a hero, but as with Lucrece, this moment can be read as the moment at which she recognizes her position as martyr, though she would not put that word on it. Her death feels heroic for most of the text, but here, where it seems like she will die with no recognition and no political movement to show that her death will have been worth it, she begins to think of her death as more of a cruelty than an act of valor. Perhaps one of the starkest differences between being a hero and being a martyr is the concept of reward. As stated in regards to Leonora, it is easy to die a heroes death. To die to save another person or to assist the hero in saving others is a uncomplicated and obviously moral death. Her death is in response to an act that is, indeed, moral, but is not heroic. The most heroic aspect of her story is her willingness to stand up to Creon and ultimately force him to reexamine his corrupt laws. She, like Lucrece and Leonora, is caught in a space where she is forced to examine the workings of her death and why she has been brought to this position. Leonora's death is shortly after this moment, giving her little time to ruminate on the injustice of it all. Lucrece and Antigone, however, are forced to wait. These women realize they must die and then

they spend time examining why they must die and whether or not they find that answer adequate. For both of them, it is not, but that does not halt their deaths.

Antigone's struggle with the punishment she faces brings up one of the key traits of the martyr: she must suffer. A hero's quest may involve suffering, but at the end lies the hero's reward. The martyr is respected specifically because she occupies a thankless role. Her role is gendered in that it is the woman's job to die and not ask for anything in return, and this is a noble thing to do. Usually, when she dies for the hero, he will go on to sing her praises. In this case, her legacy was heroless and is told not through praise, but through Creon's punishment. Without the figure of the hero, the martyr's position is one of tragedy. It can lead to an uprising or a reverse of power, but it cannot lead to a legacy of victory. A difference between Antigone and Leonora is that Antigone's death has a resounding impact. Those who wronged her will eventually be punished and the world will come to accept her as having been on the right side of this story, a progression that she could not have anticipated before her death. Unfortunately, as we see in her struggle in this passage, she is distracted by the prospect of her justice and is unable to look ahead. She does not take this as an opportunity to brag or to say that everyone will know she was right when she dies, because they won't. Those beholden to Creon already think she is in the right and if she cannot know the truth until she dies, neither can they. Antigone's execution turned suicide concretizes Creon's injustice in history, taking away his ability to repent. This death has a much more immediate effect than that of most martyrs. Her suicide holds tight to the original narrative, even as Creon tries to change it.

In *Il Trovatore*, Leonora is caught in a similar sort of narrative trap, but it is based more within the narrative. Loved by both De Luna and Manrico, Leonora's death has to occur in order

for Azucena's revenge/curse to truly take its hold on De Luna. This is not how Leonora perceives her death, largely as she is unaware of the curse and of the narrative. *Il Trovatore* is a complicated and a little convoluted story in which small, personal narratives are overcome by sweeping plotlines driven by politics and fate. Leonora functions within one of those small, personal narratives, and because of this she is able to interpret her death in a way that makes it easy for her to commit to. She sees her sacrifice as a truly heroic act, and heroic death is an easy choice to make. For Leonora, there is no fear in her death as she has given it purpose: to save Manrico. This would be a very heroic death, and it is heroic in the modern sense, but it is complicated by her ultimate failure to save the man she loves. Leonora was written in a time with vastly different values from any of the most prominent iterations of Lucrece. Surrounded by thoughts of Italian revolution and young revolutionaries, martyrdom came closer to heroism in this era— that is if it sent the right message. Unfortunately, Manrico ultimately dies, along with Leonora, and the only narrative closure is that of Azucena's curse as it is fulfilled. Leonora's death does not earn her a heroic title, but a tragic one. This is because her death does not have a lasting effect on the larger narrative. Leonora goes into her necessary death more willingly than Lucrece, but only because she misunderstands the role she is playing. Leonora imagines herself in the role of the hero, and she uses that to shape her understanding of how her story will be told.

Leonora makes it very clear during the final scene that she is not afraid to die. She says “Now I wait for my end fearless, full of joy, I will be able to tell him as I die, I have saved you (for/through) myself!”

Or il mio fine impavida,
 piena di gioia attendo,
 potrò dirgli morendo,
 salvo tu sei per me! (Verdi, Part 4 Scene 2)

There is no fear in her death because she does not fear how she will be perceived after death. She recognizes herself as valorous and virtuous, and recognizes this action as one of her own agency. Like Lucrece, Leonora has a strong sense of justice, but she sees the world differently. Rather than feeling trapped by her suicide, she feels liberated by it. Leonora perceives her act as one she is driving based on an active choice, counter to the plot of De Luna. She correctly perceives De Luna as the antagonist of the story, but the narrative force is not centered on her love story. It is necessary that she think of her narrative in this way, otherwise she, like Lucrece, would be much less eager to kill herself. By respinning her tale as one of her own heroism, she is able to enter into this agreement (that of her fulfilment of the curse paired with her agreement to marry De Luna) in which she can save Manrico. This reaction is based on her deception of De Luna and the story she thinks she will be telling. She is without fear and full of joy specifically because of the heroic way in which she perceives her final act.

This moment is so monumental to her because it represents a turning point in the narrative. While Lucrece's turning point happens *to* her (the rape) Leonora is trying to make her own, though ultimately she is only successful within one of the smaller storylines. Leonora places her decision in the present. She does not simply say she is going to her end, but she says that *now* she can go to her end fearless. Now that she has given herself a reason to die; now that she has constructed a narrative in which she is proud to die; now that she can see her death as a reclamation of agency rather than a surrender to the grander plot. This "now" refers to her after she has drunk the poison. Leonora, having committed to the act of suicide, has now set into motion the rest of the story and is now ready for it to take over. The narrative (or in the world of the text, the curse) pulls Leonora along from the beginning, but this is the first time she is able to

look at it and feel in control. Now that she has taken the poison, she has claimed ownership of her death. It is difficult for us as readers to view this reclamation as a true act of agency when we see the narrative demand her death. It is still an interesting question: If the curse wants her to die, but she kills herself in order to fulfil a different narrative purpose than that of the punishment for De Luna, has she claimed her own agency? Leonora's "Per me" or "for/through myself" gives the impression that she has not just saved him, but she has saved him both for herself and by way or sacrificing herself. Leonora used his salvation as a way to try and elevate herself to the status of the hero. On the other hand, if Leonora was truly to die from the beginning (which makes sense, considering the revenge Azucena seeks, but is not strictly enforced) then her action here is more of a forced shift in audience perception of her rather than a shift in the plot. Of course, her grappling with her own character may have been the most effective way for her to affect the narrative as she was not granted the power to change the path of the plot.

Leonora's comments in this passage suggest a change in narrative momentum. Before, she was helpless and hopeless. Now, she is (she thinks) powerful and in control. She has the power to save Manrico to keep herself out of De Luna's control. Poison is a slow acting killer, and we get these comments from Leonora in the space between the act of her suicide and the onset of death. Unlike Lucrece, who was pushed into suicide, Leonora's suicide was relatively unnecessary. It *seems* that her death was necessary in order to bring about the complete fulfillment of Azucena's revenge, but this not the only way for her to fulfil the curse. Her decision to drink the poison means that she turned the tide of the narrative. This is not to say that she took herself out of Azucena's revenge narrative, but that her death was suddenly about something else. *Now* Leonora is able to face her death with joy, fearless.

Leonora, like Lucrece, recognizes the performative quality of her death, nodding back the performative role of the martyr in general. Martyrs do not just die, but they die to say something or do something. Here, she emphasizes that not only will she die, but she will be able to tell Manrico that she saved him. “Potrò dirgli morendo,/salvo tu sei per me!” She does not say “I will be able to save him,” but “now I can *tell* him as I die, I saved you by sacrificing myself” (my emphasis). The moment she anticipates is the moment in which she tells him she has saved him and his subsequent gratitude or grief. She is actively trying to grasp a role that is not allowed to women, so she must try and step in another way. Leonora sees herself in a narrative as clearly as Lucrece and Christ. These figures reference their deaths as being necessary because they have meaning. Leonora sees herself dying, but she is unafraid because she knows she can see herself as a hero, and she can make Manrico see her as one too. She wants to make sure that others see this narrative in the same way that she does. Leonora is perhaps not taking control of her fate with her suicide, nor with the fate of Manrico, but the way she dies does change the course of her narrative and how she is remembered in the story. This is, perhaps, the closest a martyr can come to a heroic role. She does not kill herself because her legacy is under threat, but rather she enters into a deal knowing she can simply kill herself to get out of it. Her joy and fearlessness come from her claim to power that she would not have been granted in the ordinary ways. She used the tools often attributed to women trying to get power that those around them do not want them to have: poison and deception.

If we read this turn as an active seizure of the narrative on behalf of Leonora, we see a literal action that accompanies the figurative action. This does not refer to the suicide, but to her exclamation, both to the audience and Manrico, that she is committing suicide in order to save

him. The act of dying for her lover does fall strongly into the figure of the martyr, but it is difficult to ignore the heroic aspect of doing something to save someone else's life. Perhaps this comes from a modern reading of the text, but Leonora's action turns the tide of her narrative; she turns herself from a victim into a sort of hero. Of course, this stipulation comes accompanied by the fact that the curse's narrative pushed for her death, so her actions could also be read as being pushed by the narrative force of the curse, her decision to control her narrative ultimately futile. These two readings both have their flaws, but ultimately, Leonora is right to cherish the opportunity to be able to tell Manrico "salvo tu sei per me!" This moment reveals her understanding of how much why you do an action matters as much as the effects of the action. Leonora is a tragic figure, but she is also a heroic one.

Now that she has concretized her position as martyr, she can be remembered for her heroic actions rather than for her role in De Luna's punishment. She functions with a modern understanding of heroic effort: instead of judging her actions based on their success or outcomes, she judged them based on her intentions. Before she could even see the outcome of her actions, she already claimed to have won. There is no regret in Leonora's words because she already counts this as a victory. In a modern discourse, she is right. Leonora's story, as hard as she pushes to be recognized hero, also conforms to the figure of the martyr in almost every regard. She sacrificed herself for him, and he was a much more sympathetic hero than Brutus, making it easier for us to accept him as the story's central protagonist. The major difference between her story and Lucrece's is that Lucrece was trapped into her sacrifice. Leonora did not have to kill herself for Manrico and, in fact, it ultimately proved fruitless. Her sacrifice here was much more

active than Lucrece's, though her death was already motivated by outside forces. For this reason, she embodies a different kind of martyr alongside the modern day heroic status.

I started this paper in an attempt to analyze the troubled relationship between the role of martyrdom and martyr herself. My working assumption was that a martyr was a figure set up to assist the hero in the completion of his narrative. However, two of my texts were largely heroless, and in the other, the hero dies and is revealed to not be the narrative force after all. For these texts to function without a hero driving the narrative, the narrative pull comes from elsewhere. In these cases, it comes from some iteration of fate. All of these martyrs, then, die to teach someone else a lesson or offer them an opportunity. Rather than occupy positions in the hero's narrative, they operate in a grander narrative that goes over the heads of the apparent heroes. These deaths make it so the narrative can come to fruition; their deaths are necessary. This means that the martyr is just as necessary for the completion of these acts as the hero. This concept of necessity, however, means that they have a very different relationship to the act than the hero does. The hero approaches the heroic task as a chance to do something (save the day, change the world, overthrow the government). The martyr, however, is usually put in a position where her death is the only option. In these texts, by centering their focus on characters other than the hero, the relationship is shifted. There are "hero" figures, but none of them are the narrative force we expect from a heroic figure. For this reason, the martyrs become the main focus of these texts (though Leonora is only the subject of one narrative thread in a mass of them). This focus destabilizes the figure of a martyr. Part of her job is not only to die, but to be grateful for the opportunity.

Though these women are often viewed as making a difficult (though virtuous) choice, it seems as though they had little choice to begin with. In analyzing this, Wagner's take on the theory of action laid out in *Bound to Act* is helpful, especially in considering Lucrece's narrative. Wagner talks about the phenomenon of female sacrifice with respect to Agamemnon's sacrifice of his daughter, Iphigenia. This sacrifice, Wagner points out, is not strictly necessary until it happens. Once it occurs however, it becomes central to the progression of the plot. She says "it will be necessary, in view of what will happen, if it does happen. In other words, Iphigenia's sacrifice is compelling because it is impelling; it can be conjugated in the future anterior as an event that *will have been necessary*" (Wagner 124). Lucrece's death functions in the same way, as do Antigone's and Leonora's, though they don't recognize it in the same way. Lucrece's text has the most metatextual treatment of narrative. She does not just recognize that she is being pushed to suicide, but also that it is happening because of the story she finds herself in. She is aware of this exact narrative necessity that Wagner details. In contrast, Antigone and Leonora recognize their deaths as, though unjust, motivated by the characters within their stories; Antigone recognizes it as a result of judicial injustice and Leonora recognizes it as a result of her own heroic actions (though those were also the result of systemic injustice). Using Wagner's theory, these texts all proceed as they do because they must. It is understood that without their deaths Rome's monarchy will hold, De Luna will not truly feel his punishment, and Creon will not learn the effects his unjust laws bring into being.

Each of the women I have chosen to analyze recognize one aspect of heroism and try to take control of it. Antigone and Leonora use heroic deeds while Lucrece tries to push back against her narrative position by claiming narrative agency. Leonora does not realize it, but her

decision to try and claim heroism for herself is the same kind of rewriting we see Lucrece attempt to employ. These women recognize the power of the figure of the hero. They then try to gain access to the exclusionary tradition of the hero by claiming agency over whatever part of the plot they can control. They are, ultimately, unable to achieve heroic status, but they did achieve something else: they became active arbiters of their fate. It is difficult to see suicide as a reclamation of agency, but these women did refuse to be killed or shamed by other sources, instead using their deaths as a final model of their seizure of the plot. They take their allowance as propellants of the plot and utilize that in order to hold control over their status as figure. Though they cannot be heroes, they do become active agents in their own legacy, even if that activity is not able to affect the overarching plot.

This brings us to the primary question of this essay: do these women have agency? If they do, it seems reasonable to imply that they are, despite their status as martyrs, also heroes. The agency of the story must belong to the central force which often lies in the hands of the hero. Lucrece and Antigone both make it clear they feel they have no other option, meaning they do not really have agency, so Leonora's text is the least forthcoming on this question. Leonora takes hold of her narrative, but it is unclear whether she is actually able to steer it somewhere it was not already going. The pivotal aspect of Leonora's story is that she plays a role in the narrative she feels that she has control over. Azucena's curse, De Luna's political sphere, and the story of the gypsies are all untouchable for her. In this complicated and multifaceted opera, Leonora finds the one story that she has control over and she takes the reins. Were this story the central plot of the show, she would be the heroine. She does claim agency here, it is just only over relatively isolated vision of the story being told. The looming plot that works without her control, however,

will not allow itself to be changed by her claim to heroism. This tension relates to a long history of women's sacrifice being, though virtuous, ultimately less impactful than the death of men.

McCracken's analysis of the death of women in Medieval Literature reveals that the futility of these women's deaths is not isolated, but a traceable tradition in literature. Perceval's sister is another subject of this tradition. At the end of her life, she offers a dying woman her blood and dies in the process. This would be a heroic act, but when the woman dies anyways, it becomes a tragic and virtuous act instead. Her deed is in fact valorous, but it is also unrelated to the greater struggle of the story. "Through her self-sacrifice Perceval's sister joins the ranks of the holy men and women who populate this romance, but even though martyrdom endorses the Christian ethos represented by the grail quest, her death is never explicitly explained as part of the struggle between good and evil, as are most events in the story" (McCracken 9). Women can earn respect by martyring themselves in the name of virtue or justice, but that respect is conditional. They will be respected as doing a woman's job in the way that a woman should. There is no understanding that martyrdom is going above and beyond the expectations layed out for them since it is a necessary death and they had no choice in the matter anyways. This kind of understanding of martyrdom being a woman's job adds to the devaluation of their sacrifices. Through this construction of value, the martyr is distinguished from the hero. Martyrdom is not an act that is inherently less heroic than those acts of the hero, but their actions are unique because they are only allowed the power to pave way for heroic action, never to enact it.

In considering the role of sexual violation in regards to suicide, a helpful parallel is the objectification of Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*. Lavinia is exactly what Lucrece feared she would become. She is silenced and used more as a means to an end rather than as the central figure in a

narrative of her own. Lucrece and Lavinia are both forced to occupy positions in these narratives in which they contribute to the narrative flow. Tronick argues that Lavinia is silenced in an effort to maintain the status of Rome. She says, “A woman with a voice would ‘disturb’ homosocial Rome, and as a consequence Lavinia is violently rejected by this world. However, in turn she begins to undermine the play’s social order” (Tronick 42). Lavinia becomes disruptive to the social order she occupies by fulfilling the narrative role she is assigned. Without her transgression (her communication), the play would have no climax and the world would remain the same. As with Lavinia, Lucrece undermines a societal norm in order to fulfil her narrative purpose. She is transgressing against the political system she is a part of in order to allow Brutus to destroy that system. Her act within the play disrupts the social order so that it can reinforce the culture and history of the audience. Both Lavinia and Lucrece “transgress” so that the man who would be the hero can step in and complete his task. Titus is more of a heroic figure in “Titus Andronicus” than Brutus is in “The Rape of Lucrece.” Titus completes the final heroic, though tragic, act of killing his daughter in order to save her from her shame. Brutus is uninvolved in the central story of Lucrece’s poem, though he seems to maintain his position as the hero. This contrast highlights the stark difference between the use of a martyr when paired with a hero and when set as her own protagonist. The martyr who supports a hero is arguably in a less respected position, but also one in which she knows her role.

The gendered nature of the roles of the martyr and hero draw from the expectations of these genders in narrative construction. It is a man’s job to be active, and thus the hero is to be active. It is the woman’s job to serve the man and thus the martyr serves the hero. The hero is able to drive this narrative plot, while the martyr is to be a passive participant, submitting to the

construct she is assigned. These two figures are both fulfilling necessary roles, but the martyr's actions are motivated precisely because they are necessary. It is a fine distinction between the two as it is difficult to tell whether the hero is truly motivating his own actions or if they are simply motivated by the expectations laid out for him by the reader. This seems to be a similar dilemma faced by the martyr, but the difference lies in the connection between motivation and effect. The hero wants to do something and therefore he does it. Whether or not he is motivated by an outside force, he is the central drive. The martyr is pulled along in this narrative, refused the ability to take control and make it her own. I would have liked to consider more closely the relationship of the nature of time in respect to the hero alongside that of time and the martyr. Having spent time developing my understanding of how the martyr is excluded from heroism, I've created a working understanding of the differences. My next work, however, would follow up on the hero and his own sense of agency, one that is complicated in a way different from that of the martyr by the horizon of expectations. By nature of being literary figures, both the hero and the martyr are caught in a web of narrative threads and expectations. The martyr's entanglement, however, is unique in that she does not get narrative closure because her job is to provide closure for the narrative that she has no control over.

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