“THE POMP OF DEATH, / IS FAR MORE TERRIBLE, THAN DEATH ITSELF”: THE EXECUTION SPECTACLE ON THE ENGLISH THEATRICAL STAGE, 1660-1731

BY

SARAH KATHLEEN APPLEBY

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

English

May 2013

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Approved By

Claudia Kairoff, Ph.D., Advisor

Gillian Overing, Ph.D., Chair

Olga Valbuena, Ph.D
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fact that I’m still here to write this is thanks in no small part to the wonderful people in my life who never, ever doubted I could make it this far. My parents’ love and belief in me has been unwavering my entire life, and that has held me up through every challenge. I can never thank them enough. Thank you to Andre Randolph, for loving me and supporting me unconditionally, and giving me the space and time to pursue this. I love you. Thank you to my brother, Brian, for always knowing how to make me laugh when I need it. Thank you to my advisor, Claudia Kairoff, for the guidance and encouragement that helped me believe I could actually pull this thing off, and to my other professors at Wake for helping my find my confidence as an academic. Thank you to all of my friends all over the country for being so inspiring. You all remind me that it is possible to do incredible things every day, even when those things seem small. Boundless thanks to the friends I made in Winston-Salem for enriching this experience more than you can understand. Special thanks to Will Forde-Mazrui, who held my hand from the first intimidating day to our exhausted limp to the finish line. I couldn’t have done this without you. Also, thanks to Harry Potter for keeping the dementors at bay.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT............................................................................................................................................iv

INTRODUCTION....................................................................................................................................v

CHAPTER ONE......................................................................................................................................1
“It shall be thus then; not the Hangman’s hand”: Reappropriating the Scaffold in the Drama of the Exclusion Crisis

CHAPTER TWO....................................................................................................................................24
“What honest man would live beneath such rulers?”: Authority of Conscience and Manipulation of the Execution Spectacle in *Oroonoko* and *Jane Shore*

CHAPTER THREE................................................................................................................................50
“Money well timed and properly applied will do anything”: Staging Death for Profit and Power in *The Beggar’s Opera* and *The London Merchant*

CONCLUSION......................................................................................................................................73

WORKS CITED....................................................................................................................................78

SCHOLASTIC VITA.................................................................................................................................85
ABSTRACT

Spectacular public death was not something unfamiliar to the European people of the Restoration and eighteenth-century. Public executions had been performed for hundreds of years, and the scaffold was still a scene that was expected to draw spectators. In the name of sovereign or religious vengeance, all means of violence had been performed on real human bodies before the eyes of a crowd. The same spectators in attendance at hangings, burnings, beheadings, and the like, comprised the audiences of the drama as well. This thesis examines six plays between 1660 and 1731 and tracks the ways in which the punishment spectacle was deployed as a theatrical device. I argue that the incorporation of executions into the plays of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century provided a recasting of the role of the criminal facing death. Execution could be seen as a hero’s demise, and a chance to undermine the power of the sovereign by suggesting the power of the individual to choose to die well. Sometimes that means suicide. Sometimes that means allowing the machinations of punishment to be seen through to the end and having the condemned accept death as justified not wholly by the justice of the state, but by spiritual conviction. Sometimes that means using the framework of the drama to eliminate the threat of execution altogether. Thanks to the mediation of the stage, the powerful act of violent sovereign justice is transformed into a chance for the condemned to tell his or her story, undermining the absolute authority of justice by blood and permitting the autonomous power of the individual.
INTRODUCTION

Spectacular public death was not something unfamiliar to the European people of the Restoration and eighteenth-century. Public executions had been performed for hundreds of years, and the scaffold was still a scene that was expected to draw spectators. In the name of sovereign or religious vengeance, all means of violence had been performed on real human bodies before the eyes of a crowd. Condemned bodies announced retribution, shame, and example. The same spectators in attendance at hangings, burnings, beheadings, and the like, comprised the audiences of the drama as well. In the Elizabethan theatre, one could find more of the violence of everyday life: swordfights and ghosts and murder, and of course the particularly Marlovian style of brutality. Restoration audiences lived with the relatively fresh memory of an actual regicide enacted on a public stage, incidentally followed by an eleven-year span without public theatre at all. But Charles II, a personal admirer of drama, also “recognized the propaganda value of the theatre” (Macguire 3). The reopening of the theatre was a proud moment for the restored monarchy, and playwrights were quick to find employment in the new political era: “Whether triumphant after twenty years of fidelity to the Stuart cause or hopeful that they could blot out their Cromwellian allegiances, the playwrights, like other Royalists, defended the traditional power structure in an attempt to rehabilitate themselves and their culture” (3). Responding to what many viewed as an unjust punishment against Charles I, “the playwrights manifested anxiety about the regicide and fear of unforeseen complications” (5). By reproducing, recasting, and performing cultural values and topical concerns, the playwrights were able to converse about power in a relatively safe arena.
Popular drama and public executions existed as two sides of the same spectacular coin. Both required the presence of an audience in order to be effective. Whether that effect was generating profit or imparting some moral lesson or simply providing entertainment, each instance was staged for maximum visibility, carefully orchestrated by the scene’s director. Both spectacles were also able to draw on certain expectations of their audiences in order to exploit the event for the most impact. Margaret Owens writes of Renaissance audiences:

Playgoers, along with dramatists and actors, brought to the theater some degree of familiarity with the protocol of punishment, and this constituted the horizon of expectations that was brought to bear on the creation and reception of dramatic enactments of execution. In turn, playgoers brought their experience of dramatic representations of punishment to the real-life equivalent whenever they chose to attend the proceedings at Tyburn or Tower Hill. Both the real and the fictional forms of penal spectacle served to condition spectators, instilling in them certain qualities of attention to the words and behavior of the condemned as she performed her part on either the theatrical or the judicial scaffold. (123)

The audience of either event expected the central figure to play the role; indeed, the intimidating power of the execution spectacle for the sovereign over the masses depended on it. In its supporting role, the playing stage relied on the visual power of spectacle that operated in conjunction with the familiar execution stage to continue to create simulations of punishment that would reiterate cultural norms and social control. It presents a possibility to explore that space of the death sentence as the negotiation of
power with less fear. Art allows the audience to bring their expectations to a simulation of real-life punishment and then offers a moment of contemplation: Why do we do this to each other? Are those reasons enough? What are the stories and circumstances that lead people to the scaffold or the gallows? Drama permits a perspective that looks beyond the power play at work when the axe of the sovereign comes down. In the theater, the audience sees momentarily into the humanity and motives of the condemned.

Renaissance scholars are attentive to the dramatic violence of Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Webster in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but upon the Restoration and the reinstating of the public theatre, the critical focus lies heavily on the comedies as well as the political climate that compels a cultural response from playwrights and audiences. However, considering the advancements made in theatre and stagecraft in the later seventeenth century, it seems surprising that so little critical attention is paid to the deliberate theatrical representation of violent spectacle. Scenes of human sacrifice, murder, suicide, rape, and execution are quite present in the drama of the time, but are passed over as incidental or grounded simply in tragic conventions. Of course, there is the obvious visceral appeal for the audience of witnessing a gruesome image without ethical implications. Susan Sontag articulates this impulse in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, investigating the effect of artistic reproductions of violence: “No moral charge attaches to the representation of these cruelties. Just the provocation: can you look at this? There is the satisfaction of being able to look at the image without flinching. There is the pleasure of flinching” (41). My thesis will look at plays that exploit that pleasure and shaky anticipation of flinching by reproducing scenes of death and dismemberment to be continually consumed by the masses. For the most part, the
plays examined herein have been widely anthologized as representative examples of the popular drama of the age and show how execution as a dramatic device functioned in a commercially successful way. Huge volumes of audiences already conditioned to the gruesome theatricality of the punishment spectacle would have been additionally exposed to a familiar scene of power exerted over life and death.

Margaret Owens’s perspective on the dismembered body in Renaissance drama can be a useful springboard to thinking about how violent imagery evolved into what we see in Restoration and eighteenth century works. She offers a helpful timeline contextualizing the roots of representing violent acts on stage, noting the clear influence of religion and the Reformation as means of imagining the body:

Violence was contained by a governing ideological framework that endowed physical suffering with meaning and purpose. Presumably the pre-Reformation audience believed that it gained some spiritual benefit by participating vicariously in Christ’s passion as it was enacted on the stage. With the Reformation and the emergence of the secular drama of the Elizabethan playhouses, violent spectacle was released from the signifying system that had previously invested suffering and the human body with easily identifiable meanings. In the commercial playhouses, the tortured body could no longer be assimilated to the sacred body; violence no longer presaged redemption. To some extent, violence on the Elizabethan stage may have seemed more threatening, and the body more at risk because attendant meanings and values were no longer as tightly controlled.

(Owens 18-9)
The violent stage spectacle, rather than reaffirming salvation, suddenly became dangerous ground once the Reformation severed that long-standing association. Without violence being always already viewed through the lens of Christianity and the torture and execution at the center of the salvation narrative, it could be thrust on the people simply for the entertaining spectacle of pain and torment. If the immediate post-Reformation culture of the Elizabethan era sought to use the stage to exploit the attendant violence present in society where the body was “at risk,” then the Restoration world attempted to recreate wholeness after the execution of Charles I provided a new signifying system to accompany the portrayal of violence on stage. Violence returned not to the sacred, but to the service of the political. The king’s body had to be reassembled from a gruesome rending, and in order for the restored monarchy to be a success, the spectacle had to return to the controlling hands of the sovereign.

This particular period occupies an overlap point in the early modern evolution of both theatre and capital punishment. Theatre becomes something more spectacular and elaborate than in Shakespeare’s day, when the poet accomplished more with language than with reliance on staging effects. Yet it is still a way from becoming the stage of the nineteenth century and later when the “fourth wall” separates the audience from the actors. Late 17th century/early 18th century theatre maintained some of the closeness and intimacy of the Renaissance theatre space with a movement toward later development. Conversely, capital punishment, as Foucault sees it, is approaching the process of moving from spectacle to secret. At this time, though, society was still immersed in spectacular violence as both entertainment and punishment. Using Foucault’s theories put forth in *Discipline and Punish*, I hope to look at the reception and deployment of the punishment
spectacle as social regulation. Many critics of drama have observed and conversed with Foucault in this capacity, especially exploring the notion that during the eras of prominent public executions, audiences of both “stages” informed one another and created a series of roles and expectations:

Extending Foucault’s analysis of the state’s ritual consolidation of power through a theatrics of punishment, scholars of early modern drama have concluded that dramatic and judicial executions existed in something of a symbiotic or interpenetrating relation to each other. These cultural sites shared a bond of exchange and imitation so subtle and so pervasive that it can be difficult, if not impossible, to discern who borrowed from whom. Judicial executions in this period were conducted in an unabashedly theatrical manner insofar as the participants were expected to perform designated roles and to reproduce prescribed behavioral and rhetorical formulas in front of a crowd of spectators. The audience also contributed to the proceedings by enacting a repertoire of responses—derision, silent sympathy, gasps of horror, cheers, applause—at appropriate moments. (Owens 121)

The expectations of what it meant to “die well” on the scaffold and the “appropriateness” of the audience response could be challenged or reinforced in drama. Executions could become just another dramatic device, revealing the innate theatricality and conventional nature of the actual punishment spectacle. Changing the perception of the act aided in changing the perception of absolute power behind the executioner. The spectacle became something that was potentially mutable and subject to the will of others.
Much of what has been written about the drama of the Restoration and early eighteenth century frames the texts within the politics of the age. Critics like Susan Staves, Susan Owen, and Derek Hughes writing about Restoration and Exclusion Crisis plays examine the ways the drama tends to point toward political leanings or changing political attitudes. Such discussions are necessarily concerned with the role of authority. A wealth of scholarship exists on the fluctuating political powers of Tories and Whigs and the evolving role of the monarchy at this time, as well as the impact those changes made on the artistic output of the country. Analyzing the deployment of executions as a stage technique provides an additional approach to these changing power dynamics. The concerns of the playwrights and their treatment of capital punishment as a form of entertainment reiterate the changing nature of authority and punishment as they adapt and evolve from the restored Stuart monarchy through the Revolution of 1688 and into the eighteenth century. Looking at the treatment of staging death as regulated punishment, my project will examine six plays moving chronologically forward, beginning in 1680 with *Lucius Junius Brutus* and ending in 1731 with *The London Merchant*. By arranging the plays this way I intend to use the plays alongside historical events to observe the changing cultural environment and the social capital of crime and methods of punishment.

Chapter 1 discusses Nathaniel Lee’s *Lucius Junius Brutus* and Thomas Otway’s *Venice Preserved* in the context of the Exclusion Crisis. This chapter approaches the staging of executions as part of a way of imagining the critical power struggle at a time when the nature and extent of a monarch’s role fell under intense scrutiny. Both plays feature conflicting models of authority that must reach a resolution on the scaffold, and
both plays set up this scaffold scene only to have it ultimately serve as a platform for suicide. In both instances, the condemned chooses to die at the hand of a friend rather than allow the punishment machine of the state do its work, thus undermining the controlling nature of the sovereign’s spectacle.

Thomas Southerne’s *Oroonoko* and Nicholas Rowe’s *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*, both adaptations written around the turn of the eighteenth century, continue the discussion of the role of the staged spectacle by investigating the moral superiority of the condemned over the sovereign’s justice system. These plays help speak to a changing society in the process of devaluing aristocracy and moving towards the valorization of the upstanding citizen. The state still lays claim to its exclusive right to punish, but the plays drastically limit the extent of control such rights can obtain. Maintaining loyalty to the authority of their own honors, the heroes prohibit the sovereign power from ever commanding their obedience or allowing ceremonial punishment to properly enact the intimidating and terrorizing spectacle.

Chapter 3 is chiefly concerned with the rising mercantile economy and oligarchy of the eighteenth century and the representations of that economy in John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* and George Lillo’s *The London Merchant*. These plays occurred at a time when the number of capital crimes dramatically rose in proportion to the accumulation of property and wealth. Human lives became inextricably connected to monetary value and the presence of the gallows helps articulate and assert this. Both of them seemingly acknowledge the power of the propertied while also pointing to the flaws of the punishment system and the agency of the individual. Gay’s representation of the
spectacle becomes a caricature that perpetuates vice, while Lillo’s gallows are only effective when reinforced by a moral consciousness and true atonement for one’s sins.

Importantly, it should be noted that while this thesis looks at capital punishment as a theatrical device, only two of the six plays actually see a death sentence carried out on stage as the representative body in power intended it. Staging and language imply the present threat of execution, and in all cases there is an explicit death sentence that places the act of death in a context of dominant authority versus submissive condemned. But the many emerging classes of people were hardly in a position where submission to traditional governance was the only option:

During the Interregnum, the commercial classes had grown, had experienced considerable autonomy, and had had time to reflect upon the political and economic power that they had exercised during the Revolution and its aftermath. Forced to choose between Parliament and the king, they had experienced personal, individual responsibility and the power that ordinary people could exert. (Backscheider 33)

It is my opinion that the repeated use of this device—whether implied or explicitly represented—as the tragic conclusion to these plays forces a consideration of authority versus autonomy in the visible body of the condemned. Once the Exclusion Crisis began to occupy the concern of the country, the demonstration of executions on stage was no longer a tragicomic retelling of the royal tragedy and a triumphant return to power, but became an experiment in possibilities that explored the individual responsibility of ordinary people. What if things didn’t happen the way they always had? Ultimately, what if the condemned, who had always been seen as under the control of the sovereign, had a
choice? The incorporation of executions into the plays of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century provided a recasting of the role of the criminal facing death. Execution could be seen as a hero’s demise, and a chance to undermine the power of the sovereign by suggesting the power of the individual to choose to die well. Sometimes that means suicide. Sometimes that means allowing the machinations of punishment to be seen through to the end and having the condemned accept death as justified not wholly by the justice of the state, but by spiritual conviction. Sometimes that means using the framework of the drama to eliminate the threat of execution altogether. Thanks to the mediation of the stage, the powerful act of violent sovereign justice is transformed into a chance for the condemned to tell his or her story, undermining the absolute authority of justice by blood and permitting the autonomous power of the individual.
CHAPTER ONE

“IT SHALL BE THUS THEN; NOT THE HANGMAN’S HAND”:
REAPPROPRIATING THE SCAFFOLD IN THE DRAMA OF THE EXCLUSION CRISIS

In *Players’ Scepters*, Susan Staves writes, “The idea of authority changed in two related ways in the early modern period: it was detached from the hierarchical structure of feudal society and it was secularized. Authority no longer came down from God to king, from priest to people. It was understood, instead, to originate in the people or in the needs and ends of individuals” (xi). The hierarchical nature of authority was an especially important item of discussion at the time Nathaniel Lee’s *Lucius Junius Brutus* and Thomas Otway’s *Venice Preserved* came to the stage. In another chapter of England’s tumultuous seventeenth century fraught with conspiracy, treachery, fear, and retribution, what came to be known as the Exclusion Crisis claimed the attention of the English people from the monarch to the commoners. The heir apparent—the king’s brother, James, Duke of York—was a known Catholic in a precariously Protestant land and much concern rose over what might happen under the rule of a Catholic king. The Exclusion Bill sought to eliminate James from the line of succession, and in so doing questioned the prerogative of the king. Should the king be able to appoint an heir independently of the wishes of the public? Is monarchical authority absolute?

The fact that the established power structure could be questioned to the point of overturning the royal line of succession speaks to the kind of redistribution of authority Staves suggests. The “divine right” of kings no longer seemed an untouchable truth. Ultimately, however, traditional order would—for the time being—persist and, in 1685,
James would indeed succeed Charles II as decreed. The traditional power structure so elaborately defended and displayed in the years since 1660 would continue as planned.

Emphatically marking the Stuart return to the throne, Charles II used spectacle to enforce his vision of monarchial power. He used it, like many rulers before and since, to punish and control and establish authority on a very visible and immediate and sometimes excruciating level. In one of his showiest gestures upon his return, he demanded the exhuming and posthumous dismembering of his old family nemesis, Oliver Cromwell. It wasn’t enough that Cromwell was already dead; there was still a chance to make an example of him and the other regicides to an extreme and symbolic degree:

[T]he trials and executions of the regicides and especially the desecration of Cromwell’s body became hideous but magnificent theater. Charing Cross rather than Tyburn was chosen as the execution site for the regicides, and English people would be reminded not only of its destruction during the Commonwealth, allegedly at the final instigation of Hugh Peters, one of the men on trial, but of its ancient meaning.¹

(Backscheider 7)

The Cross had been torn down in 1642 during the Interregnum, by order of Parliament.² Charles II’s enacting of his spectacles here reclaims the ground. The importance of

¹ Backscheider goes on to discuss just what occurred to the already deceased bodies of Cromwell and others like him: On 30 January, the exhumed bodies of Cromwell, Bradshaw, and Ireton were dragged to Tyburn, dismembered, and the body parts exposed to the people’s view for months. Played out in public places, including that most ignominious, most public place, Tyburn, the spectacle went on interminably as the severed heads and body parts rotted on pikes and on the gates of the city. (7)

² The act inspired a Royalist ballad that accused the Parliament of acting against the interests of city and warning those Commonwealthsmen of the repurcussions that likely awaited them, should the monarchy return: Methinks the Common-Council should of it have taken pity,
Charles’s action rests in the deployment of images and locations with contemporary cultural capital. With the insertion of a new image, the monarch influences the collective memory people associate with a place. Such a spectacle stakes a claim on the collective consciousness for the monarchy by dramatic and ruthless exhibition of absolute power. Punishing the corpse of Cromwell was purely theatrical; there could be no pain exacted through torture, no potential for the hero’s march to the scaffold, no final speeches or confessions. The grisly desecration served only as an important show, and one that the newly restored king required the public to see. As Backscheider writes, “This spectacle went beyond showing people their [the traitors’] ‘folly’ to aiming at an ultimate discrediting” (8). The move also showed the extent of monarchial possession, and Charles needed to ensure that the people understood the breadth and depth of his reach. The king asserted his ownership over these traitors’ bodies even in death, and forced them to fit into one of the crucial requirements that Foucault lays out in his principal criteria for torture: it must form part of a ritual, and that ritual had always been that the crown summarily punished traitors.³

“From the point of view of the law that imposes it, public torture and execution must be seen as a triumph,” Foucault says. The full effect comes from the theatrical nature of the process. He goes on to elaborate:

The very excess of the violence employed is one of the elements of its glory: the fact that a guilty man should moan and cry out under the blows

³“Torture is a technique,” Foucault writes, that obeys three principal criteria: First, “it must produce a certain degree of pain”; second, “this production of pain is regulated […] Punishment does not fall upon the body indiscriminately or equally; it is calculated according to detailed rules”; and third, it “forms part of a ritual” (34). In Charles’s synthesized torture ritual, it is the memory of Cromwell that must feel the pain of bodily dismemberment.
is not a shameful side-effect, it is the very ceremonial of justice being expressed in all its force. Hence no doubt those tortures that take place even after death: corpses burnt, ashes thrown to the winds, bodies dragged on hurdles and exhibited at the roadside. Justice pursues the body beyond all possible pain. (34)

The spectacle of execution and public punishment, especially of Cromwell and those that thought to undo the monarchy, was all about Charles II creating a visual referent for the consolidation of his power. He needed to re-emerge as victorious in the space where the monarchy had literally lost its head, so to speak. Such spectacles created a notable return to a previous kind of authority, replacing the head where it belongs as the ultimate dispenser of justice and punishment.

Needing to solidify his return to power and the extent of his authority over the people, Charles was deeply invested in triumphal displays. Having spent his years of exile in France, where “the numbers and uses of public ceremonial spectacles were traditionally greater than in England” (Backscheider 3), he was familiar with the effects of public displays of power and knew well of the potential value such propagandistic apparatuses could have in reestablishing the monarchy among the English people. Most importantly, as Backscheider states, “Charles needed to inscribe his authority. Not only would that establish his own position, but, more essentially, the ancient authority of the monarchy, the Right of Kings and the rightness of his family’s reign” (11). Charles’s excessive displays certainly went beyond the dismembering of corpses; Charles’s restoration procession was a remarkable affair, and for his coronation, “Westminster Cathedral became a theater, complete with raised stage for the coronation. […] At this
point, theater as a mode of power reached its fullest potential” (18-9). Indeed, Charles blurred the line between stage and reality, understanding the influence of one over the other.

However, as Charles’s reign progressed and the events surrounding the Exclusion Crisis began to unfold, spectacular demonstrations of power were no longer enough to reassure and capture the loyalty of the people. Plots and conspiracies abounded, not least of which was Titus Oates’s 1678 allegation that a Catholic faction was scheming to assassinate the king. The Popish plot ultimately proved to be false but provoked rampant fear and suspicion, leading contemporary dramatists to remark, “there was more truth and less artifice inside the theater than outside” (Owen Restoration Theater 3). The royal reaction to the treasonous allegations led to the execution of innocent men such as William Howard, Late Lord Viscount Stafford. Stafford claimed upon the scaffold to be “as Innocent as is possible for any to be,” and swore, “I do now upon my Death and Salvation aver, that I never spoke one word either unto Oates or Turbervil, or to my knowledge ever saw them until my trial” (Stafford 1-3). Such actions paint a more vindictive picture of the sovereign than that of the merciful Charles who reserved his wrath only for those who truly deserved it.4

Charles’s monarchial prerogative fell under scrutiny, and with it his ability to govern with absolute power and retain the kind of kind of monarchy that had been, and

---

4 Statements made in The Royal Chronicle, printed in 1660, make grand references to Charles II’s admirable mercy that clearly referenced his treatment towards his father’s executioners and other rebellious subjects:

But he hath a mercy that rejoiceth over his Justice, a mercy calculated for our time and Nation, wherein Subjects were never so obnoxious to Justice, nor a Prince so inclined to mercy; a People was hardly ever so guilty as we, and hardly a Prince ever so gracious as himself, we are not more ready to offend than he to pardon; with what tender Majesty doth he pass by the guilty prostrate? […] It is but the least part of his mercy that he can be merciful to others while there are most cruel to him; he is exercising the highest charity towards them, while they are exercising the greatest injuries towards him. (7)
that he had hoped to restore. The spectacle of the scaffold—a place where power is negotiated in mortally serious terms—seems like a good place to take on the question of where the limits of authority lie, and whether or not an individual might have the power to seek a fate other than that decreed by the present ruling body. The playing stage offered an area where such a thing might be considered and authority might be questioned without incurring gruesome and deadly penalties.

The ability to control life and death and exhibit it as a public spectacle, especially for those seen as traitors to the crown, has already been established as something unique to the king. Cromwell’s corpse serves a good reference point for this. Recreating a traitor’s scaffold scene, as the two plays I later discuss do, likely would bring to mind recent events featuring dissenters in conflict with the king. Yet, in *Lucius Junius Brutus* and *Venice Preserved*, the likely figure of power is not allowed to triumph absolutely and his sentence on the condemned is not carried out as planned. As Foucault states:

> The right to punish…is an aspect of the sovereign’s right to make war on his enemies. […] The public execution, then, has a juridico-political function. It is a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted. It restores that sovereignty by manifesting it at its most spectacular. […] Its aim is not so much to re-establish a balance as to bring into play, at its extreme point, the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength. (48-9)

When the heroes of these plays become the instruments of their own individual demises, they challenge that display of strength and, by extension, the one who apparently
possesses that strength. The playing stage relied on the power of spectacle that operated in conjunction with the execution stage to continue to create simulations of punishment that would assist in reiterating cultural norms and social control.

Playwrights had essentially abandoned the theme of regicide and the royal martyr in the decade prior to the crisis, but such themes began to be revived in support of the beheaded king’s other son. Susan Staves examines the relationship of the drama of this period to the changing perceptions of what constituted authority:

> These plays, by focusing on situations where such traditional upper authorities are absent, by insisting on the failure of traditional sources of authority in hopeless conflict with each other (for example, king with father) prepare the way for the early modern idea of political authority, authority coming from below, authority as the voluntary creation of individual men for their own self-preservation and betterment. (Staves 80)

Given the uncertainty around the royal succession, authority from above ran the risk of being seen as unstable. *Venice Preserved* seems to be deeply invested in the instability of authority, establishing two groups—a corrupt Senate and a similarly off-putting and violent gang of conspirators—in an oppositional struggle for power and presenting neither as a perfect solution. *Lucius Junius Brutus* presents a more “heroic aspect to republicanism” (Owen Perspectives 121) while still featuring at its close a familial conflict where a father condemns his sons to the executioner’s axe. Both plays deploy scenes of ostensible capital punishment to bring the two parties into a final conflict over the triumphant control of life and death. Both plays also ultimately allow the condemned to make a different call and determine the method of his death; both Pierre and Titus
desire to die “nobly” by the hand of a friend rather than be shamed “like a common
carcass” in the public spectacle of execution. These scenes set up recognizable instances
of regulated punishment only to subvert them, thereby diminishing the power of the
sentencing body. The condemned still must die, but the condemned also wishes to die; he
never seeks to escape death but rather desires more to escape the “engine,” or the
instrument prescribed by authority.

Produced in December of 1680, Lee’s Lucius Junius Brutus presented such a
controversy that the Lord Chamberlain suppressed the play just a few days after its
premiere, based upon what he called “very scandalous Expressions upon ye Government”
(Womersley 430). In the midst of the high political tension brought on by the Exclusion
Crisis and the amplified discussion regarding monarchical prerogative, Lee chose to
dramatize the end of monarchy in Rome and the ensuing establishment of the republic
(430). The play presents multiple versions of Whiggish sentiments, provoking thoughts
of a republican alternative to monarchy but that are not without complications. Brutus
rails against royalty under the banner of Lucrece’s violated body, exhorting his followers
to “drive proud Tarquin out,” calling the king “the royal Villain,” who “Mixt his foul
Spirits with the spotless Mass.” He commands, “Swear from this time never to suffer
them, / Nor any other King to Reign in Rome” (I.i.461-70). The king, and the royal
family by extension, becomes a symbol of atrocity and misuse of power. Vinditius later
excites a crowd with a different kind of rhetoric posed against kings:

Sirs, I am a true Commonwealths-man, and do not naturally love Kings,
tha they be good; for why should any one man have more power than the
People? Is he bigger, or wiser than the People? Has he more Guts, or more
Brains than the People? What can he do for the People, that the People can’t do for them selves? Can he make Corn grow in a Famine? can he give us Rain in Drought? or make our Pots boil, tho the Devil piss in the Fire? (II.i.44-53)

The image of the king to Vinditius, speaking from the vantage point of the common people, is less one of evil and more one of a kind of uselessness. Vinditius later in the scene makes reference to the “Arbitrary power of Kings,” suggesting that there is no real basis of their royal authority, and that ultimately, the king is but a man. In this questioning and damning of royalty and royal behaviors, it seems apparent that authority is not a given, nor is it always ideal. As Susan Owen states, “The Exclusion Crisis exposed and exacerbated the contradiction of Restoration society: between the notion of triumphant consensus and the reality of division; and between Stuart patriarchal ideology and the perceived reality of royal (mis-)behavior and (mis-) government” (Owen Crisis 11). Whether cast as violent and dangerous or ineffective and illogical, the institution of monarchy is harshly criticized throughout Lee’s play.

Despite the fact that the play presents an abhorrent monarchy, there are other avenues present by which authority attempts to be established. Lucius Junius Brutus deals in the currency of bodies, and the control and political utilization of those bodies. The propagandistic potential of dead, wounded, and/or bloodied bodies is exploited often as a rallying point. Notably, Brutus appropriates Lucrece’s body, dead by her own hand, and represents it as a “public wound” (II.i.172) around which the leader rallies his troops. The weapon of suicide and her corpse become conflated as battle standards:

Behold this Dagger, taken from her wound,
She bids you fix this Trophee on your Standard,

This Ponnyard which she stab’d into her heart,

And bear her Body in your Battels front (II.i.234-7)

Brutus possesses all of Lucrece after her suicide and turns it over to the people as a symbol to be revenged. By putting words into her mouth and re-presenting her body as an item with military significance, he adopts the spectacle as the first of two major visual “anti-royalist” moments (Owen Perspectives 107). Her suicide was the result of vicious abuse from the royal family, and Brutus permits himself to possess her body and the spectacle around it and narrate it within the scope of his own code of authority. Concerning the deployment of Lucrece’s body, critic Joyce MacDonald writes:

The reduction of the body of the violated Lucrece to the status of "public wound" suggests how, for Lee, bodily behaviors and experiences articulate a vision of civic and historical duty. […] Despite its affiliations with a radically anti-monarchical position, Lucius Junius Brutus will nevertheless mount a passionate and anxious argument on behalf of father right as a principle of organization in the state, and in private families. (MacDonald 232)

The ownership Brutus demonstrates over Lucrece’s body and her experiences after her death is a pronounced step in creating this organization and establishing a pattern of leadership around himself as the new figure of authority. Brutus, unlike the Tarquins, does not act with reckless and arbitrary violence and unrestrained power. When he orates over the body of Lucrece and has the people swear by her blood and take up her dagger and carry her body into battle, he creates a distinctly violent and militaristic vision, but
his speech happens within a space where violence is regulated and purposeful. The demonstration of power and the right to others’ bodies for Brutus is part of a ritual that confirms existing notions about what is right, and the “wound” that the Tarquins dealt to Lucrece should be a pain felt by all the people due to their misrule, and they should be justly punished.

Beginning with the rape of Lucrece, royalty becomes associated with terrorizing violence and conspiracy. Act IV brings the actions and intents of the royalist conspiracy to a head, featuring the horrific sacrifice of “two very busie Commonwealth’s-men” whom Tiberius claims are guilty of “holding forth ‘Twas possible / That Kings themselves might err, and were but men” (V.i.26-9). For this, these men are turned over to priests, and their fate is soon frightfully apparent: “The scene draws, showing the Sacrifice; One Burning, and another Crucify’d: the Priests coming forward with Goblets in their hands, fill’d with human blood” (IV.i.SD). The scene links the atrocities of the royalist conspiracy with recognizable Catholic imagery, as Owen notes: “These actions are not chosen at random: burning (of heretics and of cities) was the chief atrocity cited in anti-Catholic propaganda; crucifixion of course recalls the death of Christ; and drinking human blood suggests diabolism as well as the Catholic mass” (Perspectives 108). Drawing these connections, the play for the first four acts allows the power of spectacle to remain within the hands of the royal, ostensibly Catholic-backed faction.

Upon learning that his sons are traitors to the republic and complicit in the royalist conspiracy, Brutus makes the irreversible decision to have them executed, and the audience learns at the opening of Act V that both are “Doom’d to the Rods and Axes”
(V.i.1). The language of the play constructs Titus’s shame; his whipping takes place offstage, but both himself and others reiterate his bodily scourging as a shameful act:

HERMINIUS

But see, O Gods, behold the Gallant Titus,
The Mirror of all Sons, the white of Virtue;
Fill’d up with blots, and writ all o’re with blood,
Bowing with shame his body to the ground;
Whipt out of breath by these Inhuman Slaves!
O, Titus! is this possible? this shame?

TITUS

O, my Valerius, call it not my shame;
By all the Gods, it is to Titus honor,
My constant suff’rings are my only glory:
What have I left besides? but ask Valerius,
Ask these good men that have perform’d their duty,
If all the while they whipt me like a Slave,
If when the blood from every part ran down
I gave one groan, or shed a Womans tear:
I think, I swear, I think, O my Valerius
That I have born it well, and like a Roman.
But, O, far better shall I bear my death,
Which, as it brings less pain, has less dishonor. (V.i.33-50)
Succumbing to the whipping is an act of submission and weakness, likened to the behavior of a slave or a woman. Lee chooses to show his hero bloodied and beaten after the act rather than allowing the audience to contemplate a moment of shameful spectacle. In this state, Titus still potentially stands as a heroic survivor, emerging strong from the lash that he bears “like a Roman.” The only part of his punishment he has yet to face is the axe, which would have some resonance for a contemporary audience. Execution by beheading traditionally occurred when the condemned held rank or status. Most obviously, it had been the method by which Charles I met his end. Margaret Owens discusses differences in methods of capital punishment and how they may have functioned to create individual reactions among certain audience members:

Hanging and beheading, both in the theater and at the actual site of execution, offered significantly different subject positions not only for the condemned but also for the spectator. Although both forms of punishment elicited a specular relationship whereby the viewer was compelled to gaze on the Other, the viewer’s capacity to identify with that image varied depending on his or her social rank. [...] The scaffold of decollation...presented an image beyond the reach of all but the most privileged on the social scale. It is not surprising then that this transgressive Other should have served as a fantasy image of autonomy, of individual aspiration soaring above all constraints to achieve a tragic greatness. (128)

Titus’s body, however, doesn’t simply represent one afforded the most “prestigious” of deaths due to his honor. The body that goes to the headsman’s axe is scourged and
bloodied, tainted with shame. His whipping produces much talk of dishonor, which separates him from his noble background. In his book, *Rack, Rope and Red Hot Pincers*, writer Geoffrey Abbot describes flogging as “a punishment without regard for mercy, for compassion or even sexual consideration. [...] So easy was a whipping to administer, so obviously the deterrent it was thought to be, that it became the judicial panacea for most minor crimes. Rufflers and vagabonds, rioters and drunkards provided a rich harvest for the flailing lashes” (123). Titus is presented to the audience as a conflicting figure; both debased and privileged by his punishment. He is at once relatable and set above.

Up until the point of Titus’s punishment, shocking death spectacles are suggestive of brutal and unrestrained violence, and partnered with royalty. The final act places control of the spectacle in Brutus’s hands, and reiterates his possession over subservient bodies and his ability to present them as examples in service of the state. Importantly, as one critic writes, “Brutus’s execution of his sons at the end is a legal action, not to be confused with royalist arbitrary violence” (Owen *Perspectives* 102). The moments of flogging and execution aren’t afforded the same shocking stage presence as Lucrece’s suicide or the sacrifice of the men, but sets up recognizable instances of state-regulated punishment. It is very important, in order to be observed as a head of state, that Brutus be recognized as capable of regulating punishment and properly deploying the act of sentencing traitors, which would put an end to the arbitrariness of violence put in motion by previous leadership. Referring back to the appropriation of Lucrece’s body, one scholar writes, “As was hers, [Titus’s] violently opened body will be dissociated from its disquieting femaleness and used instead to speak a lesson about the power of men and of patrilineal inheritance. The ritual of his public torture and execution will produce him as
a sacrificial victim whose death will mystically make that power real” (MacDonald 239). The bodies of Titus and his brother become another propaganda tool whereby Brutus establishes his power, and Brutus goes forth to the execution despite his paternal urge to “pardon both of ‘em this black Design”:

> But, as I am Rome’s Consul, I abhor ‘em,
> And cast ‘em from my Soul with detestation:
> The nearer to my blood, the deeper grain’d
> The colour of their fault, and they shall bleed.
>
> Yes, my Valerius, both my Sons shall dye (IV.i.312-317)

The play goes to great lengths to distance the republican ideal from what it sets up to be the arbitrary violence of the royals. When Brutus sentences his sons to death, it is staunchly against that arbitrariness to go through with it. Their crime, as he sees it, is even greater due to their affiliation with him, and his hand must come down justly on the traitors in a public fashion in order to solidify his role as father to a state. The law of the republic and the unity of the state demand it, and his authoritarian power hinges on it:

> It has been found a famous truth in Story,
> Left by the ancient Sages to their Sons,
> That on the change of Empires or of Kingdoms,
> Some sudden Execution, fierce or great,
> Such as may draw the world to admiration,
> Is necessary to be put in Act
> Against the Enemies of the present state. (V.ii.8-12)
Brutus seems to act with the best wishes of the commonwealth in mind, and bears knowledge of the importance of creating an air of “admiration” through his punitive deeds and exhibition of control. Going forward with this execution is precisely that “fierce” deed that shows that the new regime is in power and able to enforce the laws, monitor the spectacle, and “stop the mouth of loud Sedition” (V.ii.42).

The moment that Titus subverts the execution is the moment that the model of republican authority is dealt its damning blow. As Titus is led to headsman’s block, Valerius approaches and “runs him through,” delivering the death blow that Titus requested to avoid the shame of the public spectacle. “It shall be thus then; not the Hangman’s hand,” Valerius declares as he stabs Titus instead of dragging him to the Ax as Brutus orders (V.ii.143-4). “Hangman” stands in as a generic term for an executioner, but it also serves to draw a distinction between what Titus and his accomplice see happening and how Brutus envisions the sentence. Invoking the hangman and his gallows contextualizes the execution as that common, anyman’s death Titus fears, eliminating his social status and any point of privilege he might draw from this method of execution. Titus declares his gratitude as he receives his chosen death: “Oh bravely strook! thou hast hit me to the Earth / So nobly, that I shall rebound to Heav’n, / Where I will thank thee for this gallant wound” (V.ii.146-8). Titus’s idea of nobility and gallantry comes only from himself and his ability to determine his own manner of death. Despite the recognized conventions that deliver certain kinds of punishments to certain levels of social privilege, Titus’s execution suggests that there is no “better” or less shameful death as long as another is determining it. Lee’s allowing Titus to dictate the means of his own death undermines the ability of the republic to control the spectacle of the scaffold and by
extension, its ability to enforce the laws of the people. After the subversive stabbing, Brutus asks “Why, my Valerius, did’st thou rob my Justice?” (V.ii.150) This once again impresses the importance of visually reiterating that justice has indeed been done and that the right person had been punished for the right crime. Titus undermines the whole pattern of declaring justice by public spectacle by assuming the scaffold as his own sacrificial altar. The attempt to organize violence and administer justice as spectacle under a new regime ultimately fails as Brutus, while acting in the interests of the people, cannot complete the execution of justice. The new authority, while judicially minded, suffers in the end from a fatal inadequacy.

Thomas Otway’s 1682 play, *Venice Preserved*, falls topically into the same political conversation concerned with power and authority and the possibility of a new and different regime. Presenting a violent faction of conspirators versus a corrupt republican government, the play highlights a competition for power in the wealthy mercantile empire of Venice. Jaffeir, as the tragedy’s hero, faces intense emotional conflict regarding the kind of man he ought to be. His struggle is embodied in the characters of Pierre and Belvidera; Pierre, bonded to Jaffeir by close friendship, represents a soldier’s identity and the prevailing values of honor and patriotism, versus Belvidera, the beloved wife, whose presence casts Jaffeir as a man of feeling, enraptured with domestic bliss. Swapping hands throughout is a poignant stage prop and symbol of power: the dagger. Dangerous and secretive, the dagger occupies a prominent position in constructing the identities of those that carry it in a spectacular way. It is a visual representation of absolute control over life and death. Even as it seeks to undo the current body in power, its wielders present the possibility for simply a continuation of corruption
and abuse. Jaffeir partially resists the essential image of militarism and aggression, but also adheres to the norm and acknowledges the need to perform the ideal model of masculine power in a public context. Our hero struggles mightily, but finally self-destructs. Violently weaving its way throughout the play, the dagger helps to illuminate multiple possibilities and interpretations of power and control, but in the end the play offers little hope for a new or different distribution of power. Instead, Otway suggests the only real power comes from the negotiation of one’s own life on one’s own terms.

Jaffeir does not choose to participate in the power struggle as much as he is coerced into it based on a combination of personal factors. Staves claims that Jaffeir, as a hero, is “strangely passive, reacting rather than acting” (42). Jaffeir’s motivation to undo the senate is provoked largely by revenge against his father-in-law, the senator Priuli, who has cursed and abandoned the couple. Jaffeir wishes death on Priuli—and the other senators by association—as he tells Pierre: “Oh for a curse / To kill with.” Pierre responds, “Daggers, daggers are much better” (II.ii.69-71). Jaffeir hopes for words to attack the object of his vengeance, keeping his proverbial hands clean. Pierre, as a conspirator, chooses daggers to do the deed, deciding to violently engage in close contact with the enemy and thereby be the active instrument of his own destiny. Additionally, Pierre engages in a discourse of masculinity, replacing Jaffeir’s language of passivity with a language of more militant aggression. As Jessica Munns writes, “The definition of manliness is a central issue in Venice Preserved, for ‘to be a man,’ a phrase much repeated in the play, is to be an empowered social and political agent” (182). This is the first moment between the friends that Pierre presents the option of arms to Jaffeir, thereby empowering him with the ability to take a life. Thus equipped, it is also the
moment where Jaffeir becomes a man in Pierre’s image, dependent only on himself for action and change.

However, in order for Jaffeir to assume a decisive role of power in the context of the play, he must confidently wield the dagger. Pierre swears by the dagger and offers the ideal masculine identity to counter that of the senators, brandishing publicly his manliness and self-determination. Before bringing Jaffeir into the fold, he promises the conspirators that his friend will be true to the cause and seals the oath with the dagger:

Receive and cherish him, or if, when seen
And searched, you find him worthless, as my tongue
Has lodged this secret in his faithful breast,
To ease your fears I wear a dagger here
Shall rip it out again and give you rest. (II.iii.130-4)

The dagger is the language that they all understand. It unites them all as men and provides a visual symbol of the usurpation of power. Pierre aligns his honor, his friendship with Jaffeir (and, indeed, Jaffeir’s life), and the weight of the secret plot with the finality of the dagger. The dagger helps to fashion him into a model of deadly authority, underlining the controlling voice presented in his speech. He issues the orders in the imperative, holds the dagger himself, and promises to take the action if necessary.

Jaffeir enters the conspiracy scene with a dagger, according to the stage direction, which prompts Bedamore to say, “His presence bears the show of manly virtue” (II.iii.136). Indeed, as Munns reads the scene, “the sign of Jaffeir’s manhood and his entry into the political realm of the conspiracy is his dagger/phallus that, like a token of exchange and verification, passes between the various male and female contestants who
struggle to dominate and define the structures of power” (184). She makes the important affiliation between the dagger and phallus, conflating conventional images of dominance and power. The one who holds the dagger holds control, for they hold the latent capability of murder and the possibility of spectacular violence.

The penultimate scene of Otway’s tragedy transforms the theatrical audience into potential spectators of an execution. Viewers are presented with a grisly sight: “Scene opening discovers a scaffold and a wheel for the executing of Pierre” (V.iii). After the reveal, the scene is quickly populated with “officers, Pierre and guards, a friar, executioner, and a great rabble” (V.iii.SD). With all of the major players in such a scenario present and accounted for, the scene begins to be played like any public execution, and the spectators and the condemned share the experience of contemplating the moment of death. Of course, the theatergoers know that (barring anything incredibly unfortunate) the actors will all walk away unscathed, but the merging of the theatrical stage with the still-present public gallows is hard to ignore. The visual cues—the wheel, the executioner, the rabble—tap into an existing bank of human feeling and help to construct the same emotional responses one might feel upon actually witnessing such a thing. By the inclusion of the gaping throng on stage, the theatrical audience has the additional task of stepping outside of themselves and watching themselves watch death, viewing and evaluating the spectacle as a whole. The audience of executions played a crucial role, for as Foucault writes:

   In the ceremonies of public execution, the main character was the people, whose real and immediate presence was required for the performance. […]

   The aim was to make an example, not only by making people aware that
the slightest offence was likely to be punished, but by arousing feelings of terror by the spectacle of power letting its anger fall upon the guilty person. (57-8)

If one’s presence at an execution arouses a certain terror in the face of power, then the theatrical audience must, by observing the rabble, observe their own complicity in and reinforcement of such a terror and view their own central role in the enacting of institutionalized violence.

Additionally, the theatrical audience has the unique knowledge of the condemned’s actions and motives that led him to his position on the scaffold. Pierre tells the friar, “You say my conscience / Must be mine accuser. I have searched that conscience / And find no records there of crimes that scare me” (V.iii.15-8). Knowing what they know, the audience can largely validate this statement, further complicating the approaching execution. Pierre’s actions throughout align with his conscience and code of honor. His ideals are imperfect, as the audience also knows, often muddled by his love for Aquilina or the angry conflation of revenge and liberty often spoken of by himself and the other conspirators. At the same time, however, the audience also knows of the corruption and deviant behavior within the Senate, potentially calling into question the ability of such a ruling body to punish justly. Neither of the bodies in conflict on the scaffold comes with clean hands; “guilt” and “justice” are debatable terms.

Pierre, the condemned man, questions the punishment within a discourse of honor. Joined at the scene by Jaffeir, Pierre suddenly seems afraid to die. He weeps and curses his own weakness while regarding the wheel, then asks his friend: “Is’t fit a soldier who has lived with honor, / Fought nation’s quarrels, and been crowned with conquest, /
Be exposed a common carcass on a wheel?” (V.iii.89-91) The spectacular demise that awaited one sentenced to die by breaking on the wheel was a painful, prolonged death by torture. Surely most people would be afraid at the sight of the “engine.” But it doesn’t seem to be entirely fear of an excruciating death that concerns him. Pierre draws a firm distinction between himself and the kinds of people that are more “fit” to be subjected to the spectacle of public torture and execution. For Pierre to be broken “like a common carcass” on the wheel would allow for the kinds of public bodily shaming that would exhibit the triumphant power of the Senate and its attached corruption. Pierre’s question seems to be one for the audience as well, challenging their silence and tacit approval. His pleas raise his honorable military service to an almost kingly status, and as his question resonates through the audience they must consider whether such a fate could be deserved, and whether this governing body should have the power to enact it.

Ultimately, the heroes of Venice Preserved successfully undermine the political authority of the state by articulating the terms of their own deaths. Circumventing the instrument of punishment determined by the state, Jaffeir and Pierre implement their own favored weapon—the dagger—as the tool of their final act of rebellion. Jaffeir saves Pierre from death on the wheel by stabbing him, and then turns the dagger on himself. “This was done nobly—we have deceived the Senate,” Pierre says, to which Jaffeir responds, “Bravely” (V.iii.129-30). Performing the suicide on the scaffold allows for a visual redistribution of the monopoly of punishment imagined to be held by the state. The play offers no potential republican model as an alternative, and no promising results for rebellion, but it does find a way of stabilizing authority somewhat by placing it within the individual. The condemned body avoids becoming a trophy in a power play for either
side to claim martyr or traitor and essentially undoes the spectacle of punishment, recontextualizing the image of dead body in the space of the scaffold in a way that does not necessarily reproduce the conventional power structure, but opens up an appropriate space to consider the unstable nature of the convention and its institutions.

In *Heroes and States*, J. Douglas Canfield writes, “Restoration tragedy, like Restoration comedy… remains essentially conservative, reaffirming aristocratic ideology in the teeth of challenges—until the Glorious Revolution called forth a new bourgeois ideology” (1). *Lucius Junius Brutus* and *Venice Preserved* occur in, and reflect on, such challenges to aristocratic ideology partially through the execution spectacle. While both plays present parties in opposition to conventional authority and throw the concept of absolute monarchy under intense scrutiny, Canfield makes the valid point that, “the new order has not really escaped patriarchalism” (58). In the end, the state is still in charge, whether it’s Brutus’s republican alternative to monarchy or a corrupt Senate. The condemned individuals brought to the scaffold for treason illustrate that the state still has the ultimate, privileged power of punishment, and that justice will be served on its terms. However, the rebellious actions of the accused as they choose suicide over the sovereign’s manifestation of justice reveal a moment of vulnerability in the machine and allow for the retention of some individual agency and dignity.
CHAPTER TWO

“What Honest Man Would Live Beneath Such Rulers?”: Authority of Conscience and Manipulation of the Execution Spectacle in OROONOKO AND THE TRAGEDY OF JANE SHORE

Charles II’s calculated deployment of the spectacle of execution assured that his authority would be recognized as final. Upon his ascent to the throne, Charles’s brother James had a similar opportunity to assert his claim of power through punitive measures. The bastard son of Charles, James, Duke of Monmouth, amassed a following that supported his claim to the throne of England. In June of 1685, shortly after James’s accession, Monmouth “arrived at Lyme Regis in Dorset and raised the standard of rebellion against James” (Pincus 104). He had himself declared king a few days later. However, with relatively little support for this mainly religious and conservative rebellion, Monmouth failed. King James was quick to react and Monmouth’s army was resoundingly defeated in July at Sedgemoor. Monmouth fled the battle, but was captured and executed in the Tower of London on July 15, 1685. According to an anonymous account of Monmouth’s execution, “At his first coming upon the Scaffold, he looked for the Executioner, and seeing him, said, Is this the Man to do the business? Do your work well” (1). Reportedly, it took five blows of the axe and a belt knife to sever his head (Diehl 266-7).  

---

5 For a detailed and interesting analysis of Monmouth’s Rebellion and its doomed ideology, see Pincus 104-117.
6 Apparently Monmouth was rightfully concerned about the headsman’s aptitude. The anonymous account gives the following interaction between Monmouth and his executioner: Then he lay down; and soon after he raised himself upon his Elbow, and said to the Executioner, Prethee let me feel the Ax; he felt the Edge, and said, I fear it is not sharp Enough. Executioner. It is sharp enough, and heavy enough: Then he lay down again. (3)
Monmouth the rebel had to be executed as an example. This was James’s chance to bring down the iron hand of punishment and set precedent against treachery and sedition. The account of Monmouth’s execution presents a brief exchange between an attendant on the scaffold and the disgraced duke:

A. _My Lord_, You have been bred a _Souldier_; You will do a Generous Christian Thing, if you please to go to the Rail, and speak to the _Souldiers_, and say, That here you stand a sad Example of _Rebellion_, and intreat _Them_, and the _People_ to be _Loyall, and Obedient to the KING_.

M. I have said, I will make no Speeches; I will make no Speeches; I come to dye. (Anon 3)

The attendant gives Monmouth the chance to articulate his sins directly to those who are most likely to benefit from his “sad example”. The soldiers, with their focused military training and experience in bloodshed, could pose a significant threat if seduced from loyalty to their king. Monmouth refuses the opportunity to speak, but it is hardly necessary. The more spectacular gesture is the beheading, which speaks much louder regarding the importance of obedience and deference to monarchal authority.

In addition to Monmouth’s beheading, nineteen other rebels were hanged for high treason at Taunton-Dean on September 30, 1685. An account of their execution reinforces the allegiance between God and king, stating, “for as it has in most Ages been Evident that Heaven frustrates and blasts evil Purposes and wicked Designs; so more especially in this it has appeared even to a miracle, and peculiarly in the preservation of his most Sacred Majesty the best of Princes, and subduing his Enemies under his Feet, to

---

Diehl also notes in his history that Monmouth’s execution came dangerously close to becoming a riot due to the botching of the job by the executioner, Jack Ketch (267). The execution spectacle was not always an infallible demonstration of power.
render all good men entirely happy” (1). Heaven, at this time, is still in league with the king and helps to quash traitors. Such sentiments reinforce the divine right of kings, for it lends itself to the interpretation that rebellions are not just an act against the ruler, but an act against God. James II made certain to reiterate his sovereign power by making frightening examples of those who might challenge his right to rule. Operating with his counsel, Judge Jeffreys, King James II sentenced hundreds to death and hundreds more to exile and slavery in what was known as the “Bloody Assizes” (Diehl 268).

James II, despite prior concerns to the contrary, initially enjoyed many positive endorsements from supporters across the political spectrum (Pincus 116). The new king promised to rule by the law and was welcomed by the people.7 Unfortunately for James, the ringing endorsements from the people were not to last long. Scholar Steve Pincus suggests several reasons why:

Many opposed his modernizing and centralizing state. Some were concerned with his sympathy for and promotion of French-style Catholicism. A very few detested his promotion of liberty of conscience.

Others were concerned about his use of royal fiat to promote his policy of liberty of conscience. Still others were concerned about James’s failure to align his kingdoms firmly and publicly against French expansionism.

(226)

James had managed to alienate the same wide spectrum of people he’d charmed just a few years earlier with his talk of maintaining the constitution, protecting the Church of

7 In a sermon preached in the anniversary of James’s accession, Thomas Cartwright proclaims: “The Ark of God was not shaken, as many fear’d it would have been, at the Death of our late gracious Soveraign Lord, King Charles the Second; but continued steady, without the least Commotion. No Cry in our Cities, no complaining in our Streets, no Tears but those of Love and Loyalty” (15).
England, and governing “by law established” (102). The revolution was not necessarily, as many critics have suggested in the past, a victory for aristocrats, nor was it a foreign invasion. Altering England’s rule at this point could not have come about without the involvement of supporters from all social classes. Revolutionaries in 1688 looked to the Dutch republic as a model, and preferred political participation over the rule of an absolute monarch (6-7). Ultimately the revolution that would force James off the throne and into exile was propelled forward by the populace, made up of supporters from various social backgrounds. The resulting English Bill of Rights in 1689 did away with absolutism, limiting the power of the monarchs (who were now officially William and Mary) and provided a Parliamentary form of government. The perception of royal authority had turned a corner and was no longer viewed by the majority as divinely inspired.

The “Glorious” Revolution has long held the distinctive modifier of also being “bloodless.” G. M. Trevelyan states that, “the cataclysm of James’s overthrow was not accompanied by the shedding of English blood either on the field or on the scaffold” (222-3). Indeed, William and Mary’s royal spectacle was slightly more subdued than Charles II’s or James’s. There were no corpses desecrated or high-ranking heads lopped off. The new king and queen of England used their royal monopoly of punishment to let James flee. Bloodless though their actions may have seemed, however, there was still a prominent culture of violence. Some crowds were warring factions of Williamites versus Jacobites, and some crowds largely directed their assault on the remnants of Jacobite absolutism, destroying property and tearing down statues. The spectacle turned to the streets. The levels and extents of mob violence compromised the state’s exclusive hold on
the punishment of criminals. Blood stained this revolution; just not on the usual hands. Mob violence resonated with the shifting style of government. As dangerous as such violence was, it presented a movement among the people to demonstrate their own requisite standards of punishment. The power of determination over one’s life (or death) was no longer entirely in the hands of one ruler acting in legion with God.

Foucault describes the public execution as “a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted. It restores that sovereignty by manifesting it at its most spectacular” (48). The heroes of the previous chapter depended on that ceremonial framework, disrupting the value of the spectacle for the sovereign and tipping the balance of power within a recognized ritual. By intercepting the executioner, the condemned deprives the master of his vengeance and halts the flow of justice, assuming control of the scene and by extension, his life. Unable to contain the spectacle, the sovereign becomes vulnerable and the extent of his power may be questioned. That the condemned even made it to the scaffold, however, speaks to the truth of their crime, or their ability to injure that sovereign. Jaffeir and Titus, for all their noble posturing and emotional appeal, were technically guilty. They willfully participated in conspiracies against the state (however flawed that state may have been), so while it may be sad or feel unjust to see them approach the axe or the wheel, we are aware on some level that this is the price paid for high treason.

The heroes of this chapter’s tragedies force the audience to further examine that notion of guilt and just punishment. While Lucius Junius Brutus and Venice Preserved rely on the visible spectacle of public executions to dramatically display a conflict of power between competing factions, Oroonoko and Jane Shore are noticeably distanced
from such a scene. What we see in these plays are heroes that are too good for the executioner. The moral distance between the heroes and the villains is so great that the spectacle must be removed to avoid asserting any validity to the guilt of the hero. Foucault asserts of public torture and execution, “In this liturgy of punishment, there must be an emphatic affirmation of power and its intrinsic superiority” (49). In these plays, the representative authority figures are so morally bankrupt that there can be no claim to any superiority by the sovereign. The state still lays claim to its exclusive right to punish, but the plays drastically limit the extent of control such rights can obtain. Maintaining loyalty only to their personal integrity, the heroes prohibit the sovereign power from ever commanding their obedience or allowing ceremonial punishment to properly become “an exercise of terror” (49).

Heroes of the post-Revolutionary dramas were meant to be noticed for their personal merit. High birth and innate nobility had less to do with what made a hero worth watching; if anything, such things began to take on more negative than positive connotations. Kavenik writes about the changing nature of drama at this period, and specifically, the new face of the tragic hero: “If the heroic hero acted out of self-interest and society benefited, newer heroes were often in conflict with a world that was sick, disordered, or base, and that destroyed the hero but not his or her honor” (101). The conflict between heroes and villains was certainly nothing new, nor was the conflict between the hero and his problematic state, but the drama began to show a focus on individual worthwhile characteristics embodied in the kinds of people less accustomed to a theatrical spotlight. Audiences found noble heroes in the bodies of lesser figures that were forced to confront a corrupt authority and make a choice. In the case of these
figures, their choice reflected obedience to themselves and their own moral code of justice.

Thomas Southerne’s tragic 1695 play *Oroonoko*, an adaptation of Aphra Behn’s 1688 novella of the same name, echoes its Exclusion Crisis dramatic predecessors in its preoccupation with violence—audiences once again see the noble dagger changing hands among heroes—and features a protagonist that chooses suicide over execution. The dramatized version of the story avoids the inclusion of the executioner or a visual show of punishment enacted by an outside arbiter, who in the context of the play would be morally ill-equipped to pass judgment on one as virtuous as Oroonoko. As Thomas Krise observes, Oroonoko is “characterized in every possible way as a man not deserving of enslavement” (202). Conversely, those who seek to enslave, torture, and kill Oroonoko are often characterized as deceptive, amoral predators. To stage the execution of Oroonoko as Behn did would be to force on some level a visual acknowledgement of the truth of Oroonoko’s criminal behavior, for as Foucault puts it, the guilty man put on display at the moment of his death becomes a “herald of his own condemnation” (43). While Oroonoko’s participation in a slave revolt presents him as a threat to the colonists, his motives remain noble and honest while the models of white colonial rule consistently display abhorrent character flaws. In her analysis of the play, Kavenik observes of Oroonoko: “His prowess in battle, love for his family, and leadership qualities are joined to eloquence, rationality, and a sense of honor superior to that of almost every other character in the play, white or black, but particularly to its “libertines,” the Captain and Lieutenant Governor” (103). Oroonoko, like the characters of the plays examined in the
previous chapter, interrupts the ritual of power and regulation that should be the prerogative of the governing body and opens up a space for individual empowerment.

Violence as it occurs in *Oroonoko* operates within a privileged order. When Oroonoko says, “Give me a sword, and I’ll deserve your trust” (II.iv.64), he hopes to enter into the violent space created by the Englishmen by wielding the sword to help put down a rebellion of Indians, thereby restoring the established order of things as desired by the planters of the island. By punishing others for transgressing, he may hopefully avoid being punished himself for merely racial difference. Demonstrating violence is the prerogative of power, and when Oroonoko is given a sword and permitted to show his skill in battle he proves to be more than capable of performing at the level of the colonial masters. Such an act makes him immensely more of a potential threat. Oroonoko’s difference and threat is visually marked from his very entrance on the stage, presented to the audience as the “troublesome” part of a procession of African slaves: “Black slaves—men, women, and children—pass across the stage two by two; Aboan and others of Oroonoko’s attendants two and two; Oroonoko last of all in chains” (I.ii.SD). This will hardly be the last time that Oroonoko finds himself facing chains; Captain Driver goes to secure him later “as an enemy to the government,” proclaiming him as a terrible threat that “would be glad to cutting masters’ throats” and likely to rally the other slaves to incite a revolt (II.iv.19-60). However, Oroonoko’s perception of order and propriety comes from a belief in trust and honesty, and his exhibition of violence only works in tandem with that. Both times he is moved to battle, he does so out of concern for others; the first time he protects the colonists, and the second time “For the great cause of Love
and Liberty” (III.iii.246). In her exploration of Oroonoko’s marked difference from the colonists, Lowenthal writes:

Oroonoko is represented in both Behn’s and Southerne’s renditions as a man unjustly treated, but Behn’s representation insists that the source of that injustice springs from Oroonoko’s high status; he is first of all a prince; he is only secondarily black or African. In Southerne’s much more colonialist view, Oroonoko is first of all a man racially different from the British colonists, an African transported to the New World, and thus, even though he speaks a princely rhetoric and refuses to bow down and accept his enslaved status, he is a much more difficult object of identification for a British theatergoer. He may be pitiable, a man who unfairly suffers, but he must inevitably be killed because he presents a powerful danger to the colony. (198)

Lowenthal’s statement that Oroonoko “must inevitably be killed” in Southerne’s play because of the threat he poses is reasonable, except that he isn’t. In an alternate dramatic “reality,” there could be a story that ends with Oroonoko’s inevitable punishment by death, but that would hardly restore order in the colony. In Southerne’s world, the colony is morally diseased, coming across most clearly in the figures of the Lieutenant Governor and the Captain. They and the enraged planters—who are presented as a bloodthirsty rabble motivated by fear and greed—are really the only ones to whom Oroonoko presents a danger. Even after Oroonoko has attempted revolt and killed the Captain, Blanford offers his sword to Oroonoko, coming before him unarmed. “I’ll answer with my life for
all he says,” Blanford pledges (IV.ii.144). The danger to the colony that Oroonoko represents is a revelation of the tenuous grip the leaders have on control.

The slaves readily acknowledge that the colonists have full power over the spectacle of punishment. As they prepare to rebel, they are entirely aware of the consequences that await them if they fail, understanding that while their cause may be righteous, the colonists will ultimately condemn their guilt. “We must expect no mercy, if we fail,” says Oroonoko, displaying a comprehension of the state’s right to punish insurrection (III.iv.52). Deriving effectiveness from the context of slavery, death is often spoken of in terms nearly equal to liberty; for a slave, these are the only possible means of escape. Oroonoko uses the suggestion of torture and death to draw out fear from the slave Hottman, testing his commitment to the rebellion. “There is no mean, but Death or Liberty,” Oroonoko says (III.iv.56). And death will likely not come quickly, as he elaborates on the possible outcome of a failed revolt and subsequently falling into the hands of the colonists:

I could die altogether like a man,

As you, and you, and all of us may do.

But who can promise for his bravery

Upon the rack? where fainting, weary life,

Hunted through every limb, is forced to feel

An agonizing death of all its parts?

Who can bear this? resolve to be impaled?

His skin flayed off and roasted yet alive?

The quivering flesh torn from his broken bones
By burning pincers? Who can bear these pains? (III.iv.74-83)

To an audience familiar with Behn’s novella, the answer to Oroonoko’s rhetorical questions would be, Oroonoko himself. The graphic hypothetical situation Oroonoko presents to Hottman echoes shades of his execution in the other text, where he is subjected to the most horrific mutilation with no complaint, bearing such pains and dying indeed like a man. In articulating such atrocities, Oroonoko helps cast the colonists as unimaginably violent and ruthless, pursuing their idea of justice “beyond all possible pain” (Foucault 34). The spectacle’s terrorizing purpose is achieved through narration, and it is Oroonoko that owns it, using an illustration of the colony’s monopoly of punishment to cast them as monstrous villains.

The state’s power of punishment is further placed under scrutiny as the audience sees the potential for mob violence. Once the slave rebellion fails, the planters wish to make an example of the dangerous slave. They call for Oroonoko’s execution while Blanford and the other benevolent colonists plead for his life:

FIRST PLANTER

Never mind ‘em, Governor, he ought to be made an example for the good of the plantation.

SECOND PLANTER

Aye, aye, ‘twill frighten the Negroes from attempting the like again.

---

8 Oroonoko stoically faces an intensely gruesome death in Behn’s text:

He had learned to take tobacco; and when he was assured he should die, he desired they would give him a pipe in his mouth, ready lighted, which they did; and the executioner came, and first cut off his members, and threw them into the fire; after that, with an ill-favored knife, they cut his ears, and his nose, and burned them; he still smoked on, as if nothing had touched him. Then they hacked off one of his arms, and still he bore up, and held his pipe; but at the cutting off his other arm, his head sunk, and his pipe dropped, and he gave up the ghost, without a groan or reproach. […] They cut Caesar into quarters, and sent them to several of the chief plantations. (Behn 2226)
FIRST PLANTER

What, rise against their lords and masters! At this rate no man is safe from his own slaves.

SECOND PLANTER

No, no more he is. Therefore, one and all, Governor, we declare for hanging.

ALL PLANTERS

Aye, aye, hang him, hang him.

WIDOW

What! Hang him! Oh! forbid it, Governor!

CHARLOTTE, LUCIA

We all petition for him.

JACK STANMORE

They are for a holiday. Guilty or not,

Is not the business; hanging is their sport. (V.ii.15-27)

Mob violence is a power to contend with that doesn’t care for honesty, moral fortitude, guilt, or innocence. Contrasted with Oroonoko’s reluctance to participate in violent behavior without a just cause, the planters are provoked by a combination of fear and voyeuristic excitement. In their cries for hanging, they aren’t even focused on Oroonoko’s guilt of any particular crime. They simply want him killed to prove that they can.

The presentation of the tortured bodies of the slaves reinforces the unjust measures of the mob. The audience has to deal with the sight of the brutalized body of
Oroonoko as the scene opens to reveal “Oroonoko stretched upon his back, his legs and arms stretched out and chained to the ground” (V.iii.SD). This scene qualifies the tortures Oroonoko narrated for Hottman; his positioning echoes that of the rack and offers a visual cue that suggests what the colonial powers are actually capable of. Such hints are reiterated in the sight of brutally battered Aboan, whom Oroonoko calls, “This spectacle of horror” (V.v.22). Aboan has evidently been tortured without mercy and to the brink of death. Foucault claims, “The tortured body is first inscribed in the legal ceremonial that must produce, open for all to see, the truth of the crime” (35), yet the tortured bodies of the slaves offers a complication to this truth. The bloodied bodies of Oroonoko and Aboan show the marks of the ritual of punishment, but it doesn’t seem consistent with the crime. After all, members of a colony that have proven themselves capable of selfish aggression and who also care little for trust and honesty have determined their guilt, yet from another perspective the only thing the slaves are guilty of is a natural desire for liberty.

Both slaves ultimately choose suicide, as it seems the only way to reconcile their crime of transgressing against such a deeply flawed state with their own integrity. In their final moments, they choose to circumvent the spectacle and assume agency in their manner of death, dying as slaves to no one and by no dishonest hand. In response to Aboan’s suffering and requests for death, Oroonoko gives a dagger and says to him:

Here he is,

The only present I can make thee now.

And next the honorable means of life,

I would bestow the honest means of death. (V.v.55-8)
The “present” of the dagger is the instrument by which the noble figure takes his own life. In the midst of such dishonesty and immorality as perpetuated by the lying, scheming, raping Lieutenant Governor, the only conceivable way that a real hero might die with honor is by his own hand, which he can depend on to bestow an “honest” death. Oroonoko, as Aboan’s social superior, gives him this gift out of mercy and demonstrates the true affection a noble leader has for his subjects. Aboan still seeks permission to die, and Oroonoko’s approval of that decision portrays a leader who respects the agency of his subjects to make the best decisions for themselves.

This benevolent gesture gains relevance as Oroonoko faces the same fate. As he and Imoinda tragically debate the consequences, it is apparent that his honor dictates no alternative other than death for both. To live would most likely mean torture, mutilation, and execution for him (as it does in Behn’s story), and rape for her. In this final scene, however, Oroonoko emerges as the sovereign body and embodies the role of the prince he has been restricted from being since he first arrived on the scene in chains. He kills Imoinda and accepts personal accountability for his actions:

The deed was mine.

Bloody I know it is, and I expect

Your laws should tell me so. Thus self-condemned,

I do resign myself into your hands,

The hands of justice. But I hold the sword

For you—and for myself. (Stabs the [lieutenant] governor and himself, then throws himself by Imoinda’s body.) (V.v.343-7)
For the last time, Oroonoko holds the sword and he wields it as a king. In his discussion of the militarism present in the public execution spectacle, Foucault notes that, “The justice of the king was shown to be an armed justice. The sword that punished the guilty was also the sword that destroyed enemies” (50). This is the sword that Oroonoko holds. He punishes the guilty—himself, for his killing of Imoinda, to which he confesses—and destroyed his enemy. Jaher’s reading of the final death scene is almost exactly to the point:

Oroonoko, unlike Behn's prince, who is executed without avenging himself against the colonists who betray him, rebels against an absolutist government by simultaneously usurping the state's authority (its monopoly of punishment) and resigning himself to "your hands," that is, the legitimate, noncorrupt authority represented by the "good" colonists. He obeys the colonists' laws—even implements them by executing a guilty man—but, like Aboan, he assumes agency over his life and denies the colonists ultimate control of his fate. (64)

He also usurps the state’s authority by declaring he is “self-condemned,” and not to be judged by anyone else. He resigns himself to “The hands of justice” while holding the sword. At the end of the play, Oroonoko more than rebels; he assumes control by restricting the governing body’s access to the task of punishment. By removing the execution of Oroonoko and allowing him to govern the final minutes of the scene with militant power, the play allows for a victory based on merit. He who exhibits the most worth actually gets to experience the honorable death of a prince, resplendent with “exalted virtue.”
In 1714, nearly twenty years after the premiere of *Oroonoko* and in the midst of a new crisis of succession, Nicholas Rowe’s *Tragedy of Jane Shore* came to the stage. In it, Rowe offers something of an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, showing the corrupt Gloster’s rise to power alongside the suffering of its central heroine.\(^9\) Beyond the play’s historical and Shakespearean source material, the play is also commonly considered as one in his repertoire of what came to be known as “she-tragedies,” a genre in which he earned his reputation as a dramatist. Similar to plays such as Rowe’s successful *The Fair Penitent*, “she-tragedies emphasize the suffering of a sympathetic female figure, often a woman who…has committed a sexual sin” (Marsden 637). Jane Shore’s folly was to have arrested the attention of King Edward IV, who then took the married woman as his mistress. Laura Brown also states that the rise of the she-tragedy “coincides with a major transformation in the genre”: the transition from the aristocratic heroics of the Restoration tragedies to the sentimental, bourgeois tragedies of the eighteenth century (430). The suffering, passive woman became a useful trope to explore questions of morality, agency, and authority. Jane, much like Oroonoko, has no status for much of the play; she has no property, no husband, and waning physical appeal, and all of her sufferings stem from victimization by men who seek to use, hurt, and control her. By maintaining allegiance to her sense of what is right, Jane emphasizes the cruelty of these men while exercising her limited remaining agency.

*Jane Shore* certainly functions on a high emotional level, but several critics have also observed that the play is also engrossed in the politics of the time. “However culpable in moral terms Jane is, her suffering is brought about by the machinations of

---

\(^9\) Additionally, elements of the domestic plot are derived from Thomas Heywood’s *Edward IV* (Pedicord xvi-xviii).
Gloster and his faction, who are intent on altering the succession: pathos is heightened by politics” (Kewes 308). Although the 1701 Act of Settlement assured a Protestant succession, Queen Anne’s inability to produce an heir created concern among the British, especially considering the exiled Jacobite court still sheltered by the French:

Subsequent movements in political events and passions also led to a new attempt to associate the spectacle of the woman in pain with state politics, and in particular with the threat of Jacobitism to the welfare of the British nation. The apparent precariousness of the Protestant succession pushed Whig writers to confront a crisis that would put the whole nation at risk; they frequently responded by depicting that risk as sexed or sexual. On stage, the national crisis becomes the national she-tragedy in Rowe’s Jane Shore. (Wilson 823)

Jane Shore participates in this conversation surrounding succession by underlining the corrupt and vile behavior of the libertine aristocrat, once lauded in the Stuart age. Exploiting what Wilson calls “the cultural politics of sympathy” (823), Rowe uses the spectacle of the death sentence as a vehicle to illustrate the potential villainy of absolute rulers, from the perspective of a sympathetic female figure.

The play shows several men attempting to dominate Jane Shore in one way or another. Edward, though dead by the start of the play, continues to impact Jane as we become aware of her financial and social dependence on him. She says that “The hand of pow’r has seized almost the whole / Of what was left for needy life’s support” (I.ii.102-3), showing herself to have little recourse in the events that take place in her life; by her perception, Gloster’s “hand” has the authority to take her possessions, and those
possessions were her only means of getting by without a husband for support. She already sees the seeds of her condemnation being planted, for she understands the connection between the authority of the state and the control over an individual’s life. Hastings and Gloster both attempt to manipulate Jane for their own ends, preying upon her weakness and perceived indebtedness. Once again, the characters with the most “innate” nobility are the ones least capable of showing it:

Even more than *Venice Preserved* and *Oroonoko*, *Jane Shore* shows the erosion of libertinism and the privatization of the heroic ethos. Except for Hastings’s loyalty to his boy king, no values that might be termed “aristocratic” are exalted in the play, while a host of aristocratic vices are shown as contemptible. Edward IV, however good a ruler in some respects, is remembered as a libertine who willfully destroyed the marriage of Jane and Shore. Richard himself is seen as the worst kind of political manipulator, not even blanching at murder to advance his own interest, with no regard for his country’s health and well-being, and with outright contempt for the citizenry. (Kavenik 109)

Attention becomes focused on the heroic decisions of private individuals, away from high-ranking members of society who seem incapable of acting in unselfish ways. The idea of absolute power seems to have disappeared, as has any reverence for the aristocracy.

While much of Jane’s suffering originates from her sexuality, the play neutralizes much of her sex appeal, leaving her to be represented wholly by her sadness and suffering. Brett Wilson claims, “At issue in Rowe’s Whiggish tragedy is the signification
of Jane’s body, whose feminine gender must remain intact to serve as index of her mistreatment, but whose sexuality must be wiped out to keep her a figure of sympathetic identification” (Wilson 835). After Edward’s death, Lord Hastings reports that she has become a shell of her former self: “Now sunk in grief, and pining with despair, / Her waning form no longer shall incite / Envy in woman, or desire in man” (I.i.69-71). Additionally, men acting in Gloster’s name have seized the property bestowed upon her by the late king, and thus the loss of the king has made her penniless and haggard; even her physicality depends on the presence of a man. And despite the apparent nobility of his pleading on Jane’s behalf, Hastings finds that she does apparently still incite desire in men and attempts to force himself on her as repayment for his advocacy (II.215-39). But despite the attempts to strip her of all meaning, she maintains moral conviction and adamantly refuses Hastings’s advances:

    Never! By those chaste lights above, I swear,
    My soul shall never know pollution more!
    Forbear, my lord! Here let me rather die;
    Let quick destruction overtake me here,
    And end my sorrows and my shame forever. (II.225-9)

Even though Jane has seemingly hit rock bottom, she chooses chastity and calls upon what little power she has left. Here, death becomes a model for resistance. While she places a seemingly unfair amount of blame on herself for the events in her life, she retains sense of self enough to want to preserve her soul from further “pollution,” the source of which is the libertine Hastings. Even as a shell of her former self, she refuses to become another possession.
Her opportunity to subvert authority cannot come from her domination of the scaffold spectacle or the circumvention of the hangman. Unlike the heroes of the previously examined plays, Jane actually dies by the terms of her sentence. She doesn’t appropriate violent or militant behavior in an attempt to enter a masculine discourse of power. As a long-suffering woman, she has no chance to participate on any equal terms with the representative authority. Jane herself observes:

    Such is the fate unhappy women find,
    And such the curse entailed upon our kind,
    That man, the lawless libertine, may rove
    Free and unquestioned through the wilds of love;
    While woman, sense and nature’s easy fool,
    If poor, weak woman swerve from virtue’s rule,
    If, strongly charmed, she leave the thorny way,
    And in the softer paths of pleasure stray,
    Ruin ensues, reproach and endless shame,
    And one false step entirely damns her fame.
    In vain with tears the loss she may deplore,
    In vain look back to what she was before;
    She sets, like stars that fall, to rise no more. (I.ii.181-93)

Jane’s suffering is total, and she knows it. Much like Oroonoko’s bleak realization that suicide is really the only option that allows him to exercise any degree of autonomy as an oppressed yet noble figure, Jane acknowledges that her fate as an “unhappy woman” is more or less sealed with a curse. Her agency is always already compromised from the
beginning, existing under the rule of “virtue” or a king or a cruelly ambitious ruler. Jane Shore accepts her death as a fitting result for the choices she made, articulating her virtuous conscience so as to throw into contrast the unjust behavior of her judge, Gloster. Jane’s sentence is even framed as a choice; a tragic one where she must look a tyrant in the face and choose death or moral compromise. She refuses to do Gloster’s bidding:

Let me be branded for the public scorn,

Turned forth and driven to wander like a vagabond;

Be friendless and forsaken, seek my bread

Upon the barren, wild, and desolate waste,

Feed on my sighs, and drink my falling tears,

Ere I consent to teach my lips injustice,

Or wrong the orphan who has none to save him. (IV.170-76)

It is by her willful self-condemnation that the sentence is placed into effect. Threat of execution has little effect on Jane as her moral superiority comes into sharp focus.

However obviously corrupt the rule of the ascendant Richard III may be, it maintains the privilege of punishment. Yet, executing disobedient subjects fails to provoke fear among the condemned or function effectively as an example to the public. Gloster’s subjects instead remain loyal to their own concepts of right and wrong, accepting death as simply momentary, worldly suffering. Upon learning that he will be sent to the scaffold immediately for high treason, Hastings prepares to “die as a man should”:

‘Tis but to die;

‘Tis but to venture on that common hazard
Which many a time in battle I have run;
‘Tis but to do what, at that very moment,
In many nations of the peopled earth,
A thousand and a thousand shall do with me;
‘Tis but to close my eyes and shut out daylight,
To view no more the wicked ways of men,
No longer to behold the tyrant Gloster,
And be a weeping witness of the woes,
The desolation, slaughter, and calamities,
Which he shall bring on this unhappy land. (IV.266-77)

While Gloster holds the power of execution, Hastings’s reasoning removes anything exceptional from the event. By his moving account, his death will be no spectacle but merely a common task, like falling asleep, that almost sounds pleasant. The greater devastation is the fate of England under Gloster’s control, which comes across as much more emphatically violent and frightening than any executioner’s axe. He forgives Alicia for her hand in his death and seeks forgiveness from her for his wrongs as he prepares to “part without one angry thought” (IV.283). Despite his initial shock, he seems to be a man at peace as he is led away. Hastings’s brave acceptance of an unjust act lessens the power of the thing, and the last impression the audience has of the complicated character is of him offering sincerely kind words for Jane. The execution presumably takes place offstage, and unlike in Shakespeare’s play, his severed head never makes an appearance.\textsuperscript{10} Rowe’s presentation of events essentially eliminates the spectacular

\textsuperscript{10} Richard III, 3.5.20ff
element of punishment. Gloster’s sentence fails to completely break its victim and shows the limits of his control.

Jane Shore’s conscience dictates that she would rather die than intentionally wrong innocents, and indeed she is sentenced to death by neglect, banished to the street and forbidden from receiving aid. As the audience spends the last act watching Jane die, as per the instructions of the sentence, they become implicated in her condemnation and complicit to her suffering; as spectators unable to undo the course of the punishment, they become potential lifelines withheld and an implied part of the execution process:

Go, some of you, and turn this strumpet forth!
Spurn her into the street; there let her perish
And rot upon a dunghill. Through the city
See it proclaimed that none, on pain of death,
Presume to give her comfort, food, or harbor.
Who ministers the smallest comfort, dies. (IV.179-84)

Gloster not only condemns Jane to death by deprivation, but also uses her as a terrorizing instrument for the public. By her sentence, Gloster implicitly challenges anyone to dare disobey him and attempt to aid her. “The foremost expression of Gloster’s tyranny comes when he declares it treason—a violation of the highest law of state—to relieve Jane’s suffering. […] The blustering, sadistic Gloster makes sympathy a capital crime” (Wilson 832). The entire city becomes her scaffold and every single person who withholds aid her executioner by proxy. Jane’s punishment is a punishment served to the entire populace, challenging their moral fiber.
The spectacle of Jane’s execution doesn’t rely on a scaffold or gallows. The success of the execution depends entirely on the people’s obedience to the terms and implicates all who participate in the tyrant’s unjust authority. Bellmour’s account of Jane’s suffering forces the audience to hear about not only the effects of the cruel sentence, but of the crowd’s role in enforcing Jane punishment:

Before her, certain rascal officers,
Slaves in authority, the knaves of justice,
Proclaimed the tyrant Gloster’s cruel orders.
On either side her marched an ill-looking priest,
Who with severe, with horrid, haggard eyes,
Did ever and anon by turns upbraid her,
And thunder in her trembling ear damnation.
Around her, numberless the rabble flowed,
Should’ring each other, crowding for a view,
Gaping and gazing, taunting and reviling;
Some pitying, but those, alas! how few!
The most, such iron hearts we are, and such
The base barbarity of human kind,
With insolence and lewd reproach pursued her,
Hooting and railing, and with villainous hands
Gathering the filth from out the common ways,
To hurl upon her head. (V.4-19).
As she collapses into the throes of starvation, exposure, and ultimately death, she does so in full view of a theatrical audience comprised of many of the same types of common people that make up the “rabble” hurling filth at her. Kavenik rightly observes, “In *Jane Shore*, the corruption seems vested entirely in the nobility, who control court and town, while the common people, the bourgeoisie, maintain clear ideas of right and wrong, loyalty, and Christian forgiveness” (110). Kavenik’s “common people” clearly refers to Jane, her husband, and Bellmour—the good merchant class who are very much the moral beacons in the play—but neglects to mention the less-than-Christian behavior described as coming from the citizenry. While the corruption does indeed originate from the nobility, the nature of Jane’s punishment shows the dangerous trickle-down effects that come from a society governed by such nobility. The conflict between responsibility to the state and duty to a suffering fellow human becomes particularly relevant as the “rabble” becomes the enforcer of the sentence and the “base barbarity” of the mob is revealed. The audience of *Jane Shore* is confronted with the idea of an angry, violent crowd, willingly participating in the suffering of another. This mob is another example of the disastrous effects of a sovereign with designs on usurpation and absolute rule. “Jane traverses a landscape of deprivation, yet remains intent on justice. Throughout the *Tragedy of Jane Shore*, the Whig Rowe continues distinguishing political oppression by its pathetic effects” (Wilson 832). The consequences of this kind of monarchial power have a dangerous and corrupting effect on the people as well; oppression doesn’t stop at poor Jane. In other words, it isn’t simply Gloster’s sentence but the exhibition of England’s moral decay under his rule that ultimately does her in.
Before her death, Jane receives her redemption. Her husband, formerly disguised as Dumont, reveals himself to her and forgives her. It is with his forgiveness that she “shall sleep in peace,” and she dies in his arms (V.420-5). For assisting her, he will presumably be jailed or executed, to both of which he is “equally indifferent,” heartbroken at the brevity and tragedy of their reunion (V.434). Jane dies as the acknowledged wife of a merchant, restored to the status she held before her sufferings began. Although her punishment always seemed inevitable, and she was doomed to serve as a “sad example” for women who break the marriage vow, her death is a calming relief. By choosing death and adhering to her moral convictions, Jane avoids any further ethical transgression. By emerging as morally superior to the nobility, even with all of her many “sins,” Jane becomes a martyr that exposes the execution spectacle as a tool for tyranny and oppression.

The question in such a situation becomes: who is the criminal? Responding to changing perceptions and concerns around monarchy, nobility, and authority, Oroonoko and Jane Shore muddle traditional power demonstrations and show moral conscience as a truer arbiter of justice. Both plays examined in this chapter show culturally marginalized people with little to no social or economic status as heroes, emphatically undercutting the libertine, aristocratic hero previously seen in Restoration dramas. Heroes of these dramas subvert the execution spectacle by showing the limits of its power. The spectacle of execution still remains the prerogative of the sovereign as a tool of power and control, but it becomes an empty threat, functioning as an instrument of tyrannical posturing and injustice rather than any kind of properly applied punishment.
CHAPTER THREE

“MONEY WELL TIMED AND PROPERLY APPLIED WILL DO ANYTHING”:
STAGING DEATH FOR PROFIT AND POWER IN THE BEGGAR’S OPERA AND
THE LONDON MERCHANT

In the eighteenth century, the new absolute ruler was money. Traditional notions of monarchy and aristocracy had given way to what some called “Robinocracy”, the colloquial and antagonistic term to describe Robert Walpole’s regime. In the wake of new and vastly profitable trade agreements abroad as well as new financial management systems at home, this was a government that prioritized the accumulation of wealth for the country and the propertied. The economically prosperous period after the Revolution also gave rise to the system of criminal law in England typically referred to as the Bloody Code. This system rapidly increased the number of capital offenses on the books, spawning from a need to protect new wealth and property being amassed in England thanks to a rise in commercial activity (McLynn). Or as Douglas Hay puts it in his essay included in the seminal Albion’s Fatal Tree, “The Glorious Revolution of 1688 established the freedom not of men, but of men of property” (18). Importantly, the vast majority of the rising capital offenses were indeed crimes against property. There was no

---

11 Linebaugh credits The Craftsman, “the principal paper of the [Tory] Opposition,” with the coining of the term in 1729. I found it mentioned previously in a document published in 1711, titled A choice new song, call’d she-land, and Robinocracy. To all sorts of tunes. Verse 8 of the song rather concisely describes the concept:

For ROBINOCRACY consists
   In getting Pow’r and Gold,
By any Method that one lists,
   Which for the time will hold.

12 According to McLynn, the Bloody Code traditionally spans the years 1688-1815: In 1688 no more than fifty offences carried the death penalty: the crimes so possible were treason, murder, rape, and arson. By 1765 this figure had risen to about 160; an average of one new capital offence a year was added during the thirty-three year reign of George II. [...] The explosion of capital statutes marked a return to Tudor severity that saw the gallows as the only deterrent to serious crimes. (xi)
regular police force at that time in Britain, so the gallows were placed before the people in an attempt to control those who would be thieves through violent warning and intimidation.\textsuperscript{13} As theft of property could now be avenged by blood, it became more culturally explicit that a human’s life was now assessed in monetary terms.

Unlike the earlier plays of this project, where the execution spectacle was deployed or suggested in the final moments as a striking illustration of sovereign power at work, \textit{The Beggar’s Opera} and \textit{The London Merchant} are directly concerned with criminal behavior and capital punishment to the point where the spectral presence of the gallows haunts the language and the actions of the characters throughout. As the dramatic focus shifted away from the plights of the nobles to the domestic struggles of the lower classes, and as those lower classes were the targets of the system that used hanging as a deterrent, such a haunting reflects the spirit of the times. Both staged events would draw the same crowds, and the audience of either event expected the central figure to play the right role; indeed, the intimidating power of the execution spectacle for the sovereign over the masses depended on it. \textit{The London Merchant} reinforces the expectation for the condemned to “die well” to an emphatic degree, while also driving home the virtues and rewards present for those who hold high the values of a merchant-driven economy. \textit{The Beggar’s Opera}, the only comic play of the project, satirizes that same contemporary profit-driven culture and portrays a subculture that profits from crime and death itself, pointing toward the inherent flaws in the current criminal justice system that placed such

\textsuperscript{13} Murder and treason were certainly still punishable by death, but McLynn provides some additional capital offenses that are perhaps a bit more shocking to our modern sensibilities:

\begin{itemize}
  \item It was a capital crime to steal a horse (and after 1741 a sheep); to pickpocket more than a shilling; to steal more than forty shillings in a dwelling place or five shillings in a shop;
  \item to purloin linen from a bleaching ground or woolen cloth from a tenter ground; to cut down trees in a garden or orchard; to break the border of a fishpond so as to allow the fish to escape.
\end{itemize}
emphasis on the threat of taking a ride to the “Tyburn tree.” Looking at these plays together shows an emergence of conflicting social representations and attitudes towards capital punishment in the eighteenth century. Represented on the stage or on the scaffold, the long-held execution institution becomes critically bound up in the capitalist economy, presenting for the condemned a struggle with different kind of sovereignty. However enmeshed in the legal system the plays and their representative economies may be, both use the death spectacle as a space for consideration regarding a certain model of personal autonomy and power for the under-represented classes over a fallible authority of wealth.

John Gay’s *Beggar’s Opera* debuted in 1728 and was a tremendously popular production. In the period from 1714-1747, few other plays could come close to matching the sheer number of productions it boasted. Beyond the period of its inception, Gay’s ballad opera would have the opportunity to reach huge numbers of audience members as it remained the most frequently produced play throughout the remainder of the century (Kavenik 166). The ensuing years and centuries would recognize the play’s socially relevant potential, for as Dianne Dugaw writes: “The play mapped for [Gay’s] own generation and the following three centuries what is at play and at stake in the jostling worldview, material systems, and social and institutional relations that make up the modern nation state” (22). Dugaw’s claim that Gay’s play presents a modern perspective is emphasized by the fact that, as she states, “*The Beggar’s Opera* has exerted an eye-opening influence on the sensibility of key modern authors” and points to well-known re-imaginings of the play by Brecht, Havel, and Ayckborn in recent history (22). The social climate in which Gay wrote finds echoes in other societies rife with injustice. Something

---

14 Frances Kavenik’s list of the most popular plays of this thirty-year period has *The Beggar’s Opera* with a staggering 491 performances, surpassed only by Charles Coffey’s *The Devil To Pay*, another successful ballad opera, with 525 performances (120).
captivating lingers in the performances of Macheath, Polly, and Peachum, that makes this play remarkably resilient, and perhaps that can be found in the persistence of oppression by the “haves” of the “have-nots” where ultimately people’s lives are at stake. Gay’s play permits us to laugh at this matter of life and death, using comedy to undermine authority.

Coming out of this culture, The Beggar’s Opera introduces an entirely different perception of execution than those in the other plays examined thus far. There is no one scaffold scene to parse out, nor is there a doomed tragic hero. The entire play is fixated on a language of economy, and the economy presented on Gay’s stage requires death and crime to function. The devastatingly real punishment stage at Tyburn provided the punctuation to that idea, as people could still regularly visit the gallows to watch the power of wealth in action, and this increasingly modern capitalist economy required the death spectacle in order to keep reasserting the value of property in terms of life. Macheath, the play’s central condemned figure, is never in danger of going to the gallows because of murder or a dramatic treasonous offence against the state. Macheath’s crime—perhaps in some way tantamount to treason—is that he is a known highwayman who lives by robbery, thereby attacking the “officially deified” status of property in a capitalist climate (Hay 19). Audience members are meant to be fully aware of the deadly possibilities that hover in the proximity of these characters and their actions. Saturating language with the threat of death makes that threat very present, but also has a desensitizing effect. Execution becomes such an everyday kind of conversational topic that the potential for taking a man’s life becomes fodder for comedy. As the execution spectacle becomes a joke, the fear diminishes, and thus the effectiveness of the practice is compromised.
From the perspective of the Beggar, the audience glimpses the dynamic criminal underworld that the legal system is failing to repress and sees the potential for the state potentially losing power over the mob. Peter Linebaugh adopts the term “thanatocracy” in his book “to characterize a government that ruled by the frequent exercise of the death penalty.” While he importantly notes that the average number of executions per capita in the eighteenth century had actually diminished since the reign of Elizabeth I, “it is not the rate of hanging but the definition of sovereignty in terms of it and its exercise in close calibration with money that requires emphasis” (50). In other words, the success of the sovereign class depended on the fear generated by the threat of hanging. So much is clear. But *The Beggar’s Opera* posits a more likely scenario, where people of all classes have taken the justice system and the terrible application of capital punishment and manipulated it for profit. Another example of this can be found in contemporary publications of *The Ordinary of Newgate, His Account of the Behaviour, Confession, and Dying Words of the Malefactors who were Executed at Tyburn*, a pamphlet occasionally written by the Ordinary containing summaries of his last conversations with the condemned. These were published along with his sermons to be sold in the streets before, during, and after the hangings. The motivation behind these distributions was twofold: the edification of the readers and his own profit (Linebaugh 89). The Ordinary’s accounts also routinely printed advertisements for local tradesmen.\(^{15}\) Daily business was explicitly wrapped up in the economy of the scaffold and profit generated from the violent practice

\(^{15}\) The account of Captain Kidd and various other pirates, given by Newgate Ordinary Paul Lorrian, contains press for a few dentists, some surgeons, and a bookbinder (Lorrain 3). Another account of Mattias Brinsden includes an advertisement for a “Physician who is no vain Pretender” with claims to cure “All Melancholy, Histerical, and Hepocondriack Distempers which variously effect the Mind with strange Fears, and dismal Apprehentions, Faintings, and Sinkings of the Spirits, etc.” Considering the subject matter, the audience, and the venue at which they were likely distributed, these seem to be targeted marketing strategies.
of public death in conventional business circles as well as among the underbelly of society. People were no longer strictly afraid of this public demonstration of power but rather deftly put it to work for their benefit. Additionally, despite their plausible generation for exemplary purposes, Foucault suggests that something different was at work in the pamphlets:

[T]he effect, like the use, of this literature was equivocal. The condemned man found himself transformed into a hero by the sheer extent of his widely advertised crimes, and sometimes the affirmation of his belated repentance. Against the law, against the rich, the powerful, the magistrates, the constabulary or the watch, against taxes and their collectors, he appeared to have waged a struggle with which one all too easily identified. (67)

The literature runs the risk of perpetuating the culture of violence and vengeance especially where the people perceive injustice. Drama like The Beggar’s Opera can be incorporated into this literature, permitting insight into a criminal world with its pretenses for nobility and solidarity. “Sound men and true,” says Nimming Ned. “Of tried courage and indefatigable industry,” cheers Robin of Bagshot (II.i.18-9). These are admirable traits in any circle, and the audience is shown repeatedly that these men are not that different from high society, hence raising the question why this system of punishment exists for some and not others. The very existence of this world goes to show that the exemplary effect of the Tyburn tree wasn’t quite functioning as imagined. The Beggar’s Opera turns the critical power play between authority and its subordinates into a farce.
One of the central themes of the play is that the high and low classes aren’t that different; the difference comes from how they are treated under the law. The pursuit of money drives all classes in a similar fashion, and executions become one element of the growing economy. Peachum’s opening speech draws a parallel between his own role as a premier underworld businessman and that of the more conventional legal profession:

A lawyer is an honest employment, so is mine. Like me too he acts in a double capacity, both against rogues and for ‘em, for ‘tis fitting that we should protect and encourage cheats, since we live by them. (I.i.9-13)

Peachum acknowledges that both he and the more “honest” lawyer thrive because of criminals, placing an important value on the body of thieves, murderers, and the like. Instead of being a plague on society, seen in this light these people actually become an economic necessity. As Peachum tells his daughter: “Why Polly, the captain knows that as ‘tis his employment to rob, so ‘tis ours to take robbers. Every man in his business.” (I.x.40-42). An emerging economy of crime satirizes more socially acceptable economic pursuits while illuminating the wealth disparity between classes. As Linebaugh points out, the “employment” of men like Macheath often had a practical purpose: “The revenue obtained by the highwayman might be a means of personal survival or a means of restocking his business. Thus, in actuality as well as in popular imagination, he shared attributes of both the plebian tradesman and the proletarian victim of oppression” (192).

Characters like Macheath and Peachum build upon the projection of the highwayman as a gentleman engaged in gentleman’s pursuits. Vilification of the high aristocracy such as was seen in the previous plays of this project goes a step further by elevating the lowest classes into a position of virtue with common values shared with the sovereign. Of
course, this is part of the joke that serves to intensify the arbitrariness of power. Jemmy Twitcher, another member of Macheath’s gang, articulates such a sentiment: “Why are the laws leveled at us? Are we more dishonest that the rest of mankind? What we win, gentlemen, is our own by the law of arms and the right of conquest” (II.i.10-14). Incidentally, this was a thought shared by the Jacobites, who saw the pursuits of the highwayman as legally justified. McLynn writes, “Since the post-1688 regime was illegitimate, it followed that in a sense all its property relations were bogus, and that the highwayman was merely claiming back what had been stolen” (57). The most recent Jacobite rebellion had been put down in 1715; however, there were sure to be those among the audience with persisting sympathies to the cause.

The inability of the conventional ruling body to truly establish and maintain control becomes an issue as it becomes a kind of passive participant in the punitive process, or a necessary evil towards the goal of securing a payday. We avoid seeing a sentencing spectacle like the sessions or assizes and instead view scenes of Peachum at his register contemplating the next “decent execution.” Men like Peachum seemingly put the wheels of justice in motion, as he represents the figure that determines who dies next. He is the one who echoes the implicit ideals of the Bloody Code that draws equivalence between life and money by making statements such as, “I hate a lazy rogue, by whom one can get nothing until he is hanged” (I.iii.2-3). State authority remains a present figure in the play, characterized as the body that judges and punishes, but the punishment itself seems less intimidating. Some other hand influences one’s legal consequence, as Macheath muses:

The charge is prepared; the lawyers are met;
The judges all ranged (a terrible show!).
I go undismayed, for death is a debt,
A debt on demand. So, take what I owe. (III.xi.83-6)

Macheath’s awareness of the entire judicial process brings that presence into certain consideration. Judge and jury are all gathered to pass condemnation on a criminal. But it is, as Macheath observes, a “show.” Gay chooses not to portray that show visually, and thus the play even further separates the judicial machine from the individual it hopes to impact and from the audience for whom punishment was meant to function as a violent reminder of the power of the state. For Macheath, the confrontation with the law and the potential for execution bear less meaning than his personal assessment of the situation. Death isn’t something that he fears, but rather another cost in the economic system.

Macheath’s approach to his demise speaks to the criminals’ overall bravado. They are put in place to be heroes and admired by the people. Condemned men derive praise from their position, as Mrs. Peachum illustrates in one of her songs: “The youth in his cart hath the air of a lord, / And we cry, ‘There dies an Adonis!’” (I.iv.22-3). Mrs. Peachum likens the body of an inmate facing certain death to the Greek god of beauty and desire, immediately elevating the convict to an exalted and romanticized position and someone around whom people (especially women) would willingly gather. Someone like Macheath has the potential to emerge as a kind of Pierre or Oroonoko figure as a man who exists in opposition to a corrupt system. “Since the highwayman was the leading protagonist of property crime, he attracted the same sort of ambivalence as the modern bank-robber. The violence of his methods was deplored, but he was considered the logical extension of a society that deified greed” (McLynn 57). A man of violence was
also a man of courage. In the terms of the play, violence is derided much less than other vices such as gambling or womanizing. “A man of courage should never put anything to the risk but his life. / She takes up his pistol. Tawdry takes up the other. / These are the tools of a man of honor” (II.iv.132-4). The violence-as-honor theme is a familiar one, and one that we’ve seen several times even within the scope of this project as a way of entering masculine heroic discourse. Having the women take up the pistols shakes up the standard representation and shows a brief hesitance on the part of the men to commit to the violence required from their profession. It also shows a predisposition toward vices of all kinds and a resistance to forming Macheath into any kind of heroic figure.

Macheath’s “execution” scene presents a surprising departure from past plays in which the machine of the state exacts retribution from a transgressing offender. Macheath, however, is a different kind of condemned man than has been seen in the past. Little question surrounds the fact that the highwayman is a criminal, regularly engaged in acts that are certainly against the law. And despite his stoic reference to death as a debt that must be collected, Macheath’s actions in prison paint a picture of a frightened and weak man who attempts to embolden himself with drinking: “But valor the stronger grows, / The stronger liquor we’re drinking” (III.xiii.15-16). Even though the perception of the criminal has been somewhat romanticized, the level of unpleasantness present in someone like Macheath becomes apparent thanks to a combination of his vices and their consequences. The Player and the Beggar enter the action of Macheath’s procession to the hangman’s noose to reassure that such a thing ought to take place:

PLAYER
But honest friend, I hope you don’t intend that Macheath shall be really executed.

BEGGAR

Most certainly, sir. To make the piece perfect I was for doing strict poetical justice: Macheath is to be hanged, and for the other personages of the drama, the audience must have supposed they were all hanged or transported. (III.xvi.1-??)

As the play approaches its seemingly inevitable conclusion, the audience is led to believe that the condemned man—not to mention all the other unsavory types encountered in the play—will indeed face the gallows as punishment for his crimes. But things quickly shift, and the ending of the play becomes an issue of generic conventions:

PLAYER

Why then, friend, this is a downright deep tragedy. The catastrophe is manifestly wrong, for an opera must end happily.

BEGGAR

Your objection, sir, is very just, and is easily removed. For you must allow, that in this kind of drama ‘tis no matter how absurdly things are brought about.—So, you rabble there, run and cry a reprieve. Let the prisoner be brought back to his wives in triumph.

PLAYER

All this we must do to comply with the taste of the Town.

BEGGAR
Through the whole piece you may observe such a similitude of high and low life that it is difficult to determine whether (in the fashionable vices) the fine gentlemen imitate the gentlemen of the road, or the gentlemen of the road the fine gentlemen. Had the play remained as I first intended, it would have carried a most excellent moral: ‘twould have shown that the lower sort of people have their vices in a degree as well as the rich: And that they are punished for them. (III.xvi.1-28)

Admittedly, this is an “absurd” world where the potential for change is in the hands of the chorus and the rabble. John Richardson cites the form, language, and genre of the Beggar’s Opera as itself offering a “complex resistance to seeing things as they are normally seen” (19). Suspending and subverting conventional expectations, the play disallows viewers to buy completely into all of their preconceived notions about either theater or the execution spectacle. According to Richardson, the play’s “response to power is evasive rather than combative, demonstrating to reader and watcher how to extricate oneself from the constrictions of power and ideology rather than how to oppose them” (28). By implicating the execution spectacle in the absurdity of the drama, the play doesn’t offer necessarily an opposition to the threat but rather an illumination of its own theatricality and governance by convention. Any staged action is only effective as long as it produces the desired response. The power in this penultimate scene ultimately rests in the hands of theatrical conventions that subvert the ideology where theft must be punished by death. The Beggar as the representative force of the conventions of comedy redistributes control to the people to intervene in an injustice against genre and taste. By their intervention, the scaffold is prohibited from having any visual effect in the play,
thus becoming nullified as a present threat. Instead, in keeping with comedic expectations of a wedding and a dance, Macheath reappears not in a noose, but reluctantly prepared to be wed: “So it seems I am not left to my choice but must have a wife at last” (III.xvii.1-2).

The same audiences that delighted at Gay’s comic jab at death also attended The London Merchant. The latter presents a much more serious take on death and the spectral presence of the gallows in England’s mercantile culture. Gay’s language and staging choices humorously lessen the fear of death, while Lillo’s bring death sharply into the foreground as a real and dangerous threat. However, Kavenik raises an interesting point: “Both kinds of plays were didactic in their intent to reform the taste and behavior of audience members” (157). The Beggar’s Opera asked its audiences to restructure the boundaries of convention, while The London Merchant is much less subtle in its didacticism.

George Lillo’s 1731 dramatic work, The London Merchant, claims it will “attempt to show / In artless strains a tale of private woe.” There will be no princes nor nobles nor royal proxies of any kind; this is explicitly the sad story of George Barnwell, a “London prentice ruined” (Prologue 19-21). The prologue also explicitly seeks to align the tragedy with the tradition of Southerne, Rowe, and Otway, keeping alive and relevant those tragic conventions. Though not reaching the extensive numbers of repeated performances enjoyed by The Beggar’s Opera, Lillo’s play was itself quite popular and “regularly performed at the holidays of Boxing Night and Easter in hopes of attracting a large audience of apprentices” (Sharpe 233). Lucinda Cole suggests that the impact of the master/apprentice relationship is felt beyond the boundaries of just this group:
The London Merchant offered different structures of identification to particular audiences at particular times, and...these structures were at least partially provided by the discourse of apprenticeship proper. From this perspective, the initial success of Lillo’s play may be ascribed to its treatment of the apprentice as an emblematic figure who, because he was not yet associated with a given socio-economic group, was able to serve for a segment of the population as a model of the collective itself. (Cole 58)

Indeed, the maximum impact of the play’s message would come from the ideal models of mercantile values creating ripples through the greater populace, enhancing appreciation of the new values system and allowing echoes of Barnwell’s punishment and remorse to reverberate in an almost propagandistic fashion. From the outset, it is plain that this is a bourgeois play concerned with bourgeois values and Enlightenment thinking, and culminating with a very public “private woe.” After a series of capital offenses such as theft and murder, the play unsurprisingly ends with an execution that allows the spectacle of punishment to be performed night after night as an exemplary pantomime.

The apprentices were certainly among those whom the example of the gallows targeted. Peter Linebaugh observes, “Of the 625 Londoners hanged [at Tyburn], 252 (40 per cent) had started an apprenticeship. Altogether, we find that 498 (40 per cent) of the 1,242 men and women hanged in Tyburn in the first half of the eighteenth century for whom we have biographies were apprenticed to a trade” (101). To this high-risk demographic, Lillo offers an explicit cautionary tale that functions to dutifully uphold the status quo. Money and property are glorified without a trace of Gay’s subversive spin.
Barnwell’s master serves as the ultimate paternal figure for the merchant class apprenticeship system and sings the praises of a trade economy to his apprentices:

Methinks I would not have you only learn the method of merchandise and practice it hereafter merely as a means of getting wealth. ‘Twill be well worth your pains to study it as a science, to see how it is founded in reason and the nature of things, how it promotes humanity as it has opened and yet keeps up an intercourse between nations far remote from one another in situations, customs, and religion, promoting arts, industry, peace, and plenty, by mutual benefits diffusing mutual love from pole to pole. (III.i.1-10)

His “thorough goodness” hinges on this attitude that lauds the benefits of the new economy. Importantly, the benefits go beyond the simple accumulation of wealth but extend into the moral development of the individual and the country. Thorowgood and those like him act as the source for the virtues and conscience upon which Barnwell draws during his heartfelt repentance.

Critic David Mazella observes the coming together ofsibility and punishment in the eighteenth century:

The rise of eighteenth-century sensibility, if it accomplishes anything during this period, certainly does not eliminate punishment per se but instead helps to create new, more enlightened practices of punishment that are better suited to a ‘polite and commercial’ society. Hence, in the play’s triumphant final scene—the double hanging of Barnwell and Millwood—a theological, essentially communal notion of sin and retributive punishment
is confronted by a juridical, essentially individualist practice of correction.

(Mazella 796)

In other words, correctional practices should not be viewed only as the heavy disciplinary hand of punishment coming down hard on transgressors, but can be tempered with a more collective notion of morality. The sentencing body simply echoes the conscience of good Christian people, as Barnwell shows through his emotional anguish and mental self-flagellation upon committing murder. Unlike Macheath, Barnwell is not a career criminal acting in the interest of personal financial gain. Barnwell’s mistakes come from placing his trust and admiration in the wrong person (a woman) and allowing himself to be steered away from his otherwise upstanding life pursuing the profits of trade as a merchant’s apprentice. Also unlike Macheath, Barnwell is tremendously remorseful. Barnwell’s torture and punishment begin almost immediately after he murders his uncle for Millwood. Frantic and terrified, he finds that he can’t escape his guilt:

Oh hide me from myself if it be possible! For while I bear my conscience in my breast, though I were hid where man’s eye never saw nor light e’er dawned, ‘twere all in vain. For oh! that inmate, that impartial judge, will try, convict, and sentence me for murder and execute me with never-ending torments. (IV.ii.21-6)

According to Mazella, “Barnwell finds himself already a condemned man in the eyes of his own conscience, which speaks for both divine and human law” (808). Indeed, Barnwell’s inner turmoil helps to validate the legal response to his crimes. He conceives of his guilt already in terms of a judicial proceeding, foreshadowing his own frightening future and creating a parallel between conscience and the law. “The play is driven by
scenes that prove Barnwell’s moral disposition to be an effect of a particular cultural one whose terms and condition are provided—or at least reinforced—by the discourse of apprenticeship proper” (Cole 70). As the play presents it, the system works. Although Barnwell committed the crime, he immediately finds his corrective moral conscience that has presumably been created by the master-servant relationship forged with Thorowgood. “Whatever is your fault, of this I’m certain, ‘twas harder for you to offend than me to pardon” Thorowgood says, and it proves to be true, helpfully legitimizing Thorowgood’s other lessons (II.i.188-90). Thorowgood provides the moral example for the apprentices that we see applied when the deed has been done. At no point does Barnwell suffer from an ethical dilemma and wonder whether what he has done might be pardonable.

Millwood, the catalyst for all things damning for poor Barnwell—fuses the moral with the legal consequences and sets in motion the events that will lead to their ends. To preserve herself, Millwood turns on Barnwell and reports his homicide. Upon his capture, he refuses to implicate her in any way. He even fails to acknowledge the sentencing power of a legal authority, finding the origin of his demise in Heaven:

To whom, of what, or how shall I complain? I’ll not accuse her, the hand of Heaven is in it, and this is the punishment of lust and parricide. Yet Heaven, that justly cuts me off, still suffers her to live, perhaps to punish others. Tremendous mercy! So fiends are cursed with immortality, to be the executioners of Heaven. (IV.ii.92-8)

Once Barnwell is seized, one can be fairly sure that it will not be Heaven but a hangman’s noose that “cuts him off.” But his language allows the audience to continue to conceive of the punishment in higher moral, or even divine, terms. Barnwell’s curse
speaks to Foucault’s observations on the changing nature of punishment later in the eighteenth century, where “it is the certainty of being punished and not the horrifying spectacle of public punishment that must discourage crime” (9). He goes on to write:

The apportioning of blame is redistributed: in punishment-as-spectacle a confused horror spread from the scaffold; it enveloped both the executioner and condemned; and although it was always ready to invert the shame inflicted on the victim into pity or glory, it often turned the legal violence of the executioner into shame. Now the scandal and the light are to be distributed differently; it is the conviction itself that marks the offender with the unequivocally negative sign: the publicity has shifted to the trial, and to the sentence; the execution itself is like an additional shame that justice is ashamed to impose on the condemned man; so it keeps its distance from the act, tending always to entrust it to others, under the seal of secrecy. (Foucault 9-10)

Millwood, the immortal “executioner of Heaven,” may be seen as the shamed hangman to Barnwell’s pitiable victim. However, in order for the moral of the story to take hold for an audience familiar with the public standard of punishment, there must be a final comeuppance for the villain and a good Christian death for our sentimental hero. It can’t be enough just to be intimidated by your conscience (which the explicitly villainous Millwood values at “what’s less than a shadow” (4.2.31)), especially when the world is populated with insensible Millwoods. Better to establish a restraining attack on both sides of the would-be perpetrator and enflame guilt with the very real potential for hanging as well as the equally painful and unrelenting assault on the conscience. The nature of
punishment in *The London Merchant* seems to need to occupy a historical place where it is both secretly inevitable and reinforced by public spectacle.

In its original conception, the play’s conclusion would have relied at least partially on the inevitability of punishment. The audience has to trust that in the imagined ending, justice was served. Without the appendix, the play hesitates to perform the scene of retribution, preferring to have the final moments of the death procession reported by Lucy, Blunt, and Trueman. Lucy and Blunt, Millwood’s former servants, serve as narrators for Millwood’s transgressions at multiple points in the play. It is through them that we learn of the plot to murder the uncle and observe the reforming of a conscience: “If we don’t do our endeavours to prevent this murder, we are as bad as she” (3.3.131-2).

Mazella writes, “The desertion of Millwood by her servants is one of the early and explicit signals to the audience to reject her and her example, or else risk running the same punishments that she does at the end of the play” (800). Even without immediate danger or threat, the servants fear the certainty of punishment. “He who knows of a murder intended to be committed and does not discover it, in the eye of the law and reason, is a murderer,” Blunt says, conflating again the social influences of conscience and authority depicted as working in tandem for maximum effect. While the spectators wait for them to arrive at their sensible reformations of character, watching and listening to the servants also creates a distance from Millwood herself. Keeping Millwood off the stage restricts the effect of the execution to the most ideal of circumstances; it is as if the act occurs in a carefully controlled lab where the condemned dies a just death for a despicable crime, and where the audience is conditioned by mediators to provide the “right” response and absorb the right lesson. But this was not generally the case, and we
have come to understand the role the spectators played in a real-life scaffold scene.

Foucault notes, “If the crowd gathered round the scaffold, it was not simply to witness the sufferings of the condemned man or to excite the anger of the executioner: it was also to hear an individual who had nothing more to lose curse the judges, the laws, the government and religion” (60). The exclusion of Millwood keeps this from happening. Barnwell curses no one, and instead claims, “I find a power within that bears my soul above the fears of death and, spite of conscious shame and guilt, gives me a taste of pleasure more than mortal” (V.ii.72-5). The play sets up Millwood’s judgment in the court of public opinion by having her actions filtered through Lucy and Blunt, who, having abandoned her in favor of moral fiber, proceed to characterize her as “cruel, artful Millwood” and “she with her usual arts of lying, swearing, and dissembling” (3.2). The final report on Millwood also comes from repentant Lucy: “She goes to death encompassed with horror, loathing life and yet afraid to die. No tongue can tell her anguish and despair” (V.ii.307-9). Without the final scene later added to the play, Millwood receives her punishment by being summarily cast out and banished from the text as well as the community of sentiment.

The appended scene is staged thus: “Scene the last. The place of execution. The gallows and ladders at the farther end of the stage” (Appendix SD). Opening on the gallows provides the same kind of resonance as seen before in Venice Preserved: the stage has become a punitive space of death. The gallows and ladders are meant to serve the same visual function that they would in their more “normal” setting. They signal death, and the audience prepares to watch an unencumbered performance of capital punishment meant to be imagined all the way through to the final breaths of the
condemned; it is an image loaded with cultural currency. Lucy’s role as moral mediator and lead spectator continues in the appended scene, and in case there was any doubt by this point, she tells the audience explicitly what they should see and feel: “They are here. Observe them well. How humble and composed young Barnwell seems! But Millwood looks wild, ruffled with passion, confounded and amazed” (Appendix.7-11). There will be no doubt about Millwood’s fate, nor Barnwell’s. “Lillo’s own decision to place the machinery of punishment on-stage reveals the human, institutional basis of the law and morality, a displacement of authority that makes such instructive moral comparisons possible while establishing the grounds upon which moral judgments so produced may subsequently be controverted” (Mazella 799). For all the insistence that the moral compass of authority points in the same direction as Heaven’s, the machinations of death reveal an explicitly human desire to punish other disobedient humans for not abiding by the authority of powerful humans. Just as it was not Heaven that cut Barnwell off, Heaven did not tie that rope. Ultimately it was man’s law that condemned Millwood for something akin to theft of property, which she committed when she lured Thorowgood’s apprentice away from his principal task of making money for his master and again highlighted the targeting of unfortunate classes (in this case, women), who are criminals born of necessity. “The judge who condemns the poor man for being a thief had been a thief himself had he been poor,” Millwood claims (IV.ii.302-4).

But above all—and this was why these disadvantages became a political danger—the people never felt closer to those who paid the penalty than in those rituals intended to show the horror of the crime and the invincibility of power; never did the people feel more threatened, like them, by a legal
violence exercised without moderation or restraint. The solidarity of a whole section of the population with those we would call petty offenders—vagrants, false beggars, the indigent poor, pickpockets, receivers and dealers in stolen goods—was constantly expressed. (Foucault 63)

Millwood has her moment to cry foul on the society that created her and opens up the possibility for the audience to consider an injustice against her. She could serve as a potential rallying point for those oppressed by the violently protective power of the Robinocracy, or for other women who are cast as “universal prey” (IV.ii.306). But in light of Foucault’s observation, we must Lillo’s original decision to keep Millwood’s final words off the stage, instead choosing to have the reformed Lucy narrate the experience. With these instances, the play attempts to redirect crowd solidarity around Barnwell and back in the direction of Christian conscience and virtue, and subsequently—quite literally—“rings the death knell for the male and female rake heroes” (Kavenik 155). Barnwell’s demise is the ideal death that clearly reinforces the values of a bourgeois culture but illustrates them as the choice that good people make.

The punishment spectacle clearly had a firm cultural impact in eighteenth century England’s growing capitalist culture. The gallows cast a long shadow over the English people. These very different plays operate under that same shadow, showing the consequences of the “hanging judge” on the people ruled by the system. Gay’s gang of criminals gleefully deals in death, profiting from the very machine that is meant to deter their existence. Barnwell’s sad fate reinforces the state’s punishment apparatus but also lets the hero make the choice to die well. Representations of figures of judicial authority
are minimal in these plays, keeping the focus largely on the hero and his decisions. The bodies of lower class people—the victims of the punishment machine—arrest the attention of the viewing crowds. It is their voices we hear. Having a chance to look into the varied minds and motives of the individuals who populate Tyburn gestures toward the ideology of the later eighteenth-century reformers who called for an end to public execution and a move toward recognizing the humanity of criminals.
CONCLUSION

In the worst of murderers, there is one thing, at least, to be respected when one punishes: his ‘humanity’.

—Michel Foucault

A successful execution performance ought to be, as Foucault says, a “triumph” for the sovereign. But as we have seen in the evolution of depictions of spectacular punishment on stage from the Restoration to the eighteenth century, that is not always the case. In these punishment simulations, the hero rarely allows this “triumph” of justice to go uninterrupted or unquestioned. In a time when public executions were still highly visible, the theatrical stage functioned as a space to consider options in a carefully controlled environment staged for specific results where the threat of the sovereign can be neutralized in favor of the popular voice. The power of authority is challenged and reimagined by the appropriation and repurposing of the death spectacle, allowing for the condemned to partially affirm a autonomous identity, even if that identity merely serves to reinforce the legal stance.

The theatrical similarities between the scaffold and the stage speak to each other and to the society that produced them. Both are spectacular means of displaying a political message, or reinforcing conventional structures of power, or holding up a mirror to the faults of society, or reifying good behavior while punishing and shaming bad. “In each instance, the gruesome invites us to be either spectators or cowards, unable to look. Those with the stomach to look are playing a role authorized by many glorious depictions of suffering. Torment, a canonical subject in art, is often represented in painting as a spectacle, something being watched (or ignored) by other people. The implication is: no, it cannot be stopped—and the mingling of inattentive with attentive onlookers
underscores this” (Sontag 42). In a play, the torment spectacle lives and thrives, beckoning attentive watchers and allowing a safe space for those who would be inattentive to finally look. Repeated performances and the continual draw of paying audiences further illustrate Sontag’s point that torments cannot be stopped, and even further suggest that not only can they not be stopped, but that they are desired. The playing stage was able to be a didactic “theatre of hell” without the screams of the condemned and the pursuit of real pain, and was able to reconfigure the spectacle to the dual purpose of example and entertainment, playing dead over and over to reinforce or perhaps contemplate or renormalize the changing institutions of power.

Theatrical representations of executions intervene in the spectacle enough to help break down any solid distinction between sovereign authority and individual autonomy. As we have seen, viewing the execution spectacle through the context of the theater reveals its inherent artifice and the ability of the individual to recast his predetermined role in the power play. As Foucault observes, public executions begin to be reevaluated and secreted away in favor of a different method of serving justice that relied less on intimidation and fear—which was itself becoming less and less effective as time wore on:

Protests against the public executions proliferated in the second half of the eighteenth century: among the philosophers and theoreticians of the law; among lawyers and parlementaires; in popular petitions and among the legislators of the assemblies. Another form of punishment was needed: the physical confrontation between the sovereign and the condemned man must end; this hand-to-hand fight between the vengeance of the prince and
the contained anger of the people, through the mediation of the victim and the executioner, must be concluded. (73)

Foucault rightly claims that the violence of the spectacle had gone beyond mere punishment, displayed tyrannical excess, and led the people to acknowledge that blood could be avenged only with more blood. These punishment spectacles allowed for the envisioning of “the excess of armed justice and the anger of the people” (73). Consequently, it would be only a matter of time before the people—having already displayed the capacity to overthrow the process of the spectacle when they felt justice was not being served—would channel that anger, reappropriate the violence, and redirect it back at the sovereign to avenge their oppression and shut down the factor of intimidation.16

Actions of the later part of the century show that the traditional authoritarian wielding of fear as control was in a precarious position. The state moved to suppress some of the more explicit political dissent on stage and keep theaters “complicit to state ideals” (Kavenik 156), marking the rulers’ acknowledgement that such sentiments were not only occurring but also widespread, reaching huge audiences that could potentially be spurred towards anti-establishment thinking. Experiments in satire and unconventionality

16 Foucault cites the example of Pierre du Fort, a Frenchman sentenced to death near the end of the seventeenth century. The hanging was botched and the crowd, seeing unfair and excessive torture coming from the hand of the executioner, intervened, resulting in “the condemned man saved by the ensuing riot and the violent inversion of the penal machinery” (64-5). Additionally, in England, the Gordon Riots of 1780 provide an example of working class rebellion against the punishment machine. Mobs seized Newgate and other symbolically oppressive structures and freed over a hundred prisoners, displaying, as Linebaugh observes, a notable social change:

But the London working class of 1780 had experiences of war, slavery and revolution that substantially changed its nature. It was larger, more international. Moreover, the ruling class found that it could no longer rely upon the microdramas of the individual or small group hanging to terrorize the London population in general or to set examples to particular groups. (334)

The revolutionary actions speak to Foucault’s poignant statement: “Tyranny confronts rebellion; each calls forth the other” (74).
on stage that led to such massive successes as *The Beggar’s Opera* became more difficult to produce once the Licensing Act of 1737 started negotiating the terms:

> The Lord Chamberlain’s powers were reasserted, with specific details about when plays were to be submitted, that is, two weeks before their intended premiere. Although most often used to suppress renegade performances and theaters, these powers were also used to refuse permission to some plays until they were rewritten to exclude material considered injurious to the ruling party. (Kavenik 25)

Staged entertainment seeks a target audience and helps to cement ideas of normal and deviant behaviors, reiterating social norms and values. Worried that drama was beginning to reiterate the wrong norms and contending with the ideology of the ruling class, the state responded with suppression motivated by fear of instability. The people were becoming harder to control and no longer afraid to react against injustice; revolutions would become an integral, bloody part of the late eighteenth century changing European landscape. French Revolutionaries famously took control of the execution spectacle and used it against their rulers, acquainting people with the new, efficient death machine: the guillotine.

We can perhaps thank theatrical representations of violence and their impact on the popular consciousness for recontextualizing and rehumanizing the life of the condemned. Characterization of the condemned as complex humans permits the development of a relationship between the criminal and the audience, aligning with the movement towards humanizing the criminal that would resonate through the prison reform movement of the latter half of the century. “The day was to come, in the
nineteenth century, when this ‘man’, discovered in the criminal, would become the target of penal intervention, the object that it claimed to correct and transform, the domain of a whole series of ‘criminological’ sciences and strange ‘penitentiary’ practices” (Foucault 74). Gaining insight into the stories behind the scaffold through the massive dissemination of theatrical performances helps to extend the perspective of the audience beyond the outward display of terror and power and leads them into a discovery of humanity, and into a place where unjust, exploitative power relations no longer go unquestioned.
Works Cited


An Account of nineteen rebels that were executed at Taunton-Dean, in the county of Somerset, on VWednesday the 30th of September, 1685, for high-treason against His Most Sacred Majestie, &c. London: Printed by E. Mallet, 1685. EEBO. Web. 26 Feb 2013.

An account of what passed at the execution of the late Duke of Monmouth; on Wednesday the 15th of July, 1685. on Tower-hill. Together, with a paper signed by himself that morning in the Tower, in the presence of the Lords Bishops of Ely, and Bath and VWells, Dr. Tenison, and Dr. Hooper. and also the copy of his letter to His Majestie after he was taken, dated at Ring-wood in Hant-shire, the 8th. of July. Dublin: Reprinted by Andrew Crook and Samuel Helsham; and are to be sold by Andrew Crook, on Ormonde-Key, and Samuel Helsham at the Colledge-arms in Castle-street, 1685. EEBO. Web. 26 Feb 2013.


Lorrain, P. *The ordinary of Newgate and his account of the behavior, confessions, and dying-words of Captain William Kidd, and other pirates, that were executed at the Execution-Dock in Wapping, on Friday May 23. 1701.* London: Printed for E. Mallet at the Hat and Hawk in Bride-lane, 1701. EEBO. Web. 25 March 2013.


Purney, Thomas. *The ordinary of Newgate's, account of the behaviour, confession, and last dying speech of Matthias Brinsden, who was executed at Tyburn, on Monday, the 24th of September, 1722. For the murther of his wife Hannah Brinsden, on the 16th day of July, last, in the parish of St. Anne, Black-Fryars*. London: Printed and sold by John Applebee, a little below Bridewell-Bridge, in Black-Fryers, 1722. *EEBO*. Web. 25 March 2013.


*The royal chronicle: wherein is contained, an historical narration of His Majesties Royal progress; the princely cabinet laid open, with an embleme to Great Brittain; the
peoples diadem, proceeding from the ornament and crown of their gracious Lord and soveraign; the incomparable studies of His Majesty in the government of Kings, to the admiration of all forreign princes; and His Majesties leige people within these His realms and dominions; His great endowments aud [sic] experience, in religion, law, and governments; His mercy rejoicing over justice, and his justice cutting out work for his mercy; His gracious pardon to offenders, and His Christian speech to the London ministers. London: printed for G. Horton, living near the three Crowns in Barbican, 1660. EEBO. Web. 12 April 2013.


SCHOLASTIC VITA

SARAH KATHLEEN APPLEBY

GRADUATE STUDY

Wake Forest University
Winston-Salem, North Carolina
MA, English, 2013
Thesis: “The pomp of death, / Is far more terrible, than death itself”: The Execution Spectacle on the English Theatrical Stage, 1660-1731
Advisor: Claudia Kairoff, Ph.D.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDY

University of Mary Washington
Fredericksburg, Virginia
BA, English, 2006

SCHOLASTIC AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Archives Assistant
Wake Forest University Special Collections, Winston-Salem, NC
2012-2013

Participant
International Congress on Medieval Studies
Kalamazoo, MI
2012

ORGANIZATIONS

Lambda Iota Tau, 2006-2013