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Supplication and the Classical Tradition: Vergil, Petrarch, Shakespeare, Milton

Whittington, Leah

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Supplication and The Classical Tradition: Vergil, Petrarch, Shakespeare, Milton

Leah Whittington

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The titlepage of Milton's *Areopagitica* presents the reader with a quotation, first in Greek and then English, from Euripides' play *The Suppliant Women*, performed at the Dionysia in Athens ca. 423 BC. Moved by the entreaties of his mother Aethra, Theseus agrees to honor the supplication of the women of Argos who beg his help to ensure the burial of their dead sons. Athens, Theseus declares in the passage quoted on Milton's pamphlet, is a place where the people are sovereign and allowed the freedom to speak their minds. With the citation from *The Suppliant Women*, Milton subtly expands the genre of his pamphlet; it is not only a speech but also a supplication. Like the Argive women who come to Athens to beg for Theseus' help, *Areopagitica* supplicates its readers, begging for sympathy and seeking to enlist support in the justice of its cause.

Scenes of supplication like the one alluded to on the title page of *Areopagitica* haunt the pages of Renaissance texts as diverse as Montaigne's *Essais*, Sidney's *Arcadia*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, dramatizing a fundamental entanglement between literature and ethics. In classical literature, the suppliant – whether a warrior on the battlefield, an exile at an altar, or a defendant on trial – used both words and gestures to arouse pity in his hearer. The recipient was obligated to evaluate the suppliant's request and decide whether to grant or refuse his plea. The reciprocity inherent in these scenes generates a flexible literary form that brings together in an unstable confluence the philosophy of the passions, the politics of mercy and justice, and the theory of rhetoric.

The dynamic structure of supplication, therefore, speaks to issues at the heart of the literary and cultural movement of the Renaissance. For Renaissance practitioners of imitation, the give and take of suppliant scenes eloquently described their complex

relationship to a literary tradition they simultaneously revered and sought to overgo. The question of how to respond to an act of supplication also appealed to the Renaissance preoccupation with the ethics of self-control and the ambivalent role of the passions in virtuous action. At the same time, the suppliant's plea posed a challenge to humanism's claim that rhetoric could teach ethical behavior. In seventeenth-century England, where the supplicatory gesture of kneeling at communion played a critical role in maintaining religious and political hierarchies, the refusal to supplicate could even be construed as treason.

Supplication and the Classical Tradition: Vergil, Petrarch, Shakespeare, Milton traces these intertwined strands of the literary, philosophical, and political histories of supplication through four interconnected case studies. After establishing the cultural and poetic legacy of supplication handed down to the Renaissance by the *Aeneid*, I show how the structures of supplication shape Petrarch's transformation of the lyric language of desire, Shakespeare's exploration of politics and personhood, and Milton's development of a mechanism for human and divine forgiveness. In each case, this project reveals Renaissance writers struggling to build an ethics and poetics of equality out of the structures of hierarchy.

Chapter One establishes Vergil's *Aeneid* as a focal point for the transmission of the poetics and ethics of supplication. In the turbulent decades after the Roman civil wars, when questions of asking for and granting pardon were pressing political issues, Vergil fashions an epic poem that thematizes the tension between pity and anger that emerges in the supplication ritual. Re-deploying supplicatory moments from Homer's *Iliad*, Vergil creates a complex relationship between narrator and reader that parallels the

poem's interest in the ethics of pity. The conflict between a narrator who pities his characters and an increasingly pitiless hero explodes in Turnus' supplication in the poem's final scene. Aeneas' inability to identify with Turnus, as Achilles does with Priam in *Iliad* 24 and as the narrator does in his sympathetic representation of Turnus' plea, results in the failed supplication that leaves the end of the poem painfully unresolved. Vergil bequeaths to the Latin epic tradition a paradigm of supplication in which the impulse toward clemency is overpowered by the desire for vengeance.

Chapter Two turns to Petrarch's negotiation of the porous relationship between the suppliant's petition for mercy and the medieval lyric language of desire. In the conventions of Provençal courtly lyric, asking for pity was code for love, and supplication was the standard mode for erotic discourse. Responding to the precedent set by Dante and the vernacular Italian tradition, Petrarch examines the implications of using a shared language for pity and love. His Latin epic *Africa* borrows the structure of supplication to interrogate the conflation of the political discourse of justice and mercy and the amatory discourse of erotic passion. The story of Sophonisba and Massinissa in Book 5 of the *Africa* reworks a scene supplication from Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* as a way of examining both the psychology of love and the humanist's relationship to the modes of feeling of the past – setting the stage for Petrarch's revolutionary approach to the language of desire in the *Rime Sparse*.

Chapter Three explores supplication as a touchstone for political, theological, and literary discourse in Shakespeare's England. I begin by examining petitionary practices in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, before turning to supplication as a tool in the logic of revenge in *Titus Andronicus*. In *Coriolanus*, however, supplication

becomes the vehicle for tragic action. Coriolanus' acceptance of his mother's supplication breaks the brittle shell of his selfhood and paradoxically precipitates his psychological and physical dismemberment. Instead of leading to a comic resolution, the successful supplication becomes the catalyst for tragedy. Similarly, in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare activates Turnus' failed supplication to create his own notoriously unresolved ending: instead of delivering the expected scene of repentance and forgiveness, Prospero lacks a suppliant to pardon.

Chapter Four concludes the dissertation with an investigation of the surprising pervasiveness of supplicatory petition in the poetry of John Milton. Supplication becomes the key to the unconventional politics and theological metaphysics of *Paradise Lost*. Satan's refusal to "To bend and sue for grace / With suppliant knee" (*PL* 1.112) speaks to Milton's engagement in contemporary debates over the political and religious orthodoxy of kneeling. Adam and Eve, on the other hand, demonstrate how the malleable structures of classical supplication can be developed into a narrative mechanism for reconciliation and forgiveness. In Eve's petition to Adam in Book 10, we see a reflection of the larger supplicatory pattern of descent and ascent, which characterizes the Milton's controversial conception of the Son's atonement and God's plan for the ultimate unity of creation.

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INTRODUCTION

As Theseus returns home to Athens at the beginning of *The Knight's Tale*, he catches sight of four women dressed in black, kneeling in the path before him. The women are Grecian queens and their husbands lie dead outside the walls of Thebes. Creon, the new king of Thebes, has forbidden anyone to bury the bodies, so the women have come to Athens, determined to appeal for Theseus' help. As Theseus approaches, they throw themselves at his feet in supplication and beg him to ease their sorrow by ensuring that their husbands receive a proper burial. Moved by the spectacle of their grief, Theseus leaps down from his horse, and lifting the women into his arms, pledges to fulfill their request. In this Chaucerian scene of supplication, nothing so befits a "trewe knyght" as a "herte pitous."[1]

When Shakespeare stages the same scene in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Theseus' pity is harder to come by. The queens kneel and plead, but Theseus tries to stop their petition: "O no knees, none" (1.1.74). Realizing that if he lets the women kneel, the codes of chivalric courtesy will oblige him to honor their petition, Theseus attempts to forestall the claims of the suppliant: he is bent on getting married, not on going to war. Only when Hippolyta herself kneels on behalf of the suppliant women does Theseus agree to postpone his wedding and bury the Greek kings. And yet the ethical disasters that follow in the contention between Palamon and Arcite suggest that the stakes of showing pity are much higher than simply putting off the pleasures of the marriage-bed. Theseus' reluctant mercy unleashes the sequence of rivalry, violence, and loss of life that

[1] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, Fragment I: 959, 953 in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 38.

consumes this late tragicomedy, leaving us to reflect that the moral and aesthetic burdens of accepting a suppliant can be just as great as rejecting one.

In the version of the scene that lies in the deep literary past behind both Chaucer and Shakespeare, Euripides shows that the act of asking for pity can be as complicated as granting it. The Argive mothers who make up the chorus of *The Suppliant Women* beg Theseus to pity their suffering and give their sons an honorable burial, but Theseus will not be swayed by their misery alone. He wants to know whether the Greek captains who fell in battle deserve his intervention. Did they go to war with the sanction of the gods? Should he risk the lives of his own citizens to bury the bodies of dead foreigners? In the course of his interrogation, Theseus discovers that, in fact, the campaign against Thebes was undertaken against the gods' advice and without careful deliberation. The Argive king Adrastus admits that he went to war because "the shouting of the young men put me out of my wits."[2] The suppliants, in this case, are in the wrong, and Adrastus is deeply ashamed that he has been reduced to begging for help. When Theseus criticizes Adrastus' poor judgment and refuses to ally Athens with such imprudence, Adrastus chafes against the humiliation of his position: "I did not choose you to be the judge of my troubles or the punisher and rebuker of any discreditable deeds I am found to have committed."[3] Even in his great misfortune, Adrastus feels the shame of asking for pity. In performing the gestures of a suppliant, Adrastus has to own up to his own failure and weakness, and the pathos of the scene is increased by his reluctance to supplicate.

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[2] Euripides, *Suppliant Women*, 160. I use the translation in Euripides, *Suppliant Women*, trans. David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[3] Euripides, *Suppliant Women*, 253-56.

The scene of supplication, as the iterations of the story of Theseus and the Argive women show, is a charged and multifaceted encounter. It presents a structure of human interaction that brings together strands from nearly every register of human experience – emotional, ethical, religious, political, literary – and holds them in an unstable, generative confluence. Because supplication combines such a fertile matrix of ideas, the meeting between suppliant and supplicated is a perdurable scene. Supplication takes place on the battlefield, in the courtroom, before an altar; between enemies, strangers, friends, lovers, authors. And while scenes of supplication appear in almost every time period and every literary genre, they become particularly important in the Renaissance engagement with the classical past. As Renaissance authors struggle to assimilate ancient structures of behavior and feeling, supplication becomes a point of contact, crossover, and dissonance between classical and modern.

We can assemble a grammar of supplication for the chapters that follow from the material of antiquity. In formal terms, supplication is a relationship that involves a gesture, a request, and a response.[4] The suppliant approaches the person he intends to supplicate and makes a physical sign that indicates the beginning of supplication. The gesture of the suppliant almost inevitably involves touch. By bringing his body into physical contact with the person he supplicates, the suppliant says, "I am here, you cannot ignore me. My body is now connected to your body." The recipient of the supplication finds himself in startling proximity to someone who might be a complete stranger. He hears the movement of the suppliant's breath, smells the odors coming from

[4] For the steps of supplication, I am especially indebted to John Gould, "Hiketeia," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 93 (1973): 74-103, and F. S. Naiden, *Ancient Supplication* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 29-162.

his clothes, and feels his life-warmth. The urgency of supplication arises, at least in part, from the feeling that this kind of physical closeness cannot last long; it must produce a transformation of emotion that will manifest itself in a shift of the body, a release from the pressure of bodily contact.

The most characteristic gesture of the suppliant in antiquity was the knee-clasp. Pliny believed this was because the knees were the home of the body's vital strength.[5] According to Servius, natural philosophers were persuaded that certain parts of the body had divine qualities, and since the knees were religiously associated with pity, they became the object of the suppliant's grasp.[6] The lowering of the body necessitated by touching the knees was also understood as a gesture of surrender, submission, and an acknowledgement of dependency. When Odysseus comes to the palace of Alcinous, he goes straightaway to the queen Arete and casts his hands pleadingly about her knees, begging her to help him find a way home to his native land.[7] In an even more iconic scene, Thetis adds to the knee-clasp the gesture of touching the chin. Finding Zeus on the topmost peak of Olympus, "she sat down in front of him, and laid hold of his knees with

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[5] Pliny, *Natural History* 11.103: Hominis genibus quaedam et religio inest observatione gentium. Haec supplices attingunt, ad haec manus tendunt, haec ut aras adorant, fortassis quia inest iis vitalitas. ["The knees of a human being also possess a sort of religious sanctity in the usage of the nations. Suppliants touch the knees and stretch out their hands towards them and pray at them as at altars, perhaps because they contain a certain vital principle"]. I use the text and translation in Pliny, *Natural History, Books VIII-XI*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938).

[6] Servius, *Aeneid*, 3.607: physici dicunt esse consecratas numinibus singulas corporis partes … genua misericordiae, unde haec tangunt rogantes. ["Natural philosophers say that each part of the body is consecrated to a divine power … the knees to pity, which is why suppliants touch them"]. I use the Latin text in Servius, *Servii Grammatici in Vergilii Carmina Commentarii*, ed. Georg Thilo and Hermann Hagen (Leipzig: Teubner, 1881). The translation is my own.

[7] Homer, *Odyssey*, 7.142-52. For translations of the *Odyssey* I use Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. A. T. Murray, rev. George Dimock, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

her left hand, while with her right she clasped him beneath the chin."[8] Her touch demands a response: Zeus cannot withdraw from her grasp without abruptly disengaging from bodily contact. If the intimacy of the knee-clasp is too great, the suppliant might enact it figuratively through language. When Odysseus emerges naked from the sea and wants to supplicate the Phaeacian princess Nausicaa, he worries that a touch might frighten her, so he relies on the verbal equivalent of embracing her knees, saying to her "γουνο□μαί σε, □νασσα" ["I clasp your knees, my queen"]."[9]

Instead of clasping the knees or touching the chin, the suppliant might also embrace the feet, touch the hand or, in a gesture that relies more on visual than sensual effect, stretch out his arms toward the person supplicated. When Priam sees Achilles streaking across the plain in his glittering armor, he groans, stretches out his arms, and begs Hector not to go out to fight: "Hector, my dear child, I pray you, do not face that man alone with no one to aid you, lest quickly you meet your fate, slain by the son of Peleus."[10] The stretching out of the arms has a particular pathos because it is a gesture normally associated with children. Priam's age and grief have transformed his kingly dignity into child-like helplessness. In Euripides' *Heracles*, it is the children themselves who, in a gesture of utter vulnerability, reach up their hands and beg their mad father not to kill them.[11]

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[8] Homer, *Iliad,* 1. 500-1. For translations of the *Iliad* I use Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. A. T. Murray, rev. William F. Wyatt, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
[9] Homer, *Odyssey*, 6.149.
[10] Homer, *Iliad*, 22.38-40.
[11] Euripides, *Heracles*, 986-89. The translation is Euripides, *Heracles*, trans. David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

In addition to performing a gesture, the suppliant also makes a request and justifies it with a series of arguments. He says, "You should grant my request because I am connected to you." The connection might be a past benefit or the promise of future profit. In Euripides' *Hecuba*, the Trojan queen supplicates Odysseus by reminding him of an act of kindness she did him in the past. Odysseus once secretly entered the walls of Troy as a spy, and was brought before Hecuba as a suppliant. When Odysseus embraced Hecuba's knees and begged her not reveal his identity to the Trojans, Hecuba accepted his supplication and now asks that he honor hers in return: "As you admit, you fell in supplication before me and grasped my hand and my aged cheek. I grasp you in the same way, and I ask for the return of the favor I showed you then."[12] The Trojan spy Dolon promises a bountiful ransom of gold and silver if Odysseus and Diomedes will take him to their ships alive, pledging a future financial benefit to his Greek captors.[13] In a much more complicated version of the argument from reciprocity, Lycaon begs Achilles not to kill him because they once shared a common meal. The experience of eating and drinking together has created a bond of guest-friendship, and Lycaon hopes that connection will persuade Achilles to spare his life.[14]

Suppliants also base their arguments on the bonds of kinship. In Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers*, Clytemnestra bares her breast to Orestes and demands that he honor her as his mother: "Stop, my son, and have respect, my child, for this breast, at which you

[12] Euripides, *Hecuba*, 273-76. I use the translation in Euripides, *Hecuba*, trans. David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
[13] Homer, *Iliad*, 10.379-82.
[14] Homer, *Iliad*, 21.74-79.

many times drowsed while sucking the nourishing milk with your gums."[15] Orestes hesitates before the awe-inspiring claim of motherhood, but Pylades reminds him that his obligation to his father has made matricide inevitable. Homer's Hecuba makes the same request to Hector as he prepares to leave Troy to meet Achilles. Loosening her robe and revealing her breast, she pleads "Hector, my child, respect this and pity me, if ever I gave you the breast to lull your pain. Think on these things, dear child, and ward off that foeman from inside the wall, and do not stand to face him."[16] Iphigenia asks to be spared because of the bond between father and daughter. She pleads with Agamemnon: "As a suppliant I lay my body at your knees, the body she gave birth to. Do not kill me before my time: to see the light of day is sweet. And do not compel me to look upon the Underworld. I was the first to call you father, and you called me your daughter first of all. I was the first to be dandled on your knees and to give and receive that dear joy."[17]

One of the most powerful arguments a suppliant can make is an appeal to a shared understanding of justice. The Danaids in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* insist that they should not be held responsible for the murder of their husbands because they were forced into unlawful marriage with their own cousins.[18] At the end of the *Odyssey*, as Odysseus and Telemachus unleash their fury on the suitors, the bard Phemius protests his innocence by explaining that he had no choice when he sang for Odysseus' enemies: "I came to your house to sing at feasts for the suitors through no will or wish of my own. They

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[15] Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers*, 896-98. I use the translation in Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers*, trans. Alan H. Sommerstein (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).
[16] Homer, *Iliad*, 22.82-85.
[17] Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, 1215-22. I use the translation in Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, trans. David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
[18] Aeschylus, *Suppliants*, 4-39.

outnumbered me, and were stronger, and brought me by force."[19] In a remarkable scene in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus asks for admittance to the sacred grove of the Eumenides by arguing that the wrongs he committed were entirely involuntary. He committed all of his crimes without knowing what he was doing, and on that basis he deserves to be excused: "For in myself you could not find any fault to reproach me with, on account of which I committed these crimes against myself and my own. Why, tell me, if a prophecy came to my father from an oracle that he should die at his children's hands, how could you justly make that a reproach to me, whom no father had begotten, no mother conceived, but who was still unborn? And if after I unhappily came to being, as I did, I came to blows with my father and killed him, altogether ignorant of what I was doing and to whom I was doing it, how can you reasonably find fault with an action done unwittingly."[20]

To these gestures and arguments in all their variety, the person supplicated must give a response. If the answer is "Yes" the response can be as simple as a movement of the head; Zeus responds to Thetis' supplication with a nod. In Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, Theseus indicates his acceptance of the plea of the Argive women for the burial of their dead sons by asking them to put away their suppliant wreaths.[21] The most common gesture of acceptance, however, is to take the suppliant by the hand and raise him from his knees. This gesture keeps the interaction on the level of touch and physical intimacy. The bodily contact signifies both the acceptance of the request and the promise

[19] Homer, *Odyssey*, 22.351-53.
[20] Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, 966-76. I use the translation in Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).
[21] Euripides, *Suppliant Women*, 359-61.

of a continued relationship. The person supplicated says, "You have touched me. I accept your touch, and give mine in return." In some cases, the form of the touch symbolically enacts the relationship it aims to create. When the recipient of a supplication clasps the hand of the suppliant, he performs the symbolic action of a pledge or a pact. Similarly, the raising of a lowered body returns the suppliant from his position of humiliation to a relationship of equality.

If the response is "No," the person supplicated might push the suppliant away, withdraw, or attack. Since the energy of the suppliant moves towards acceptance and integration, a rejection introduces a reversal of expectations. In narrative terms, a rejected supplication can force a story that seems to be progressing in one direction to swerve precipitously onto a different course. Menelaus is about to accept Adrastus' plea that he be taken alive and held for ransom – a generous gesture that promises to shift the narrative away from the monotony of relentless slaughter – but just as relief comes into view, Agamemnon appears to upbraid his brother: "Soft-hearted Menelaus, why are you so caring for men? Has great kindness been done to you in your house by Trojans? Of them let not one escape sheer destruction and our hands, not even the boy whom his mother carries in her womb."[22] With Agamemnon's rebuke, the forward march of the battle sequence resumes. Similarly, Odysseus is so close to Ithaca that he can see men lighting the beacon fires in the citadel, when his thoughtless companions open the bag of winds that blows them back to the island of Aeolia. Odysseus supplicates Aeolus and begs him to put the winds into the bag again, but Aeolus refuses: Odysseus' hope of homecoming is frustrated, and the narrative veers into another eddy of digression.

[22] Homer, *Iliad*, 6.55-59.

Even this schematic delineation of supplication's formal properties gives a sense of the richness, fertility, and spaciousness of the subject. Scenes of supplication open up into larger questions of poetics and narrative, the ethics of the emotions, the relationship between ritual and drama, and the politics of hierarchy and equality. But these openings begin with a relationship, a face-to-face encounter between two individuals, who each have their own history, beliefs, and affective identities. Supplication, therefore, inhabits a unique place vis-à-vis ritual and religion. Its formal properties resemble the ceremonial structure of ritual behavior, and both parties recognize that their interaction is connected to the realm of the divine – Zeus is, after all, the protector of suppliants. But supplication loosens itself from the timeless, generalized realm of ceremony because of its status as a dynamic interpersonal experience.[23] Every enactment of supplication is necessarily unique because of the fundamental contingency of the interaction. A supplicates B with a gesture and request. What will B do? Will he accept the request? Will he reject it? Will

[23] Until recently, ritualism has been the dominant emphasis in studies of supplication. For John Gould, supplication is a one-sided action with a set of rules that guarantee success if they are performed correctly. Drawing on the idea of a "unification ritual" from Arnold van Gennep, *Les rites de passage* (Paris: È. Nourry, 1909), Gould argues that if the suppliant makes the proper approach and the proper gesture, the rules of the game are satisfied, and the suppliant must be accepted back into society. Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), advocates for a similar view, though he allows for greater variation in the responses of the person supplicated. The strict ritualist view of supplication has recently been subject to re-evaluation by anthropologists, literary critics, and historians. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1991), has claimed that no two acts of ritual can be identical, and therefore no ritual action can produce the guaranteed efficacy necessary for Gould's account. Similarly, literary critics such as Michael Lynn-George, *Epos: Word, Narrative and the Iliad* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1988) and Kevin Crotty, *The Poetics of Supplication: Homer's Iliad and Odyssey* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994) emphasize the poet's liberty in deciding the outcome of a supplication. Naiden, *Ancient Supplication*, argues that the variability of responses to supplication cannot be adequately accounted for on the strict ritualist view and points to a variety of factors, especially the arguments made by the suppliant, which shape the success or failure of supplication.

he find a middle ground in between? It is impossible to predict. The suppliant draws on the tools of ritual in the hope of generating a positive outcome, but, in fact, there is no way to ensure success.

The tension between ritual and non-ritual elements is one of the fascinations of supplication. Like rituals of initiation, coming of age, and transition, supplication can function as a ceremonial means of bringing an outsider into a group or of shifting the relationships between members already on the inside. But supplication distinguishes itself from other rituals in that its reference to the larger community is thrown into the background by the intensity of the interaction between the main protagonists. It is not like the collective ritual of sacrifice, in which one person performs an action on behalf of the whole. It is also not like private prayer in which the individual orients himself toward the divine. For genuine supplication to take place, there must be two individual participants who are understood precisely as individuals. The element of contingency in their interaction allows for a unique relationship to emerge from ritual action.[24] Consider Priam's plea for the body of Hector at the end of the *Iliad*. Priam's words and

[24] A useful model for the duality of individual and generalized ritual properties is supplied by Roy A Rappaport, "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual," in *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion* (Richmond, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1979), 173-221. Rappaport argues that ritual can be divided into canonical and indexical aspects. The "canonical" part of a ritual is that which has been encoded and prescribed by people other than the immediate performers. It does not convey any information about the participants themselves but "is concerned with enduring aspects of nature, society, or cosmos" (182). "Indexical" aspects of ritual, on the other hand, carry messages about the current states of the people engaging in the ritual. On this model, supplication has a high ratio of indexical to canonical elements; in other words, ritual structures exist but allow for much variation and individual expression in their performance. This will become important in Chapter 1 as we consider the ritual aspects of intertextuality and the pressure that the codes of past literature can exert on present creativity. It will be even more significant for Chapter 3, where Shakespeare's Coriolanus objects to all ritual because he believe that ritual actions have only canonical properties.

gestures of supplication are successful, but not for any generalizable reason. The interaction goes in the direction it does because at that moment Priam is Priam and Achilles is Achilles. Another suppliant who made the same gestures and spoke the same words might fail. Priam's exhorts Achilles "remember your father," but the exhortation only works to arouse Achilles' grief and pity because he knows that he will never see his father again. The uniqueness of the moment is expressed in its very fragility. When Priam tries to leave the tent with Hector's body sooner than Achilles intends, Achilles' anger resurfaces and threatens to destroy the equilibrium the two men have achieved in their shared experience of grieving. If Priam refuses to sit, to eat, and to sleep, that equilibrium will be irretrievably damaged, no matter how many more times he might kiss the "terrible, manslaying hands."[25]

The emphasis on the individuality of the two people involved in the relationship of supplication gives it a deep connection to the realm of the emotions – and therefore to poetry and ethics. It is one of the paradoxes of supplication that its quasi-ritual actions shake loose the most intense personal passions. In Book 21 of the *Iliad*, Lycaon makes a supplication so perfectly ritualized that it would seem to be unrefusable. He embraces Achilles' knees and cites as arguments his past friendship with Achilles, his own misfortune to fall twice into the hands of such an enemy, and his non-involvement in the death of Patroclus. But Achilles is a different man than he was when he captured Lycaon before. He longer accepts the assumptions on which Lycaon's arguments are based. The reciprocity involved in the act of supplication presumes that the suppliant can confer some benefit on the recipient – money, status, service, friendship – but for Achilles, those

[25] Homer, *Iliad*, 24.479.

benefits are no longer worth having. His confidence in the values of heroic society – that the warrior wins prestige for his deeds in life and immortalization through song in death – has been eroded by the loss of Patroclus. Every human life is incommensurable.[26] Rather than inspiring pity, Lycaon's petition arouses profound personal sorrow. Patroclus died, and now Achilles must die too: "There will come a dawn or evening or midday, when my life too will some man take in battle, whether he strike me with the cast of the spear, or with an arrow from the string."[27] For Achilles, Lycaon's supplication becomes the occasion for the articulation of his private mourning both for Patroclus and for himself.[28]

The force of Achilles' emotion – and the physical violence it generates – raises questions that resonate well beyond the reach of the *Iliad* into Roman epic and the classicizing literature of the Renaissance. As an intense interpersonal encounter with high emotional stakes, supplication demands to be considered from the perspective of ethics. What moral responsibilities do we have toward those who petition us? Under what conditions does pity come into conflict with justice? What role do the emotions have in ethical judgment? Literary accounts of supplication also invite reflection on the relationship between ritual, narrative, and the emotions. Supplication allows for the

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[26] For supplication as a ritual of reciprocity, see the essays in Christopher Gill, Norman Postlethwaite, and Richard Seaford, eds., *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[27] Homer, *Iliad*, 21.111-13.

[28] This view of Achilles as an active shaper of conventional forms departs from the widely held view of the Iliadic warrior as a static, passive character. For Achilles' individuality see the two very different approaches of Crotty, *The Poetics of Supplication: Homer's Iliad and Odyssey* and Richard P. Martin, *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989)..

release of emotions that cannot be contained by the ritual form of the interaction – and this is perhaps its greatest gift to the poet.

* * *

The four chapters that follow present what I see as the four primary aspects – the four primary colors, as it were – of literary supplication from Vergil to Milton. The authors and works in these pages appear because, like light passing through a prism, they reveal the essential bands of color that belong to supplication as a literary phenomenon. Vergil, Petrarch, Shakespeare, and Milton have been chosen because they each have a necessary story to tell about why supplication matters for poetry, and the picture that grows out of the record of their engagement with the subject helps to illustrate the fruitfulness of the interaction between literary and ritual forms. It is not my intention to describe a teleological development or to trace a single tradition – though several genealogies lurk beneath the surface of these pages – but rather to build a framework that helps us to think about what supplication is and why it has been such a persistent preoccupation of poets in antiquity, the Renaissance, and beyond.

In the first chapter, I show how Vergil's *Aeneid* establishes supplication as a model for thinking about the relationship between a text and its readers. At the very outset of this study and the literary trajectory it encompasses, we learn that supplication has fundamental implications for us as readers. In an Aristotelian view of poetry, the reader is kept at an emotional distance from the characters whose actions are the subject of literary representation. In his famous formulation of pity in Book 2 of the *Rhetoric*,

Aristotle claims that we can only feel pity for someone who is at a certain degree of removal from ourselves.[29] We must be close enough to the sufferer to imagine that we too could experience a similar misfortune, but not so close that our feeling melts into his. If we are near enough to the sufferer that we feel the same emotion he does, we do not feel the purging pity of catharsis. Poetry, therefore, must preserve an emotional gap between the characters and the audience. Vergil, however, takes the opposite approach to readerly emotion. Through the technique of focalization – which readers since Richard Heinze have identified as the peculiar quality of Vergilian narration – the narrator of the *Aeneid* asks the reader to view the action of the poem from the internal perspective of its characters. As we come to see the events of the poem through their eyes, the characters are given the power to make heavy demands on our sympathies. As a narrative technique, focalization places the reader in the midst of an interaction of supplication. Whether we want to or not, we become receivers of requests for pity and are placed in a position of ethical responsibility. What is the proper way for a reader to respond to a text that supplicates? What are the ethical entailments that come with a poetics of supplication? Whether we choose to pity or not, as readers we must make active judgments, and by the time the poem ends, Vergil ensures that we know what it feels like both to be a suppliant and to receive a supplication.

The second chapter turns to the supplicatory relationship between lover and beloved inscribed in the conventions of medieval courtly lyric. Petrarch and Dante ask us to consider the repercussions of thinking of love as a hierarchical interaction between a suppliant lover and a supplicated lady. When Dante removes the element of petition

[29] For Aristotle's discussion of pity, see *Rhetoric* 2.8, 1385b-1386b, and David Konstan, *Pity Transformed* (London: Duckworth, 2001), 128-36.

from erotic poetry in the *Vita Nuova* and advocates for an autotelic poetry of praise, he invites a reconsideration of the basic structure of love lyric in the troubadour tradition – a reassessment that finds its fullest expression in the *Commedia*. The lover is no longer a suppliant begging for erotic reciprocation from his lady, but rather an observer whose happiness comes from simply praising his beloved, without asking her for anything in return. Love retains its hierarchical structure, but the lady's *pietà* is reinterpreted in religious terms as God's love for humanity. To plead for love in this new framework is to misunderstand the divine nature of the lady and the kind of poetry that should be written about her. Petrarch responds to Dante's provocative revision of the relationship between lover and beloved with questions of his own. What is lost in thinking about love without pleading? What happens to love poetry when the lover is no longer beset by the fear and desire that comes with the possibility of the lady's erotic response? As a way of thinking about these problems, Petrarch develops an alternative possibility for the language of erotic petition in the *Africa*. In the encounter between Sophonisba and Massinissa he explores the relationship of lover and beloved as one of supplication for political pardon. What happens when the rhetoric of lyric pity is put up against the classical rhetoric of military surrender and clemency? Suddenly there is an overabundance of models for imagining the stakes of romantic attachment, a confusion of discourses that use the same terms – pity, mercy, pardon – to signify completely different forms of affective relationship. In his characteristic way, Petrarch also mingles these issues with a larger question about the modes of feeling of the classical past. To what extent do the emotions represented in classical texts map on to the affective relationships of the present? Does the supplicatory relationship of petitioner and petitioned help to

describe the interaction between a classical text and its modern reader? When he returns to lyric poetry in the *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*, Petrarch uses what he has learned from his encounter with Livy to re-invent a supplicatory relationship between lover and beloved that is one of perpetual petition without resolution. By allowing the erotic, political, and religious meanings of mercy to blend together, Petrarch creates a lyric cycle in which hope for reciprocation and completion is held out as a possibility, but love is re-encoded in terms of hierarchy. In the holding pattern that is endless supplication, Petrarch develops his revolutionary portrait of the instability of the self in love.

The inward turn of Petrarch's interrogation of the role of lover-suppliant prepares for the examination in the third chapter of Shakespeare's exploration of the impact of supplication on identity and interiority. Here the ritual aspects of supplication become more important as they are shown to mirror the conditions of the actor performing on stage. The medium of drama always allows the playwright to manipulate the ambiguity of what can be seen and what remains unseen in performance, but while Shakespeare capitalizes on the ambivalence of gesture in many of his plays, in *Coriolanus*, he writes a tragedy specifically about supplication. Unlike earlier plays that are engaged with the representation of antiquity, *Coriolanus* hinges on the emotional and psychological entailments of ancient ritual practice. Supplication has been explored in *Titus Andronicus* for its properties of narrative suspension and its assimilation to the logic of revenge, but in *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare invites us into the psyche of a classical figure who is convinced that the gestures of supplication demanded by Roman custom will compromise his identity. As a self-proclaimed individualist who is paradoxically hypersensitive to the movements of his body and the bodies of others, Coriolanus is

preoccupied with how the gestural movements of the body in supplication – lowering, kneeling, raising – define both the inner reality of who he is and the relationship he has to his social equals, inferiors, and family. For Coriolanus the ritual aspects of supplication are felt as prescribed actions, like a theatrical role, and we are made to see the psychological urgency of the relationship between ritual and theater. If ritual and performance are indistinguishable, then Coriolanus risks a loss of identity when he takes on either side of the supplicatory relationship and moves his body in ways that have been dictated by the rules of ceremony rather than his "bosom's truth" (3.2.59). Accepting his mother's supplication for Rome, therefore, is one step away from suicide. But in the gesture that enacts his capitulation – holding Volumnia's hand – Coriolanus tries to write himself out of supplication's ritual structure of hierarchy and psychological dependency, pointing toward a vision of human relationship based on the hand-clasp rather than the bended knee.

In the fourth chapter, the questions of hierarchy and equality that cling to the gestures of supplication become the central concern of Milton's poetry, politics, and theology. Given that the relationship inscribed in the structure of supplication is inherently unequal – the suppliant's pose and psychological attitude place him lower than the supplicated physically, psychologically, and socially – we might expect suppliants to be scarce in Milton's work. In his prose tracts, Milton argues relentlessly that any superiority in the political sphere must be earned not by family or social position, but by merit. He is an unflinching advocate of the petition as a form of political self-determination, in which citizens demand not grace of favor, but their natural rights. And yet, in *Paradise Lost* supplication is given a fundamental role in the articulation of the

broadest metaphysical questions about the relationship between God and creation. Milton's vision of a world in which "God shall be all in all" (*Paradise Lost*, 3.341) depends on the unfolding of a dynamic process of elevation and descent. While Satan refuses "To bend and sue for grace / With suppliant knee" (*PL*, 1.111-12), the Son's willingness to descend the monist continuum of being and to take on the role of suppliant initiates the cosmic movement that will ultimately eradicate distinctions of hierarchy. Placing *Paradise Lost* in the thick of seventeenth-century debates over the political and religious orthodoxy of kneeling, Milton also draws on classical supplication gestures to address the challenge of creating a believable narrative of forgiveness. The element of contingency involved in the supplicatory relationship is crucial for the narrative success of Adam and Eve's reconciliation. When Eve takes on the words and gestures of a Homeric suppliant in asking Adam to relent his anger, she opens up a new model for human communication – a process that eventually allows not only for a restored relation but also for a degree of equality between husband and wife that is not found in Eden. As the Son is lowered and raised to bring about God's plan of unity for creation, and as Adam and Eve create the first ritual of reconciliation, Milton shows how supplication can be put to use to build equality out of the structures of hierarchy.

I

THE POET AND THE SUPPLIANT IN VERGIL'S *AENEID*

When Achilles accepts Priam's supplication and raises the old man from his knees, "οἰκείρων πολιόν τε κάρη πολιόν τε γένειον" ["pitying his gray head and gray beard"] (*Iliad,* 24.516), the audience of the *Iliad* experiences an exquisite sense of resolution. The narrative that began with Agamemnon's refusal to honor Chryses' plea for the restoration of his daughter comes full circle in Achilles' acceptance of Priam's request for the return of his son. In the twenty-four books that have passed since the poem's inaugural supplication, the circumstances of the protagonists who now meet for the first time in Achilles' tent have utterly changed. Achilles has lost his closest friend, and Priam has come not to beg for Hector's life but to ransom his lifeless corpse. But no matter how fragile the resolution may be, Achilles' decision to accept Priam's supplication – an acceptance which he denied to Agamemnon's ambassadors in Book 9, to Tros in Book 20, to Lycaon in Book 21, and most recently to Hector in Book 22 – brings the story of his wrath to a close. Supplication emerges as a structuring principle of epic narrative and a key to understanding Achilles' evolving relationship to the heroic ethics of compensation and exchange. Just as scenes of supplication signal the poem's movements of opening and closure, so they also mark Achilles' struggle with the unfolding realization of his own mortality.[30]

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[30] For supplication as structuring device of Homeric narrative, see G. Whitfield, "The Restored Relation: The Suppliant Theme in the *Iliad*" (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1967); Jasper Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 24-26, 54-56; Homer, *Iliad, Book XXIV,* ed. Colin Macleod (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 16-35; V. Pedrick, "Supplication in the *Iliad* and

The suppliant drama of Priam and Achilles, however, generates an even more significant insight into Homeric poetics. When Priam begs "□λλ□α□δε□ο θεούς, □χιλε□, α□τόν τ□□λέησον / μνησάμενος σο□ πατρός" ["But respect the gods, Achilles, and take pity on me, remembering your father"] (*Iliad*, 24.503-4), he uses the Greek verb based on the noun □λεος, the virtually untranslatable term that describes the painful visceral reaction one would have in response to seeing someone in extreme distress. This is the term used by Aristotle to describe the spectator's experience of tragic catharsis and the feeling an orator should try to arouse in the judges of a court case.[31] But before it comes to be systematized as a quasi-technical term in the *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, the combination of feelings captured in the term □λεος has a poetic history in Homeric scenes of supplication. As Kevin Crotty has argued, the □λεος that the suppliant aims to arouse in the person he supplicates – a feeling of generalized grief activated both by the visual suffering of the suppliant and the consideration of one's own potential suffering – is the same feeling that the poem cultivates in its audience. Like Achilles' experience of □λεος in Priam's supplication, the poem "offers an 'objective' experience of sorrow, in which the listener feels the characters' distress but in doing so learns about the kind of thing sorrow is, and its significance within human life."[32] The flexible, dynamic conventions of the supplication ritual facilitate the expression and exploration of affective

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Odyssey," *TAPhA* 112 (1982): 125-40; Agathe Thornton, *Homer's Iliad: Its Composition and the Motif of Supplication* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984); Lynn-George, *Epos*; Crotty, *The Poetics of Supplication: Homer's Iliad and Odyssey*; Manuela Giordano, *La supplica: rituale, istituzione sociale e tema epica in Omero* (Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1999). For the heroic code, see James M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hector* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), with the caveat that any values ascribed to "Homeric warrior society" are internal to the poems and should not claim to have an equivalent reality outside the epics.

[31] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1453b-1454a; *Rhetoric* 1385b-1386b.

[32] Crotty, *The Poetics of Supplication: Homer's Iliad and Odyssey*, 69.

relationships that have a parallel in the aesthetic response of the poem's listeners. Priam's supplication in *Iliad* 24 shows that the kind of pity the suppliant seeks to evoke by calling to mind the memory of a loved one's suffering has a strong affinity with the emotion of the audience of epic poetry. The suppliant in the *Iliad* is like the poet.

In this chapter, I will argue that the poetic possibilities of the scene of supplication between Priam and Achilles provide Vergil with a starting point for his own development of a poetics of supplication in the *Aeneid*. In a poem that is also about loss and the fragility of restoration, Vergil develops the ritual of suppliant and supplicated into a vehicle for thinking about the relationship between a text and its readers. In the *Aeneid* supplication is not only cued to a new version of heroism, but it comes to be almost inseparable from the poem's most innovative aesthetic mode. At a historical moment when the issues of asking for and granting pardon were especially topical, supplication in the *Aeneid* takes on a poetic as well as an ethical significance. For the poetic technique which critics since Heinze have identified as Vergil's subjective style can also be described as a rhetoric of supplication. Supplication as a dynamic relationship that involves us, the readers, becomes part of the legacy the *Aeneid* bequeaths to the subsequent literary tradition.

To Pardon or to Punish: Supplication from Republic to Empire

Before turning to Vergil's poetic treatment of supplication in the *Aeneid*, it is essential to examine the ethical and political stakes of asking for and granting pardon in the last decades of the first century BC. Horace's first book of *Satires*, a text which belongs to the mid-30's, voices what would have been for any Roman of the late

Republic an urgent political and ethical question. The poet-narrator declares with confidence: *aequum est / peccatis veniam poscentem reddere rursus* ["it is right to pardon in others what we wish to be pardoned in ourselves"] (*Satires*, 1.3.74-75). For the persona Horace adopts in the poem, nothing could be less controversial than the idea that reciprocal pardon leads to the benefits of a stable, tranquil *amicitia*. The person asked to forgive knows that he too at some point will need to be forgiven, and if he wishes to receive a favorable response when he asks for pardon for his own faults, it is only fair that he respond favorably when such a request is made of him. Mutual forgiveness and reciprocity between suppliant and supplicated becomes a *sine qua non* of friendship.

But when Horace was writing the first book of the *Satires*, the question of how to respond to someone *veniam poscentem* ["asking for pardon"] was by no means as straightforward as *Sat*. 1.3 implies. The narrator's confidence in his concept of personal ethics belies Horace's own experience with the realities attendant on asking for and receiving pardon during the Roman civil wars. As a former soldier on the Republican side at the battle of Philippi, Horace considered the question of clemency a matter of deep personal as well as political significance. After the battle, as he recounts in *Epistles* 2.2.49-52, all his property was confiscated,[33] and though he looks back on the experience with humor and self-deprecation – the loss of money made him *audax* / *ut versus facerem* ["bold to write verses"] (*Ep*. 2.2.51-3) – he returns to the issue of clemency repeatedly in

[33] As Niall Rudd explains in his introduction to Horace, *Epistles, Book II and Epistle to the Pisones*, ed. Niall Rudd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), the ironic self-deprecatory posture that the poet adopts towards his experience at Philippi (his former poverty was a stimulus for poetic production; now that he is successful and financially secure, he would rather sleep than write) should not obscure the seriousness of this episode in his life: "In this famous passage of autobiography serious and at times tragic recollections are summoned up in a throw-away, almost flippant style…The humorous self-deprecation is designed to mollify [the poem's addressee] Florus" (14).

his poetry, sometimes with enthusiasm and gratitude, sometimes with cynicism and ambivalence.

In *Odes* 2.7, written several years after Octavian's victory at Actium, Horace describes the return from war of a friend who had continued fighting against the Caesarians after the deaths of Brutus and Cassius. Horace expresses happiness at being reunited with his friend – whose name, not coincidentally, is Pompeius – but the mock-heroic description of his escape at Philippi betrays traces of anxiety behind the poem's whimsical tone.[34] Looking back on the experience of Philippi, Horace self-deprecatingly laments his *relicta non bene parmula* ["shield left behind not well"] (2.7.10) and the army's *fracta virtus* ["broken virtue"] (2.7.11). No doubt we are meant to enjoy the charm of Horace's self-mockery and to admire the dexterity of his tactful compliment to Augustus (2.7.3). But when he suggests they fill their cups with the wine of forgetfulness [*oblivioso Massico*] (2.7.21), there is an element of escapism in the midst of celebration. Nisbet and Hubbard gloss *oblivioso* as the clement forgetfulness of Augustus whose proclamation of amnesty is the cause of Pompeius' return, but it is tempting to transfer the effects of the oblivion-inducing wine to its drinkers who need to forget the humiliation of being pardoned by fellow citizens. For many former Pompeians, perhaps including Horace's friend "Pompeius," the outward acceptance of Octavian's clemency required a degree of compromise and betrayal of inner conviction that could not so easily pass into oblivion.

[34] On Horace's playful deployment of Homeric and Archilochan elements in this poem, see Robin Nisbet and Margaret Hubbard, eds., *A Commentary on Horace: Odes, Book 2* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), ad loc., 106-121.

The tension in Horace's poetry surrounding the role of clemency in personal and public life reflects a larger tension in Roman thought during the first century BC about the political implications of giving and receiving pardon. In a society wracked by almost a century of civil war, the gestures of supplication took on an enormous significance, and Horace is one of many eloquent and at times contradictory witnesses to the sea-change that took place in Roman political ethics in the roughly sixty years between the assassination of Julius Caesar and the death of Augustus in 14 AD.[35] Before the political convulsions of the first century BC, appealing for pardon in the Roman Republic had been a relatively stable concept with specific rules and a largely uniform practice. While evidence from the early Republic is scarce, by the end of the third century BC it was conventional for a Roman magistrate endowed with *imperium* to receive the supplication of conquered foreign enemies and accept terms of surrender that allowed the defeated to preserve their lives if they submitted to Roman rule. This practice, known as *deditio in fidem*, represented a kind of mercy, though it was assumed that when a defeated people begged for pardon from their Roman conquerors, they would surrender their autonomy in exchange for kinder treatment. As Livy describes it:

> Mos vetustus erat Romanis, cum quo nec foedere nec aequis legibus iungeretur amicitia, non prius imperio in eum tamquam pacatum uti quam omnia divina

[35] For the theory and practice of clemency in the late Republic and early Principate, see Melissa Barden Dowling, *Clemency and Cruelty in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), with comprehensive earlier bibliography. Particularly useful for the period immediately after Julius Caesar's death is Miriam Griffin, "*Clementia* after Caesar: From Politics to Philosophy," in *Caesar Against Liberty? Perspectives on His Autocracy*, ed. Francis Cairns and Elaine Fantham (Cambridge: Francis Cairns, 2003), 157-82.

humanaque dedidisset, obsides accepti, arma adempta, praesidia urbibus imposita forent.[36]

The old custom of the Romans in establishing peaceful relations with a people neither on the basis of a treaty nor on equal terms had been this: not to exert its authority over that people, as now pacified, until it had surrendered everything divine and human, until hostages had been received, arms taken away, and garrisons posted in its cities.

In this "old custom," as Melissa Dowling explains, "the donation of clemency implied the superiority of the donor and the willing subjugation of the recipient. It demanded gratitude of the recipient and imposed an obligation on him that remained for life."[37] Roman historiography is full of examples of this practice during the middle Republic, and only in rare cases was supplication by foreign peoples refused. Even the Samnites, who treated the Romans to a famously humiliating defeat at the battle of the Caudine Forks in 321 BC, later supplicated the Roman senate and were granted a truce.[38] In general, the Romans of the middle Republic were proud of their moral reputation for lenient treatment of defeated enemies and believed that a policy of clemency was in the

[36] Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita,* 28.34.7. I use the Latin text in Livy, *Titi Livi Ab Urbe Condita Libri XXVI-XXX*, ed. Robert S. Conway and Stephen K. Johnson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935). The translation is Livy, *History of Rome,* Books XXVIII-XXX, trans. Frank Gardiner Moore, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). Livy describes this custom to contrast it with Scipio Africanus' more clement treatment of Indibilis and Mandonius who fought against him in Spain during the Second Punic War.

[37] Dowling, *Clemency and Cruelty in the Roman World*, 17.

[38] For further discussion of this episode in terms of Roman supplicatory practice, see Naiden, *Ancient Supplication*, 260.

interest of their national security. Sparing conquered suppliants created new allies, new political friendships, and extended the sphere of Roman influence. Even the Elder Cato, otherwise known for his *severitas*, spoke in favor of the political expediency of clemency in his speech *Pro Rhodiensibus* in 167 BC.[39]

Given the intensely hierarchical nature of the dynamics of pardon, however, it is not surprising to find the Roman aristocracy of the 40's BC deeply suspicious of the relationship between suppliant and supplicated when both parties were Roman citizens. Julius Caesar's lenient treatment of the Gallic tribes who surrendered to him was perfectly in line with earlier precedent, but his generous grants of pardon to defeated Pompeians raised more than a few eyebrows. David Konstan has recently argued that scholars have over-estimated the degree to which Caesar's clemency was received as a tyrannical gesture.[40] Even in the late Republic, he claims, clemency never lost its status as a virtue for the Romans, and negative responses to Caesar's acts of clemency were the exception rather than the norm. Based on the evidence, however, I am more inclined toward Dowling's position that Caesar's policy was popular among his troops and the general public, but not among the political elite.[41] While his liberal exercise of clemency during the civil wars with Pompey won the admiration of the multitude, the senatorial aristocracy resented Caesar's extension to Roman citizens of the pardon that was

[39]Cf. Cato apud Gell. 6.3.47: *ignoscentias utiles esse rebus humanis docet … si ignoscatur, conservatum iri ostendit populi Romani magnitudinem*; 52: *nunc clementiae, nunc mansuetudinis maiorum … commonefacit*. For attitudes towards clemency in the Roman Republic, see Stefan Weinstock, *Divus Julius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 233-43.

[40]David Konstan, "Clemency as a Virtue," *Classical Philology* 100, no. 4 (2005): 337-46.

[41] Dowling, *Clemency and Cruelty in the Roman World*, 20-24.

traditionally reserved for foreign suppliants.[42] To many members of the upper classes during this period, being forced to accept the pardon of a man whom they considered an equal was an unendurable insult. Cicero, whose shifting attitudes are indicative of the general ambivalence felt by the elite in response to Caesar's radically new approach to pardon, fluctuates between appreciation for Caesar's generosity and discomfort with the hierarchy that generosity implied. In his Caesarian speeches, *Pro Marcello*, *Pro Ligario*, and *Pro Rege Deiotaro*, Cicero repeatedly praises Caesar for his mildness, leniency, pity, and clemency. In a letter to Servius Sulpicius Rufus, Cicero expresses approval of Caesar's decision to pardon Marcellus when the whole senate got on their knees to supplicate for the repeal of his banishment.[43] And yet, privately Cicero confesses to Atticus that he finds Caesar's clemency *insidiosa* ["treacherous"] because Caesar uses it as a political tool to ingratiate himself with the masses.[44] Cato famously preferred death by his own hand to the humiliation of receiving Caesar's pardon, and his suicide was a haunting example for ex-Pompeians who, by accepting clemency from Caesar, tacitly confessed the criminality of their allegiance to the senatorial party; certainly this resentment contributed to the conspiracy which led to Caesar's murder.

In the wake of Caesar's assassination, the question of pardon took on an even more central role in Roman politics. Was clemency a political policy that led to peace

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[42] Much of this debate has focused on Caesar's avoidance of the term *clementia* to describe his policy of victory, but whether he called it *lenitas* or *misericordia*, the hierarchical relationship remains the same. If clemency was a virtue, it was a virtue that could only be demonstrated by a superior to an inferior. See Griffin, "*Clementia* after Caesar: From Politics to Philosophy," 159-163.

[43] Cicero, *Ad Familares*, 4.4.3: *cunctus consurgeret et ad Caesarem supplex accederet*.

[44] Griffin, "*Clementia* after Caesar: From Politics to Philosophy," 163, cites as evidence of Cicero's fluctuating attitude to Caesar's clemency *Ad Fam*. 6.6.8 (enthusiasm), *Att*. 8.16.2 (suspicion); *Phil*. 2.116 (skepticism).

and stability or to further unrest? When should a request for pardon be granted and when should mercy be withheld? Caesar's broad application of pardon had evidently failed to secure lasting respite from civil conflict, so in the 30's BC, Octavian and Antony used clemency sparingly, for the most part limiting it to conflicts that arose among their own troops. Aiming to portray himself as an implacable avenger of his father's murderers, Octavian initially avoided replicating Caesar's perilous liberality. After the siege of Perusia, Octavian pardoned his old soldiers and welcomed them back into the ranks of his legions, but had the leaders of the town put to death and the city destroyed.[45] Before the battle of Actium, Octavian did not have the political security to risk future attacks from opponents he had previously spared. Once his claim to power was effectively undisputed, Octavian began to highlight his acts of clemency as well as his acts of vengeance. In the *Res Gestae,* he pronounces his success both in avenging Caesar's murder and in granting pardon to all who asked for it when the civil wars were over.[46] After 27 BC, honored with the title "Augustus" and his house adorned with the *corona civica*, the new *princeps* openly advertised his gentleness, and under Augustus'

[45] Appian, *Bellum Civile*, 5. 32-49. According to Suetonius, *Divus Augustus*, 15.1, some historians report that after the siege Octavian performed a human sacrifice of over 300 Roman senators and *equites* at a specially erected altar of Divus Julius. See Dio Cassius, *Historia Romana*, 48.14.3-6. For a modern assessment of the conflicting ancient accounts, see Josiah Osgood, *Caesar's Legacy: Civil War and the Emergence of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 172. Barbara Levick, *Augustus: Image and Substance* (Harlow, England: Longman, 2010), emphasizes Octavian's brutality in handling the siege.

[46] *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 3.1.

principate, pardon and clemency were thoroughly integrated into the ethics of Roman political and private life.[47]

Seneca's *De Clementia* – a document which will become central to the Renaissance theory of mercy that we will examine in subsequent chapters – demonstrates just how powerful the legacy of Augustus' clemency continued to be. In a passage that Petrarch would use repeatedly as an argument for princely pardon, Seneca describes an interview between Augustus and Lucius Cinna, a Roman senator who had been caught in a conspiracy to murder the *princeps*. Seneca sets up an intriguing contrast between the ruthless tactician of the civil war period and the merciful ruler Augustus eventually became. By the time Augustus was eighteen, Seneca tells the young Nero: *iam pugiones in sinum amicorum absconderat, iam insidiis M. Antonii consulis latus petierat, iam fuerat collega proscriptionis* ["he had already buried his dagger in the breasts of friends, he had already plotted the assassination of the consul Mark Antony, he had already been a partner in proscription"] (*De Clementia*, 9.1.1).[48] Augustus resolved to carry out the same kind of ruthless vengeance on Cinna, but his wife Livia intervened: *severitate nihil adhuc profecisti … nunc tempta quomodo tibi cedat clementia* ["Harshness has done you no good so far … Now find out how clemency can turn out for you"] (*De Clementia*, 1.9.6). Delighted by his wife's advice, Augustus agreed to pardon Cinna, and after a long disquisition on the solicitudes of power, declared: *ex hodierno die inter nos amicitia incipiat; contendamus utrum ego meliore fide tibi vitam dederim an tu*

[47] For the unfolding of this development, see Dowling, *Clemency and Cruelty in the Roman World*, Chapter 2: From the *Crudelitas* of Octavian to the *Clementia* of Augustus: Politics and Propaganda in the Founding of the Principate," 29-75.
[48] For the text, translation, and comprehensive notes on the rhetorical and stylistic aspects of this episode, see Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *De Clementia*, ed. Susanna Morton Braund (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 258-279.

debeas ["From this day let friendship begin between us. Let us compete with each other to see which of us acts in better faith – I in granting you your life, or you in owing it to me"] (*De Clementia*, 1.9.11). According to the story, Augustus not only gained Cinna's permanent loyalty, but no one ever made an attempt on his life again.

As the rhetoric of Seneca's treatise testifies, after nearly a century of political instability, clemency came to be thought of as a policy beneficial to citizens and *princeps* alike – a means of maintaining civic order and an inherent political good. Gestures of supplication gradually became the norm of civic discourse in the Roman Empire, and the hierarchy between suppliant and supplicated was accepted as a political reality. By the early 50's AD, representations of the emperor often depicted him with arm stretched out in a benevolent gesture toward suppliants embracing his knee.[49] In the middle and late Empire clemency was not only no longer regarded with suspicion by the aristocracy, but it had become the hallmark of successful rule.

Supplication and Narrative in Vergil's *Aeneid*

When Vergil began writing the *Aeneid* in the late 30's or early 20's BC, the political and ethical implications of asking for pardon and responding to a suppliant's request were still very much the subject of debate. But if generations of critics have recognized the poem's conflicting ethical claims of *ira* and *pietas* as mirroring the concerns of contemporary life, it is less widely recognized that, like Homer before him, Vergil uses of scenes of supplication to intertwine the ethics of the poem with its poetics.

[49] For the iconography of supplication in the imperial period, see Richard Brilliant, *Gesture and Rank in Roman Art: The Use of Gestures to Denote Status in Roman Sculpture and Coinage* (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1963), especially 70-78, 106-27, 154-61.

Since the pioneering work of Richard Heinze in the early twentieth century, readers of Vergil have come to recognize the subjectivity of the narrator as an essential component of Vergilian poetics.[50] While recent narratological studies of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have complicated the view of Homeric narrative as "objective,"[51] nevertheless Vergilian critics continue to emphasize the contrast between the role of the poet-narrator in the Homeric poems and the poetic voice of the *Aeneid*. As Gian Biagio Conte has argued, in the *Aeneid* the narrator's point of view blends into the perspective of the individual characters, resulting in a "subjective interpenetration between character and narrator."[52] The unification of the perspective of the narrator with his characters means that the story is constantly presented from a particular vantage point inside the poem, and the reader is invited to share and sympathize with individualized experiences of the action. For Conte, this rhetorical strategy of *empatheia* creates a "polycentric" narrative, in which "each individual claim as it surfaces seems always to offer itself as the unique point of view"[53] – a rhetorical technique which, I argue, places the narrator and the reader in the dynamic relationship of suppliant and supplicated.

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[50] Richard Heinze, *Virgil's Epic Technique* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). See also Brooks Otis, *Virgil: A Study in Civilized Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), and Marzia Bonfanti, *Punto di vista e modi della narrazione nell' Eneide* (Pisa: Giardini, 1985). Philip Hardie gives a thorough assessment of Heinze's contribution to Vergilian scholarship in "Vergil's Epic Techniques: Heinze Ninety Years On," *Classical Philology* 90, no. 3 (1995): 267-76.

[51] See especially Irene J. F. de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the Iliad*, Second Edition. (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 2004), and Ibid., "Homer and Narratology," in *A New Companion to Homer*, ed. Ian Morris and Barry B. Powell (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 305-25.

[52] Gian Biagio Conte, *The Poetry of Pathos: Studies in Virgilian Epic*, ed. S. J. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 50.

[53] Ibid., 44.

In order to flesh out this claim and suggest how it affects a reading of the poem, I begin with the *locus classicus* for thinking about questions of subjectivity, point of view, and focalization in the *Aeneid* – the mural paintings of the Trojan War in Juno's temple at Carthage.[54] It is indicative of the complexity of Vergil's adaptation of Homeric supplication scenes that Aeneas' first involvement in a supplication does not place him in either the role of suppliant or supplicated, but rather situates him as the observer of an act of supplication – and not a live enactment of the ritual, but a supplication depicted in a work of art. On one of the panels in Juno's temple, Vergil tells us that Aeneas sees the following scene:

> interea ad templum non aequae Palladis ibant
> crinibus Iliades passis peplumque ferebant
> suppliciter, tristes et tunsae pectora palmis;
> diva solo fixos oculos aversa tenebat. (*Aeneid*, 1.479-82)[55]

> And here the Trojan women
> are moving toward the temple of Pallas, their deadly foe,
> their hair unbound as they bear the robe, their offering,
> suppliants grieving, palms beating their breasts
> but Pallas turns away, staring at the ground. (*Aeneid*, trans. Fagles, 1.579-83)

[54] See the tour-de-force description of the episode in Don Fowler, "Narrate and Describe: The Problem of Ecphrasis," *Journal of Roman Studies* 81 (1991): 25-35.
[55] The text of the *Aeneid* is Virgil, *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969). I use the translation in Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Viking, 2006).

The scene corresponds closely to the parallel episode in Book 6 of the *Iliad*: in response to Hector's urging, Hecuba takes from her treasure chest the most beautiful of her robes, and accompanied by the other Trojan wives, carries it to the temple of Athena, where the priestess Theano prays to the goddess to have pity on the Trojans (*Iliad*, 6.286-311). The proximity of Vergil's narrative to the Iliadic model invites a consideration of the differences between Vergilian and Homeric narration. In Homer, the supplication of the Trojan women is described from the ethically uncommitted perspective of the narrator – what Irene de Jong calls "simple narrator-text."[56] Even at this dire point in the action, when the Trojan women turn to the gods for help and are refused, the narrator has time to linger over the description of the woven robe they carry – it is κάλλιστος ["most beautiful"] and ποικίλμασιν μέγιστος ["intricately wrought"] (*Iliad*, 6.295). Athena is described with one of her usual epithets, □υκόμοιο ["fair-haired"] (*Iliad*, 6.303), and when the Trojan women lift up their hands in the traditional gesture of supplication, the narrator remarks with emotional distance: □νένευε δ□ Παλλ□ς □θήνη ["but Pallas Athena denied their prayer"] (*Iliad*, 6.311).

Vergil's version of the episode, though it relates the same events, is presented from the subjective viewpoint of a spectator looking at a work of art. We are given not an outside account of what the image depicts, but the emotionally charged interpretation of the viewer. From the perspective of Aeneas, Pallas Athena is not fair-haired or the daughter of great Zeus, but instead she is *non aequae* ["unjust"]. Her motionless eyes – a perfectly natural condition for a statue – become evidence of her hostility. In fact, by describing Athena's eyes as fixed, Aeneas paradoxically endows them with the capability

[56] de Jong, *Narrators and Focalizers*, 41-60.

of motion; rather than staring at the ground, Aeneas imagines that they might move toward the suppliants with sympathy. By bringing the statue to life in his mind, Aeneas endows it with moral judgment – so much so that the statue can even be *aversa* ["opposed"]. Where Homer uses a word that emphasizes physical movement – □νένευε means to nod up – Vergil chooses a word that combines physical and moral senses. From the perspective of Aeneas and the focalized narrator, the Trojan women are victims of an implacable goddess, who, despite their offering and flawlessly executed prayer, remains unmoved by their petition.

But Vergil does more here than turn the viewing of a work of art into an occasion for the articulation of character or reflection on the relationship between rhetoric and pictures – though of course these questions are always present in scenes of ecphrasis. In juxtaposing a supplication scene with Aeneas' strongly focalized view of that supplication, Vergil encourages his readers to see the similarity between the poetic technique of the embedded narrator and the action of the suppliant. The narrator's assimilation of Aeneas' point of view acts as a rhetorical supplication to the reader, begging for sympathy for the Trojan perspective. Just as the Trojan women appeal to the goddess' compassion, so the narrator – by letting his voice be saturated by the subjectivity of his character – seeks to inspire pity in the reader. Vergil presents his narrative *suppliciter*, petitioning for the reader's sympathy by giving access to the story through Aeneas' emotionally engaged point of view. The poetic technique of *empatheia* is also a rhetoric of supplication.

This way of thinking about Vergilian narrative, in fact, has a precedent in ancient rhetorical theory. In the highly rhetoricized literary criticism of Vergil's own day,

Conte's "interpenetration between character and narrator" would have been understood as a function of oratory. The business of the orator was to persuade, and one of the essential components of persuasion was the development of a rhetorical persona that would appeal to the speaker's audience. As Antonius explains in Cicero's *De Oratore*, the presentation of an appealing *ethos* was fundamental to winning over the jury in a trial.[57] For Antonius, the importance of character-making can not be overestimated: *Nihil est enim in dicendo, Catule, maius, quam ut faveat oratori is qui audiet* ["Nothing in oratory, Catulus, is more important than to win for the orator the favour of his hearer"] (*De Oratore*, 2.178).[58] The way to win an audience's goodwill is to persuade them to like and trust you: *Valet igitur multum ad vincendum probari mores et instituta et facta et vitam eorum, qui agent causas, et eorum, pro quibus, et item improbari adversariorum* ["A potent factor in success, then is for the characters, principles, conduct and course of life, both of those who are to plead cases and of their clients, to be approved, and conversely those of their opponents condemned"] (*De Oratore*, 2.182). Hence the emphasis Cicero places on developing a rhetorical persona in his speeches – from the outraged consul of the *Catilinarians* to the humble deprecator of the *Pro Ligario*.[59]

The *ethos* of the speaker was aimed at producing a sympathetic response in the listeners. For Vergil's contemporary, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the term *ethos*

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[57] For Cicero's treatment of *ethos*, see Jakob Wisse, *Ethos and Pathos: From Aristotle to Cicero* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1989), and James M. May, *Trials of Character: The Eloquence of Ciceronian Ethos* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

[58] The Latin text is Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Oratore*, ed. A. S. Wilkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). I use the translation in Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Oratore*, trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1948).

[59] William Batstone, "Cicero's Construction of Consular Ethos in the First Catilinarian," *TAPhA* 124 (1994): 211-266.

therefore referred not only to the persona adopted by the orator but also to the emotions he aroused in the audience. In describing the effects of Demosthenes' deployment of *ethos*, Dionysius has recourse to the emotional response the orator's style elicits from him: "When I pick up one of Demosthenes' speeches, I am transported. I am led hither and thither, feeling one emotion after another – disbelief, anguish, terror, contempt, hatred, goodwill, anger, envy – every emotion in turn that can sway the human mind. I feel exactly the same as those who take part in the Corybantic dances and the rites of Cybele the Mother-Goddess" (*Demosthenes*, 22).[60] Dionysius' ecstatic response to Demosthenes' art blurs the distinction between *ethos* and *pathos*, suggesting that both can belong to the audience as well as to the speaker.

More to the point, however, ancient rhetoricians considered the particular form of character-making known as *ethopoieia* to be the most effective device for arousing pity. As speech-writers since Lysias had developed it, *ethopoieia* – translated in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* as "narratio in persona" – involved a form of rhetorical ventriloquism in which the speaker would imagine himself as someone else. Looking back on the golden age of Roman oratory, Quintilian observes that Cicero was a particular advocate of the rhetorical technique of impersonation and employed it to represent the inner voices of his clients, adversaries, and even the imaginary thoughts of the *Patria*.[61] In a famous passage of the *Pro Caelio*, Cicero conjures up the voice of Appius Claudius Caecus – consul, censor, and road builder – to evoke indignation against Caelius' mistress Clodia and pity for Caelius himself as a victim of her seduction. Impersonating the blind

[60] See Dionysius' essays on the Greek orators in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Critical Essays*, trans. Stephen Usher, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).
[61] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoriae*, 9.2.29-32.

Appius, legendary for the strictness of his morals, Cicero speaks in the voice of an old man looking with disgust on the sexual perversion of one of his descendants: *Mulier, quid tibi cum Caelio, quid cum homine adulescentulo, quid cum alieno? … Non patrem tuum videras, non patruum, non avum, non proavum, non abavum, non atavum audieras consules fuisse?* ["Woman, what business do you have with Caelius, what business with an underage boy, what business with someone who is not one of us … Didn't you see your father and uncle, didn't you hear that your grandfather, your great-grandfather, your great-great-grandfather, and your great-great-great-grandfather had all been consuls?"] (*Pro Caelio*, 33-34).[62]

For Quintilian, *ethopoieia* – or *prosopopoieia*, as he sometimes calls it – was particularly appropriate in the peroration of a speech, where the speaker's goal was to arouse the emotions of the judge. The appeal to the emotions was a regular feature of ancient rhetoric; following the Aristotelian emphasis on the importance of the emotions in making judgments, rhetoricians generally viewed the emotions as cognitive rather than irrational.[63] It was not enough to lay out the facts of the case, and to give proof of guilt or innocence; the judge must be stirred to action by emotion. As Quintilian argues: *Probationes enim efficiant sane ut causam nostram meliorem esse iudices putent, adfectus praestant ut etiam velint; sed id quod volunt credunt quoque* ["Proofs may lead

[62] The Latin text is Marcus Tullius Cicero, *M. Tulli Ciceronis Orationes*, ed. Albert Curtis Clark (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905). For the translation, I use Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Ten Speeches*, trans. James E. Zetzel (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), 207.

[63] For the cognitive view of the emotions in ancient philosophy and rhetorical theory, see William W. Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle on Emotion* (London: Duckworth, 1975); Konstan, *Pity Transformed*, 1-25; Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For an overview of contemporary cognitive emotional theory, see Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

the judges to think our Cause the better one, but it is our emotional appeals that make them also want it to be so; and what they want, they also believe"] (*Institutio Oratoria* 6.2.5).[64] But in making an appeal to pity – the *argumentum ad misericordiam* – the orator is most likely to elicit the response he desires if he impersonates the voice of the person whom he wants the judge to pity: [65]

> †Quale litigatore dicit patronum† nudae tantum res movent: at cum ipsos loqui fingimus, ex personis quoque traditur affectus. Non enim audire iudex videtur aliena mala deflentis, sed sensum ac vocem auribus accipere miserorum. (*Institutio Oratoria*, 6.1.25)[66]
>
> When an advocate speaks for a client the bare facts produce the effect; but when we pretend that the victims themselves are speaking, the emotional effect is also drawn from the persons [*ex personis*]. The judge no longer thinks he is listening to a lament for someone else's troubles, but that he is hearing the feelings and voice of the afflicted.

[64] For the Latin text of Quintilian, I use Quintilian, *Institutionis Oratoriae Libri Duodecim*, ed. Michael Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970). The translation is Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, trans. D. A. Russell, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[65] For a philosophical consideration of the *argumentum ad misericordiam* and its place in the judicial process, see Douglas Walton, *Appeal to Pity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997). Walton analyzes the types of arguments made in appeals to pity and makes a case for reconsidering the wide-spread view that the *argumentum ad misericordiam* is a logical fallacy.

[66] Some editors emend the passage to read "Quando enim pro litigatore dicit patronus," which is the reading used by Russell in the Loeb edition.

The effect of *ethopoieia*, as Quintilian would have it, is to mediate the relationship between the advocate's client and the judge. In a crucial passage that is reminiscent of Vergil's use of focalization, the act of impersonation itself is an essential part of *ethopoieia*'s emotional power. When the orator adopts the *persona* of someone in distress he is able to arouse even more pity in his audience than if the victim were to speak for himself: *ad adficiendum potentiora cum velut ipsorum ore dicuntur, ut scaenicis actoribus eadem vox eademque pronuntiatio plus ad movendos adfectus sub persona valet* ["pleas become more effective by being as it were put into their mouths, just as the same voice and delivery of the stage actor produces a greater emotional impact because he speaks behind a mask"] (*Institutio Oratoria*, 6.1.26). The mediation of the orator turns out to be essential for bringing about the desired emotional effect. This is not simply because the orator is trained in eloquence and knows how to speak well, but because of the mimetic function of the "mask" itself. For Quintilian, emotion mediated by an actor or an orator is more compelling than an unmediated expression of the same emotion.

Behind this claim ultimately lies Plato's anxiety that the emotional power of poetry is bound up with its status as *mimesis*. In the literary excursus in Book 3 of the *Republic*, Plato distinguishes two styles of narration: *diegesis haple*, in which the poet speaks as himself, and *mimesis*, where the poet speaks in the voice of a character.[67] In order to illustrate the difference between the two styles, he takes – not incidentally – the example of Chryses' supplication to Agamemnon. When Chryses supplicates, the poet

[67] Plato, *Republic*, 3. 392d-394c. For a discussion of this passage in relation to Plato's broader theory of imitation, see Penelope Murray, ed., *Plato on Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3-30.

"speaks as if he were Chryses and tries as far as possible to make us think that the speaker isn't Homer but the priest himself – an old man" (*Republic*, 3.393a8-b2).[68] This form of direct speech, which Plato categorizes as *mimesis*, is different from the single-layered, unmediated, narration when the poet speaks in his own voice: "If the poet never hid himself, the whole of his poem would be narrative without imitation" (*Republic*, 3.393c11-d1). The crucial point is that the danger of poetry lies not in *diegesis haple*, where the poet speaks as himself, but in *mimesis*, where the poet speaks as someone else. Since imitation imprints itself on the character of the imitator, ideally the only kind of poetry in Plato's city would be simple narration.

For Quintilian, however, *ethopoieia* gets its power precisely from the fact that it is mediated and imitative. The kind of narrative that Plato wants to expel from the ideal city is the kind of speech that is most likely to arouse the desired emotion in the judge. In this debate, Vergil clearly sides with the rhetorical over the philosophical tradition. By adopting the voices of multiple characters and focalizing the narrative through their individual perspectives, the Vergilian narrator performs the rhetorical impersonation used by advocates in the courtroom to elicit pity from the judge. This brings us to the fundamental similarity between the rhetorical theory of *ethopoieia* and the Vergilian narrator-suppliant. In the language of the rhetorical tradition, the orator takes on the character of a person in distress to move the audience to pity. Similarly, by taking on the perspective and *ethos* of a fictional character in his narrative – letting his voice become submerged in that of the character – the focalized narrator supplicates the reader, begging for sympathy for each new point of view.

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[68] Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992).

If, then, the technique of embedded focalization, like the rhetorical act of *ethopoieia*, is a gesture of supplication for the audience's pity, what do we gain from thinking about Vergil's narrative in these terms? The first point to make is that the relationship of the suppliant narrator and supplicated reader generates a model for the interaction of poet and audience that emphasizes the reciprocity of poetic exchange. If the narrator is like a suppliant, using focalization to petition for the reader's sympathy, the reader takes on the role of the supplicated, who must evaluate and respond to the suppliant's plea. The principles of interaction – both ethical and emotional – inherent in the relationship of supplication are transferred to the relationship between poet and reader, requiring active participation on both sides. Reading becomes an activity with serious ethical entailments, particularly if a reader refuses to respond with the pity that the suppliant narrator desires. Vergil's rhetoric of supplication, therefore, allows for a category generally thought to be missing from the rhetorical theory of Vergil's day: the resistant reader.[69] To play out the implications, in the mural painting of the suppliant Trojan women, Athena's hostile response occupies the poetic place of a reader who refuses to be moved – a reader, therefore, who does not allow himself to be shaped and guided by the poet's voice. This equation of resistant reader and the implacable receiver of a supplication will have major implications when we turn to the scenes of supplication at the end of the poem.

[69] Ruth Webb, "Imagination and arousal of the emotions in Greco-Roman rhetoric" in ed. Susanna Braund and Christopher Gill, *The Passions in Roman Thought and Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), argues that the "possibility of a resisting reader who refuses to act in the same way as the ideal or presumed reader is not entertained by Cicero or Quintilian" (123).

The model of suppliant poet and supplicated reader also invites us to consider the reception of a text in terms of the structure of ritual. As we have seen, the effectiveness of ritual is generally understood to be dependent on the performance of prescribed formal properties,[70] and in the roles of suppliant and supplicated, the poet and the reader engage in an interaction that would seem to dictate their behavior. This analogy might be applied directly to Vergil and his readers, but it also offers a model for thinking about Vergil himself as a reader. The generic codes of Homeric epic press upon the text of the *Aeneid* like the pre-determined gestures of a ceremony, threatening to deprive the participants of any spontaneous or individualized action.[71] But in the model of supplication, which departs from strict ritualism in the contingency of the interaction, the receiving author acquires a freedom of response. The tension between the demands of the ceremonialized code and the potential for individual participation allows Vergil to address the unstable status of supplication as an epic trope. This will become especially important as we examine scenes of supplication in which Vergil's characters seem to follow a ritualized script dictated by Homer. As we will see, Vergilian characters sometimes understand supplication as a ritual structure without flexibility or contingency, and their actions follow the rules prescribed by the prior literary tradition. In opening up the question of the degree to which scenes of supplication can be considered as tropes – literary rituals – Vergil poses the issues of imitation and intertextuality in ritual terms.

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[70] See above, "Introduction," 10-11.

[71] For a discussion of the relationship between ritual and poetry, see Crotty, *The Poetics of Supplication: Homer's Iliad and Odyssey*, 17-23. See also Conte's discussion of the "modello codice" in *The Rhetoric of Imitation* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986).

Finally, the model of poet suppliant and supplicated reader provides a way of thinking about the relationship between the narrator and his characters. Vergil invites us to consider the characters in terms of their alignment or non-alignment with the narrator's ethically motivated poetic mode. Aeneas' sympathy with the suppliant Trojan women reveals his identification with the role of petitioner. His feeling sides with the suppliant's request for mercy, and he is resentful of the implacable goddess who refuses to pity. This position places him in step with the poetics of *empatheia* practiced by the Vergilian narrator. Aeneas is aligned with the narrator in support of the suppliant and hostile to the supplicated goddess who refuses to be moved. But what happens when a character departs from the poem's suppliant-centered rhetoric? As we will see, the break between character and suppliant narrator generates a conflict of energies that has crucial implications for the *Aeneid*'s famously unresolved ending.

Aeneas and the Suppliant: Two Versions of *Iliad* 24

If Aeneas' sympathy for the suppliant Trojan women in the mural painting aligns him with the rhetorical strategy of the Vergilian narrator, the *Aeneid*'s two recollections of the Priam-Achilles scene at the end of the *Iliad* continue to develop the affective collaboration between the narrator and the hero. When Aeneas sees the picture of the ransoming of Hector's corpse, he responds vehemently to the depiction of supplication there:

> ter circum Iliacos raptaverat Hectora muros
> exanimumque auro corpus vendebat Achilles.

tum vero ingentem gemitum dat pectore ab imo,
ut spolia, ut currus, utque ipsum corpus amici
tendentemque manus Priamum conspexit inermis. (*Aeneid*, 1.483-87)

And Hector –
three times Achilles has hauled him round the walls of Troy
and now he's selling his lifeless body off for gold.
Aeneas gives a groan, heaving up from his depths,
he sees the plundered armor, the car, the corpse
of his great friend, and Priam reaching out
with helpless hands… (*Aeneid*, trans. Fagles, 1.583-89)

The scene of supplication between Priam and Achilles is radically altered in Aeneas' eyes. It may be that Vergil is drawing on non-Homeric sources for both of the episodes represented here – the mutilation of Hector's corpse and the ransom of his body – either from lost poems in the epic cycle or, more likely, from Athenian drama. Aeschylus is known to have produced a play called *Hectoros Lytra* ("The Ransom of Hector") in which the hero's body was depicted on a scale, the other side of which was balanced with gold.[72] Such images also appear on Attic vaseware, and in general participate in the interrogation of the Homeric value system especially associated with Euripides – in this case by representing Achilles not as a hero capable of comprehending and being touched by human sorrow, but as a cold-hearted merchant, dealing in gold and corpses.

[72] See Stephen Smith, "Remembering the Enemy: Narrative, Focalization, and Vergil's Portrait of Achilles," *TAPhA* 129 (1999): 239 n25.

In the absence of concrete evidence from extant tragedy, however, these lines should be considered as an interpretation of the *Iliad* itself – an interpretation that belongs to Aeneas. In a recent article on the representation of Achilles in the *Aeneid*, Stephen Smith argues that the portrait of Achilles selling the lifeless body of Hector for gold shows that Aeneas, as Hector's kinsman, only sees Achilles in terms of his savagery.[73] This interpretation is corroborated by what Vergil leaves out of Aeneas' view of the scene: Achilles accepting a supplication. As in the mural of the Trojan women, Aeneas is emotionally invested in the position of the suppliant. The sight of Priam stretching out his unarmed hands moves Aeneas so deeply that he misses Achilles' response to Priam's supplication, which is present in most extant depictions of the scene.[74] Instead, Aeneas focuses on Achilles as a heartless mercenary and sees the ransoming of Hector as a vulgar mercantile exchange. The paintings tell him the story he wants to hear – the victimization of the Trojans – and Achilles' complex response to Priam's supplication drops out of Aeneas' line of sight.

When Aeneas revisits the scene again in his account of the fall of Troy in Book 2, Achilles is allowed back into the picture, but the lesson of the supplication of *Iliad* 24 is the same – pity for the suppliant. As a speaker in Aeneas' secondary narrative, Priam presents a reading of Achilles that points to Aeneas' continued alignment with the suppliant narrator. Confronted with the horrifying spectacle of Pyrrhus' merciless slaughter of his son Polites, Priam looks back with a mixture of anger and nostalgia on a

[73] Smith, "Remembering the Enemy: Narrative, Focalization, and Vergil's Portrait of Achilles," 236-42.
[74] See the images of the Priam-Achilles episode in Naiden, *Ancient Supplication*, 48.

previous occasion, when Pyrrhus' father Achilles had behaved very differently towards Priam and his sons:

> hic Priamus, quamquam in media iam morte tenetur,
> non tamen abstinuit nec voci iraeque pepercit:
> at tibi pro scelere, exclamat, pro talibus ausis
> di, si qua est caelo pietas quae talia curet,
> persolvant grates dignas et praemia reddant
> debita, qui nati coram me cernere letum
> fecisti et patrios foedasti funere vultus.
> at non ille, satum quo te mentiris, Achilles
> talis in hoste fuit Priamo; sed iura fidemque
> supplicis erubuit, corpusque exsangue sepulcro
> reddidit Hectoreum meque in mea regna remisit. (*Aeneid*, 2. 533-43)

> At that, Priam, trapped in the grip of death,
> not holding back, not checking his words, his rage:
> 'You!' he cries, 'you and your vicious crimes!
> If any power on high recoils at such an outrage,
> let the gods repay you for all your reckless work,
> grant you the thanks, the rich reward you've earned.
> You've made me see my son's death with my own eyes,
> defiled a father's sight with a son's lifeblood.

> You say you're Achilles' son? You lie! Achilles
> never treated his enemy Priam so. No, he honored
> a suppliant's rights, he blushed to betray my trust,
> he restored my Hector's bloodless corpse for burial,
> sent me safely home to the land I rule!' (*Aeneid*, trans. Fagles, 2.660-72)

Priam's voice summons a view on the literary past that includes Achilles' positive response to supplication. In a recent reading of this passage, Neil Coffee argues that what is at stake in Priam's reproach to Pyrrhus is the distinction between the reciprocity of the heroic code and a model of exchange based purely on economic commodity. According to Coffee, the irony of Priam's prayer for Pyrrhus to receive *grates dignas* and *praemia debita* "conveys Priam's judgment that Pyrrhus has failed to act in the proper reciprocal fashion appropriate even in the conduct of war. Priam reproaches Pyrrhus with the example of his father Achilles, who outdid Pyrrhus by observing the reciprocal bonds of suppliant to supplicated. Priam's language thus suggests that because Pyrrhus lives by self-interested commodity principles rather than reciprocal norms, the gods should treat him with commodity forms of punishment."[75] For Coffee, reciprocal exchange fails and is replaced by a strict *quid pro quo* materialism. Priam's prayer ironizes, but at the same time begrudgingly accepts, tit-for-tat justice based on commodity exchange as the new ethical norm.

Even more important for the significance of Priam's account of the ransoming of Hector, however, is the role of Aeneas a focalizer of the scene. Vergil could expect his

[75] Neil Coffee, *The Commerce of War: Exchange and Social Order in Latin Epic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 47.

readers to know that Achilles' decision in *Iliad* 24 to grant Priam's request and return the body of Hector for burial is a far more complicated event than Priam's *iura fidemque / supplicis erubuit* implies. The act of mercy Priam refers to is not the preservation of Hector's life – Achilles was even more savage in his treatment of Hector than Pyrrhus in his treatment of Polites – but rather the return of Hector's dead body. Vergil's Priam romantically idealizes a past in which the norms of supplication were reverently observed, but omits the fact that in Homer, Achilles routinely flouted the contract of faith between the suppliant and the supplicated. In the exceptional case of the ransoming of Hector, Achilles is moved by Priam's bravery in coming alone to the tent of his enemy and by his identification with Priam's sorrow in his own sorrow for his father who will never see his son again. The notion of respecting the laws of supplication is present, but it is not the rationale most emphasized in the narrative. Achilles understands that a refusal to accept Priam would be a direct contradiction of the commands of Zeus; he has received instructions through Thetis to accept ransom for the dead (*Iliad*, 24. 120-37), but he makes it clear that his anger could very well get the better of him. For the narrative of the *Iliad*, therefore, it is not the laws that protect the suppliant that most govern Achilles' actions, but rather the real presence of Priam in his tent and the pity Achilles feels contemplating the sorrow that lies at the root of all human life.

For Vergil's Priam, however, Achilles' obedience to the laws of supplication is what he remembers most. The old man who has watched the collapse of his city and the cruelty of his conquerors easily glosses over the complications of the past and looks back on his former experience with a selective, idealizing memory. Vergil's Priam limits his memory of the supplication scene to the idea of reverencing the gods and does not

mention his petition for pity or Achilles' emotional response to it. According to the Priam of *Aeneid* 2, Achilles returned Hector's body because it was the right thing to do, not because of Priam's petition or the grief they shared. Achilles' reverence for the laws of supplication stands in stark contrast to the post-heroic present in which mutual respect for the laws of humanity is abandoned. The supplication that brought closure to the narrative of Achilles' wrath becomes the nostalgic memory of an old man who remembers a time when reconciliation, however precarious and equivocal, was at least possible.

The occasion of the narrative plays a decisive role in Priam's moralized depiction of his supplication to Achilles. We hear the version of *Iliad* 24 that Aeneas wants Dido to hear. By telling the story from the perspective of Priam, Aeneas invites pity for the old man whose ideal of the proper relationship between suppliant and supplicated has been betrayed by Pyrrhus. Dido is meant to take away a model of supplication that Aeneas hopes she will follow in her dealings with the Trojans at Carthage. He wants to impress upon her the importance of the obligations that come with being the recipient of supplication. If Dido, like Achilles, blushes before the rights and faith of a suppliant, Aeneas' safety will be ensured. Thus Aeneas presents Dido with Priam's view of Achilles: not a savage mercenary, but a moral, law-abiding hero who accepts the claims of the suppliant. Priam's representation of Achilles as a protector of suppliants provides a counterbalance to Aeneas' own assessment of Achilles in the mural scene, but the fundamental lesson of both stories is the same: the supplicated should pity and accept the suppliant.

The Narrator vs. the Hero

In Aeneas' account of Priam's supplication of Achilles, Vergil provides a model for an ethics of supplication that emphasizes the inviolability of the rights of a suppliant – a view, as we have seen, that corresponds with the "mos vetustus" of Roman military practice and also cooperates with the Vergilian narrator's rhetoric of supplication. Tension begins to emerge, however, as Aeneas becomes involved in scenes of supplication from the perspective of the receiver of supplication, and does not respond in step with Priam's supplicatory ethics or the narrator's supplicatory rhetoric. This tension grows in strength in the battle sequence that begins with the death of Pallas and reaches its climax in the dramatic crescendo that leads to the final duel between Turnus and Aeneas.

Pallas' heroic stand against Turnus in Book 10 ends with the despoliation of his corpse and a three-line eulogy from the poet as the Arcadians carry his body upon his shield from the battlefield. Within five lines, Aeneas is stalking the plain in search of Turnus, turning over in his mind images of his friendship with Pallas and Evander which fan the flames of his revenge. The battle sequence that follows is a compression of Books 16-22 of the *Iliad* in which, like Achilles after the death of Patroclus, Aeneas slaughters droves of his enemies without discrimination. In her study of the long-neglected battle scenes of the second half of the *Aeneid*, Andreola Rossi argues that interpretation of Vergilian battle narrative has focused too much on Homer as a "code model" and has neglected the powerful influence of Roman and Hellenistic historiography.[76] Rossi's point is well taken, and her readings of historiographical type scenes significantly advance the understanding of Vergil's war narrative, but it is

[76] Andreola Rossi, *Contexts of War: Manipulation of Genre in Virgilian Battle Narrative* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

revealing that she avoids scenes of supplication entirely, and one suspects this is because they contradict her argument for a non-Homeric point of reference. Homer provides the primary literary orientation for the three scenes of supplication which structure the narrative of Aeneas' fury after Pallas' death (*Aeneid*, 10.502-605). This is especially true of Magus, whose supplication serves as the most important precursor to the poem's final confrontation.

Magus is Aeneas' first battlefield suppliant, the first warrior who embraces Aeneas's knees and begs for his life – and the first occasion where Vergil specifically addresses supplication in terms of its status as an epic *topos*. In the face of Magus' supplication, Aeneas adopts a stance of implacability, even as the narrator maintains an attitude of sympathy for the suppliant.

> inde Mago procul infensam contenderat hastam:
> ille astu subit, at tremibunda supervolat hasta,
> et genua amplectens effatur talia supplex:
> "per patrios manis et spes surgentis Iuli
> te precor, hanc animam serves gnatoque patrique.
> est domus alta, iacent penitus defossa talenta
> caelati argenti, sunt auri pondera facti
> infectique mihi. non hic victoria Teucrum
> vertitur aut anima una dabit discrimina tanta."
> dixerat. Aeneas contra cui talia reddit:
> "argenti atque auri memoras quae multa talenta

gnatis parce tuis. belli commercia Turnus
sustulit ista prior iam tum Pallante perempto.
hoc patris Anchisae manes, hoc sentit Iulus."
sic fatus galeam laeva tenet atque reflexa
cervice orantis capulo tenus applicat ensem. (*Aeneid*, 10.521-36)

And next he wings from afar a deadly spear at Magus
ducking under it, quick, as the shivering shaft flies past
and Magus, hugging Aeneas' knees, implores: "I beg you now
by your father's ghost, by your hopes for rising Iulus,
spare this life of mine for my father and my son!
Ours is a stately mansion, deep inside lie buried
Bars of ridged silver and heavy weights of gold,
some of it tooled, some untooled – mine alone!
Now how can a Trojan victory hinge on me?
How can a single life make such a difference?"
Magus begged no more as Aeneas lashed back:
"All those bars of silver and gold you brag of,
save them for your sons! Such bargaining in battle,
Turnus already cut it short when he cut Pallas down!
So the ghost of my father, so my son declares."
And seizing Magus' helmet tight in his left hand
and wrenching back his neck as the man prays on,

he digs his sword-blade deep down to the hilt. (*Aeneid*, trans. Fagles, 10.617-34)

Magus' petition presents a conflation of Homeric and non-Homeric elements that raises the question of the extent to which supplication functions like a trope, obeying the rules of conventions prescribed by the literary past. Adapting the model of Priam's supplication to Achilles, Magus hopes to persuade the family-minded Aeneas to preserve his life by comparing his own father and son to Anchises and Iulus. Like the Homeric suppliants Adrastus and Dolon (*Iliad*, 6.45-65; 10.454-56), he promises to provide a generous ransom of gold and silver in exchange for his life. But in an argument that has no previous connection to a scene of supplication, he also declares that one life spared will not make any difference in the grand scheme of a Trojan victory.[77]

This remarkable combination of arguments places Aeneas in the position of a series of Homeric figures – Achilles, Menelaus, Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Diomedes – and in his response, Aeneas addresses those arguments that have Homeric precedents. He has no interest in ransom, and Anchises and Iulus are unanimous in the same opinion. Because Turnus has taken away the *belli commercia* (*Aeneid*, 10.532), there will be no mercy for suppliants. This phrase, which is not attested in Latin literature before Vergil, though borrowed twice by Tacitus,[78] has provoked much speculation on the part of scholars. Neil Coffee rightly observes that Aeneas' attitude towards *commercium* is by no means straightforward. By dismissing Magus' offer of ransom with the contemptuous demonstrative *ista*, Aeneas appears to despise the notion of the buying and selling of life

[77] S. J. Harrison, *Vergil, Aeneid 10* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), ad loc., pp. 205-6, argues that the passage has its origin in the image of the scales of war which Zeus uses to weigh the fate of Hector (*Il*. 22.209ff.).
[78] Tacitus, *Ann*. 14.33.2; *Hist*. 3.81.2.

implicit in the idea of ransom. At the same time, by attributing his refusal of ransom to Turnus' killing of Pallas, Aeneas also suggests that before the death of Pallas, he would have consented to ransoming a suppliant instead of slaughtering him outright, as would have been consistent with the Roman practice of pardoning enemy combatants who offered complete surrender. Indeed, this is how the fourth-century commentator Tiberius Donatus glosses the passage:

> humanitatem, inquit, poscis, quae inter partis solet aliquando praestari, sed istam mihi tuus ille sustulit Turnus et inhumanitatem plenam morte Pallantis docuit.[79]
>
> you are asking for kind treatment, which sometimes exists between factions, but your Turnus took that away from me and with the death of Pallas he prescribed all-out cruelty.

Coffee wants to see Aeneas' rejection of the notion of strict commodity exchange implied by ransom as a moral improvement on the Homeric model, in which captives were routinely sold into slavery or ransomed for money, but a number of factors point to a different view of what is at stake in Aeneas' rejection of Magus. Aeneas' response clings to another Homeric precedent: Book 21 of the *Iliad*, where, in responding to Lycaon's request for mercy, Achilles recalls a time before the death of Patroclus when it was his practice to ransom his captives rather than killing them in cold blood. For

[79] Tiberius Claudius Donatus, *Interpretationes Vergilianae*, ed. Heinrich Georgii (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1969), 10.2.

Achilles, Patroclus' death finally crystalizes the process that began when he withdrew from battle – he can no longer support the values of a system which equates human life with some form of compensation, whether it be the spoils of war or immortality in song. Achilles' response to Lycaon represents one of the most comprehensive explanations for his alienation from heroic society.[80]

In rejecting Magus' supplication, Aeneas, like Achilles, rejects the idea of a possible commensurability between life and material commodity. But for Aeneas, we have no sense of a building dissatisfaction with the rules of combat or the ethical climate of exchange. Aeneas and his men repeatedly give gifts in exchange for alliance or hospitality, so Aeneas' turn against *commercium* comes as something of a surprise. Given the Roman preference for exercising clemency with foreign captives, there would be a historical reason to expect Aeneas' acceptance of Magus' *deditio in fidem*. Similarly, Aeneas' history of sympathy with the suppliant might lead us to expect him to respond favorably to Magus' supplication. The stakes of Aeneas' response, therefore, are literary: Vergil touches on the notion of a topos as a part of a text's ritual relationship to its predecessors. The fact that Aeneas does not respond favorably to Magus stems from the pressure of Vergil's literary tradition. Despite the Roman norm of practicing clemency on the battlefield and despite Aeneas' general predilection for the suppliant, Magus cannot be spared because Achilles refused the supplication of Lycaon. The scriptedness of the scene is made clear by the fact that Aeneas does not respond to Magus's third argument for mercy. The argument that one more death will not matter since the Trojans are going to win anyway is unlike anything in Lycaon's petition to

[80] On this episode in the *Iliad*, see especially Lynn-George, *Epos*, 159-60, 202-9.

Achilles, but Aeneas is locked in a ritualized understanding of poetic reception. He cannot process or respond spontaneously to this pragmatic, unscripted argument for pardon. Instead, Vergil has him blindly follow steps initiated by the Homeric model, ignoring the uniqueness of Magus' request. Magus uses all the arguments available to him – imitation of Priam, the promise of ransom, and the entirely original argument that the Trojans should start behaving like responsible conquerors rather than vengeful warlords – but the supplication fails because Vergil traps Aeneas in a ritualized version of literary relationship. And as he refuses to honor the *iura* and *fides* of the suppliant, Aeneas breaks with the narrator's suppliant-centered rhetoric. A conflict of sympathy emerges between the hero caught in the pre-writteness of the epic tradition and the narrator focalized through the suppliant. This tension will reach its bursting point in the supplication of Turnus.

The confrontation between Aeneas and Turnus at the end of Book 12 is the event towards which the narrative energy of the poem has been driving since the beginning of Book 7, when Turnus is first introduced as Aeneas' new Italian adversary. Their story reaches its climax when Aeneas' spear strikes Turnus, and he falls to the ground:

> incidit ictus
> ingens ad terram duplicato poplite Turnus,
> consurgunt gemitu Rutuli, totusque remugit
> mons circum, et vocem late nemora alta remittunt. (*Aeneid*, 12.926-29)

it strikes home and the blow drops great Turnus
down to the ground, battered down on his bent knees.
The Rutulians spring up with a groan and the hillsides
round groan back and the tall groves far and wide
resound with the long-drawn moan. (*Aeneid*, trans. Fagles, 12. 1077-82)

The wounded warrior lying before his conqueror evokes the Hector of *Iliad* 22 and places Aeneas in the triumphant role of a victorious Achilles. But Vergil subtly adjusts the Hector-Achilles prototype to shift the perspective of the scene toward the subjective view of Turnus. In *Iliad* 22, Achilles' lance is compared to a star, which calls attention to Achilles' beyond-natural valor at the moment when he defeats his doomed enemy.[81] Aeneas' spear, on the other hand, is compared to a black whirlwind [*atri turbinis instar*] (*Aeneid*, 12.923), which encourages the reader to consider oncoming death from Turnus' point of view. The lance is like a black whirlwind to Turnus. Once again, the narrator's strategy of focalization aligns him with the viewpoint of the suppliant.

The shift in perspective from Homeric narration to Vergilian focalization is the beginning of other crucial differences between the two scenes. In the *Iliad*, Hector has received a death wound, so his request to Achilles is not to spare his life, but to respect his corpse. The lance that strikes Turnus, by contrast, sends him to his knees, but the wound is not mortal. It forces him involuntarily into the position of a suppliant, a

[81] For the reading that follows, I am especially indebted to Alessandro Barchiesi, *La traccia del modello: effetti omerici nella narrazione virgiliana* (Pisa: Giardini, 1984), 91-122.

position which the narrator immediately reifies: *ille humiles supplex oculos dextramque precantem* / *protendens* ["Turnus lowered / his eyes and reached with his right hand and begged, / a suppliant"] (*Aeneid*, 12.930-31; Fagles, 12.1081-83). At first, however, Turnus does not ask or plead for anything: *equidem merui, nec deprecor,*" *inquit;* / "*utere sorte tua*" ["I deserve it all. No mercy, please," / Turnus pleaded. "Seize your moment now."] (*Aeneid*, 12.931-32; Fagles, 12.1083-84). Acknowledging the justice of Aeneas' victory and explicitly refusing to sue for pardon, Turnus resists the role that the blow of the lance and intervention of the narrator have given him – that of a suppliant suing for his life. Despite his protestations, however, the lance and the narrator conspire against him. He is forced into a position that Hector did not have to endure: to be wounded, but not fatally, alive and able to be spared. Vergil adjusts the model of *Iliad* 22 to make Turnus as much as possible like failed suppliants Magus and Lycaon. Turnus' predicament too seems to be swept into the inevitability of pre-writtenness.

In the following lines, however, Vergil abandons the alignment between Turnus and Hector, and instead has Turnus beg for his life in precisely the terms that Priam used successfully in his appeal to Achilles:

> miseri te si qua parentis
> tangere cura potest, oro – fuit et tibi talis
> Anchises genitor – Dauni miserere senectae. (*Aeneid*, 12. 932-34)

> Or if
> some care for a parent's grief can touch you still,

I pray you – you had such a father, in old Anchises –

pity Daunus in his old age and send me back

to my own people. (*Aeneid*, trans. Fagles, 12.1084-88)

None of the complexity of Priam's appeal to Achilles appears to have been lost on Vergil. The success of Priam's supplication depends on his ability to bring to life the memory of another person whose imagined distress arouses pity in the person supplicated. Priam asks Achilles to extrapolate from his own experience of grief at losing Patroclus to imagine what his father Peleus would feel if he were to lose his son, as Priam has lost his. For Crotty, "Achilles is asked not simply to feel his father's grief, but to use such feelings as a means of understanding the emotions that characterize the relationship between other fathers and sons as well."[82] In order to do this, Achilles must not only create an identification between Priam and Peleus, but he must also place himself in the role of Hector, the son whom he has just killed. As a result, Priam's supplication requires Achilles to move from particulars to more abstract generalities, but more importantly, it also requires that Achilles feel his own emotions regarding his imminent death. Achilles' pity reveals his "tragic sense of himself as the kind of a being that is exposed to evils." Yet at the same time pity "does not at all entail forgiveness of the person who has inflicted the evils." Pity is not a "forswearing of the feelings roused by bereavement so much as an understanding of them."[83]

In the supplication scene of *Aeneid* 12, Turnus seems to have read *Iliad* 24 precisely as an example of how to persuade. He knows what to do in order to effect a

[82] Crotty, *The Poetics of Supplication: Homer's Iliad and Odyssey*, 76.
[83] Ibid., 80.

successful supplication. Appealing to Aeneas' sense of family duty, Turnus attempts to forge the bond of identification that Priam's supplication inspired in Achilles, using the same technique of calling to mind the memory of Aeneas' father. If Aeneas can be touched by the memory of his own father, surely he will be able to identify with Daunus, about to lose his son. This part of Turnus' speech, then, puts the elements for a successful supplication in place. Turnus appears in the posture of a suppliant, on his knees with arms lifted in a gesture of petition, and he delivers an appeal that in the literary tradition has resulted in the granting of the suppliant's request.

But instead of allowing the Homeric model of reconciliation to bring Turnus to safety, Vergil ensures that Turnus' supplication fails. On an important structural level, the plea for identification does not work because the parallel is not exact. Turnus is pleading for his own life, not the dead body of his son, so the complex form of sympathy created in the Priam-Achilles scene cannot be repeated. But this structural explanation is not entirely satisfactory. Aeneas is, in fact, deeply affected by the appeal and hesitates to consider what he should do.[84] The claims of the suppliant raise doubts in his mind and make him pause to consider and reflect: *et iam iamque magis cunctantem flectere sermo / coeperat* ["Turnus' words / began to sway him more and more"] (*Aeneid*, 12.940-41; Fagles, 12.1096-97). Unlike in Book 10, where Aeneas flatly rejected the supplication of Magus, here he is "on the verge of deliberating," precisely in the way that Seneca will later claim just judgments are to be made in *De Clementia*.[85] Turnus' powerful re-enactment of the rhetorical model of Priam's supplication places all the burden of the

[84] Michael Putnam discusses the sources of this hesitation in "The Hesitation of Aeneas" in ed. Philip Hardie, *Virgil: Critical Assessments of Classical Authors*, Vol. 4 (London: Routledge, 1999), 414-33.
[85] Naiden, *Ancient Supplication*, 274-76.

scene on Aeneas' response. Just as Turnus' initial similarity to Hector seemed to demand a negative outcome for his supplication, so his final plea for his life, *ulterius ne tende odiis* ["Go no further down the road of hatred"] (*Aeneid*, 12.938; Fagles, 12.1093) puts the pressure of the literary tradition on Aeneas to accept.

What erases the possibility of *clementia* in Vergil's version is a highly unritualized element of external contingency. Aeneas' deliberation ends when he catches sight of Pallas' baldric on Turnus' shoulder. The baldric introduces a conflicting message – a counter-argument to the suppliant's plea. In *Iliad* 24, word and image worked together to bring about a successful supplication. The □λεος that Achilles experiences in thinking about his own father's grief is brought about not only by Priam's invitation, "μν□σαι πατρ□ς σο□ο, θεο□ς □πιείκελ□ □χιλε□, / τηλίκον □ς περ □γών, □λο□ □π□ γήραος ο□δ□" ["Remember your father, godlike Achilles, whose years are like mine, on the grievous threshold of old age"] (*Iliad*, 24.485-86), but also by the visual corroboration of the memory Priam seeks to evoke. Unlike Lycaon and Hector, who also ask Achilles to remember the past, the visual experience of an old man standing before him in abject misery creates the link between Achilles' memory and the here and now. Priam's very presence forces Achilles to connect his mental image of his father with the immediate experience of his senses – and this move from Achilles' own particular grief to the grief of his own father and to the grief of fathers in general allows for the transformative moment when Achilles acknowledges Priam's suffering – "□ δείλ□, □ δ□ πολλ□ κάκ□ □νσχεο σ□ν κατ□ θυμόν" ["Ah, unhappy man, many indeed are the evils you have endured in your heart"] (*Iliad*, 24.518). Priam's evocation of an old man's suffering, powerfully condensed and intensified by the ceremony of supplication, brings

Achilles to a more generalized □λεος. His verbal plea is reinforced by his presence as a visual object for Achilles to behold.

In *Aeneid* 12, however, word and image operate at cross-purposes. When Turnus asks Aeneas to think of his father and pity Daunus' old age, Aeneas sees before him not only Turnus – a young man in the flower of youth – but the baldric, a visual reminder of Pallas, whom it was his duty to protect and whom it is now his duty to avenge. The image of the baldric works against Turnus' words, inverting the paradigm Vergil had established by linking Turnus to the rhetorical strategy of Priam before Achilles. It forces Aeneas to think of Turnus not as a man with an old father who will mourn his death, but as the slayer of a youth whom Aeneas thought of as a son. The scene of murder on the baldric – the myth of the Danaids slaughtering their husbands[86] – acts as a further goad. If there is any identification in the final lines of the poem, it is caused by the mimetic effect of the baldric. An image of murder produces murder. In thwarting the collaboration between word and image that brings about the resolution of the *Iliad*, Vergil introduces a new element of contingency to the affective structure of supplication to prevent his hero from taking the step that Achilles does, that of understanding and acceptance. Instead, at the end of an epic poem whose words have filled twelve emotion-filled books, Vergil admits to defeat. Even the poetics of pity cannot compete with the power of an image.

[86] For a discussion of the relationship between the baldric's theme and the end of the *Aeneid*, see Gian Biago Conte, "The Baldric of Pallas," in *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 185-95.

In the final scene of *Aeneid*, therefore, Aeneas permanently breaks with the suppliant narrator. The narrator's consistent use of focalization in representing Turnus' plea invites the reader to take the loser's point of view, to feel what it is like for Turnus' to supplicate. As we have seen, Aeneas generally shares the view of the narrative voice and sympathizes with the suppliant position, but in the final scene, he ruptures the alignment between narrator and hero. The gestures, rhetoric, and literary history of Turnus' supplication make Aeneas hesitate to kill him, but that response is de-activated by the image of the baldric, which overrides the power of rhetoric and gesture. Aeneas acts against the narrative desire created by the poet's rhetoric of supplication and refuses to grant the pardon that the formal devices of the poem appear to demand.[87] This leaves the reader in a fundamentally ambiguous position: the narrator's strategy has been to teach sympathy and invite identification with the suppliant, but the poem ends with the hero's rejection of precisely that kind of sympathetic, suppliant-based reading.

The inconclusiveness of the final scene, produced by the conflicting relationships between character, narrator, and reader, suggests that Vergil is invested in creating a readership that experiences the interaction of supplication from the perspective of both suppliant and supplicated. Just as the narrator conspires against Turnus to make him a suppliant against his desire, so the reader of the poem also must become a suppliant and experience the humiliation of Turnus' appeal. At the same time, the reader must also feel

[87] K. Galinsky, "The Anger of Aeneas," *American Journal of Philology* 109 (1988): 321-48, argues from a historical point of view that a Roman audience would have expected Aeneas to respond to Turnus with righteous anger. Departing from the usual Stoic reading of the poem, Galinsky claims that most Roman readers would have understood the ethics of the poem in Aristotelian terms. As a treaty-breaker, Turnus deserves Aeneas' anger. For an alternative view of the question see Don Fowler, "Epicurean Anger" in ed. Braund and Gill, *The Passions in Roman Thought and Literature*, 16-35.

the burden of responsibility involved in the role of supplicated. Vergil does not suggest escape into cups of Massic wine. In a society still living under the specter of civil war, Vergil insists that the reader emerge from his poem knowing what it feels like to ask for pardon and to be in the position of having to decide whether or not pardon should be granted. The rhetoric of supplication demands readerly action. The inconclusiveness which spills out from the final scene of supplication is what the poem hands down to the subsequent literary tradition – a generative energy of irresolution which supplicates for a response.

II

BEGGING FOR PITY IN PETRARCH'S *AFRICA* AND *RIME SPARSE*

Petrarch's collection of lyric poems, the *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*, begins and ends with a supplication. The speaker of *RVF* 1, reaching out from the depths of time in the lapidary voice of a Roman sepulchral inscription, begs those who listen to the sound of his sighs to give him "pity, not only pardon"[88] – a lyric gesture that fashions the poet into a suppliant before his readers, both pitiful and penitent. The voice of the repentant petitioner returns in *RVF* 366, when Petrarch begs the Virgin "with the knees of [his] mind bent" to end his torment and lead him into the safe harbor of God's peace.[89] These two poems, the bookends of the collection, give the impression of a narrative arc of sin and repentance, the story of a "youthful error" that the older, wiser Petrarch looks back on from the perspective of conversion and remorse. When he bends the knees of his mind in supplication to the Virgin to ask her to "have mercy on a contrite and humble heart,"[90] the lyric speaker seeks pardon for his attachment to Laura's earthly beauty, which has been an obstacle to his search for the transcendent God.[91]

As readers of the *RVF* know well, however, the gestures of penitence and petition that frame the collection tell only part of its story. From any given vantage point inside

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[88] Petrarch, *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*, 1.8: "spero trovar pietà, nonché perdono." I use the Italian text of Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. Marco Santagata (Milano: A. Mondadori, 2004) and the English translation in *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime Sparse and Other Lyrics*, trans. Robert M. Durling (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

[89] *RVF* 366.63: "Con le ginocchia de la mente inchine."

[90] *RVF* 366.120: "*miserere* d'un cor contrito umile."

[91] For a reading of *RVF* 1 that focuses on the creation of a penitential narrative, see Michelangelo Picone, ed., *Il Canzoniere: Lettura micro e macrotestuale* (Ravenna: Longo, 2007), 27-31, with further bibliography.

the lyric sequence, the narrative of repentance may seem like hasty scaffolding that only reveals the incongruity between the building and the façade. Take for example poem 61, "Benedetto sia 'l giorno e 'l mese et l'anno," which unabashedly celebrates the day the poet first saw Laura and the poems that he has scattered ["ò sparte"] (*RVF*, 61.10) in her name. The fragmentation for which the speaker of *RVF* 1 apologizes suddenly becomes a poetic triumph instead of a flaw. From the perspective of poem 61, nothing could be emotionally farther away than the regret of poem 1. This is the magic of the *RVF*: as Teodolinda Barolini has argued, it is simultaneously a collection with a storyline – a *Canzoniere* – and a string of non-sequential, narrative-less *Rime Sparse*.[92] As we read the *RVF*, it reads us as well, exposing our desires and predilections, our longing for plot or our delight in disintegration.

If the bookends of the collection give voice to the kind of petition that is informed by a teleological narrative of conversion, in the 364 poems that fill out the cycle, Petrarch draws on other supplicatory modes, other versions of the relationship between suppliant and supplicated that belong to different generic, temporal, and affective registers. My aim in this chapter is to tease out some of these poetic gestures of supplication and look at their histories before re-entangling them, as Petrarch does, into the fabric of the *RVF*. The interaction between various modes of petition – penitential, political, and erotic, or to put it another way, classical and modern – as they are sounded with different notes and harmonies across the pages of the collection, is crucial to the import of Petrarch's work as a humanist and a poet. If the fiction of the *Canzoniere* is a vehicle for the exploration of some larger philosophical or literary problem, there is ample evidence to suggest that

[92] Teodolinda Barolini, "The Making of a Lyric Sequence: Time and Narrative in Petrarch's *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*," *Modern Language Notes* 104 (1989): 1-34.

Petrarch is concerned with what the humanist poet should to do when the classical discourse of supplicating for mercy and the medieval erotic discourse of supplicating for love look uncannily alike.

If the destination of this chapter will ultimately be the *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta,* I will take a purposefully circuitous route to get there. My intention is to build a set of reference points for the contexts and modes of petition which appear in the *RVF* so that the complexity – even messiness – of their interaction might become apparent. Petrarch read classical authors like Vergil, who describe scenes of supplication, and he inherited a tradition of love lyric whose central premise was the idea of a lover-suppliant. Both of these strands are deployed in the *RVF,* but, as I will show, the most important precedent for Petrarch's examination of supplication as a literary problem of the meeting of ancient and modern occurs in his Latin epic *Africa*. In the story of Sophonisba and Massinissa borrowed from Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita,* Petrarch begins to explore and problematize the dynamics of supplication that will become so central to the *RVF*'s revolution of the language of desire.

Begging for Mercy and Begging For Love

In Canto 10 of *Purgatorio* Dante and Vergil find themselves on the terrace of pride watching the repentant sinners, groaning under the weight of the rocks that represent the burden of their sin, learn to be humble. The rocks on their shoulders link the sinners to the exemplary images of humility, which, by God's divine art, have been carved in stone on the walls that line the uphill path. The engravings function as visual analogues, reminders that the unwieldy stones carried by the penitent sinners have also

been fashioned by the delicate tools of the divine artist. To Dante, the reliefs seem nothing short of miraculous, each so vivid and alive "che non sembiava imagine che tace" ["that it did not seem an image carved and silent"] (*Purgatorio*, 10.39).[93]

Of the three scenes depicted on the intaglios, the one that interests me here is the third in the sequence, the story of Trajan and the Widow. Dante appears to have gleaned the details of the story from a series of medieval lives of Gregory the Great – whose prayers were believed responsible for Trajan's salvation – and from accounts of the sculptures on Trajan's Column which Gregory was thought to have seen.[94] The Trajan relief differs from the two previous scenes both in subject matter and scope; while the stories of the Annunciation and David dancing before Michal represent the New and Old Testaments respectively, Trajan's story takes us into the classical past, where Dante's verbal art most thoroughly loosens itself from the limits of sculptural representation. The words of the Widow's petition and Trajan's response free themselves from the stone and become what Dante describes as "visibile parlare" ["speech made visible"] (*Purgatorio*, 10.95).

The play of artistic media succeeds in capturing the gestural and rhetorical aspects of what is, in fact, a scene of supplication. The story is well known: on his way to a military campaign, Trajan encounters a grief-stricken woman who stops his march and begs him to avenge the death of her murdered son. Trajan responds that he will honor her

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[93] I use the text and translation from Dante Aligheri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York; London: Doubleday, 2003). The Hollander edition is based on the Italian text of *La Divina Commedia*, ed. Giorgio Petrocchi (Torino: Einaudi, 1975).

[94] See Nancy J. Vickers, "Seeing Is Believing: Gregory, Trajan, and Dante's Art," *Dante Studies*, no. 101 (1983): 67-85, with bibliography on medieval legends of Trajan's salvation.

request when he returns from the war. "But what if you do not return?" she replies. "The emperor who succeeds me will do it," he answers. Unsatisfied with the postponement of her request, the woman appeals to Trajan's sense of personal virtue: "L'altrui bene / a te che fia, se 'l tuo metti in oblivio?" ["What use is another's goodness to you / if you are unmindful of your own?"] (*Purgatorio*, 10.89-90). Stunned by the ethical urgency of her plea, he agrees to delay the campaign until he has brought her son's murderer to justice: "Giustizia vuole e pietà mi ritene" ["Justice wills it and compassion bids me stay"] (*Purgatorio*, 10.93). In the lives of Gregory the Great, the *pietà* that moves Trajan to act on behalf of the widow inspires the pope to pray for the emperor's salvation; according to one of the earliest lives, written in the eighth century by an English monk from Whitby, Gregory realized "that Trajan, though a pagan, had done a deed so charitable that it seemed more likely to have been the deed of a Christian than a pagan."[95] Connecting Trajan's compassion with the words of the prophet Isaiah – "Judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord" (*Isaiah* 1: 17-18) – Gregory weeps for Trajan's soul and, in effect, baptizes him with his tears.

The story, as it is told in *Purgatorio* 10, makes it clear that the compassion of the good emperor Trajan is in some way an answer to the feeling expressed by Lactantius when he thunders against Aeneas's lack of pity for Turnus: *nullo igitur modo pius, qui non tantum non repugnantes, sed etiam precantes interemit* ["He was pious, then, in no way who killed not only those not resenting it, but even those making supplication to

[95] Bertram Colgrave, ed. and trans., *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, by an anonymous monk of Whitby, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1968), 126-128. The passage is also discussed by Vickers, "Seeing Is Believing," 70-71.

him"].[96] In Trajan's story we have a *pius princeps* who responds favorably to the prayers of the suppliant; pity and vengeance are not opposed, as in Vergil's climactic drama of supplication, but rather compassion for the weak provokes a sense of duty to act on their behalf. For my purposes, however, the story is important not only for what it includes but also for what it does not. Despite the gender politics potentially available in such a scene, there is nothing erotic about the Widow's petition and no trace of eroticism in Trajan's pity. Dante's "vedovella" shows no awareness that her grief might be seductive. There are no disordered tresses, no glistening eyes, no soft tremulous voice. Her statuesque supplication "al freno / di lagrime attegiate e di dolore" ["at his bridle / weeping, in a pose of grief"] (*Purgatorio*, 10.77-78) appeals to Trajan's moral character, challenging his integrity if he should refuse the justice of her request, but with none of the seductiveness Angelo will later attribute to Isabella's petition on behalf of Claudio in *Measure for Measure*: "O cunning enemy, that, to catch a saint, / With saints dost bait thy hook!" (2.2.180-181).

The absence of eroticism in the scene may seem like an obvious point – Dante is talking about Christian mercy, not erotic love – but the very possibility of a scene of supplication involving male and female actors without an undercurrent of desire is something which Dante himself had to fight through to, against the conventions of the vernacular poetic tradition in which he was determined to make his mark. Dante's decision to separate the rhetorical mode of petition from erotic desire would have a

[96] Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum Libri Septem*, ed. Eberhard Heck and Antonie Wlosok, Bibliotheca Teubneriana (Munich: Saur, 2005), 5.10.5. I use the translation from Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes, Books I-VII*, trans. Mary McDonald (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1964), 352. For Lactantius' critique of Roman attitudes toward pity, see Konstan, *Pity Transformed*, 121-25.

profound impact on Petrarch's negotiation of the same poetic terrain three decades later. But before turning to Petrarch, I will sketch the history of how Dante arrived at the position we find him in with Trajan and the Widow – or, to frame the issue another way, how Petrarch, with the tercets of the *Commedia* pealing in his ears, would have understood Dante's attempt to segregate the language of mercy from the language of desire in relation to the poets who inhabited their shared poetic memory.

I begin this story with what Dante would have readers of the *Commedia* believe about his place in the vernacular lyric tradition. In *Purgatorio* 24, Dante meets the shade of Bonagiunta da Lucca, a Tuscan poet of the previous generation, now purging the sin of gluttony on the Sixth Terrace. Using Bonagiunta as his mouthpiece, Dante constructs a version of Italian literary history that distinguishes his own poetry from all other writing in the *volgare*.

> Ma dì s'i'veggio qui colui che fore
> trasse le nove rime, cominciando
> '*Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore*.'
> E io a lui: "I' mi son un che, quando
> Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo
> ch'e' ditta dentro vo significando."
> "O frate, issa vegg' io," diss' elli, "il nodo
> che 'l Notaro e Guittone e me ritenne
> di qua dal dolce stil novo ch'i' odo!
> Io veggio ben come le vostre penne

di retro al dittator sen vanno strette,

che de le nostre certo non avvenne;

e qual più a gradire oltre si mette,

non vede più da l'uno a l'altro stilo";

e, quasi contentato, si tacette. (*Purgatorio*, 24.49-63)

'But tell me if I see before me

the one who brought forth those new rhymes

begun with *Ladies that have intelligence of love*.'

And I to him: 'I am one who, when Love

inspires me, take note and, as he dictates

deep within me, so I set it forth.'

'O my brother,' he said, 'now I understand the knot

that kept the Notary, Guittone, and me

on this side of the sweet new style I hear.

'I clearly understand that your pens

follow faithfully whatever Love may dictate,

which, to be sure, was not the case with ours.

And he who takes the next step sees in this

what separates the one style from the other.'

The apparently straightforward division between old and new in Bonagiunta's description of Dante as the creator of the "nove rime" represented by the *canzone* "Donne

ch'avete intelletto d'amore" naturally raises the question of what precisely distinguishes the "nove rime" and the "dolce stil nuovo" from the poetry that Bonagiunta associates with himself and the older generation of poets that includes Giacomo da Lentini and Guittone d'Arezzo. What separates "l'uno a l'altro stilo"? If Bonagiunta's words are crafted to obscure, one thing at least is clear: the difference between old and new is as much a matter of what one writes as how one writes it. The pilgrim's assertion that he composes according to Love's dictation, like a scribe copying down the inspired words of scripture, suggests that what is ultimately at stake in the "nove rime" is a theoretical view of the nature of love. In Dante's highly idiosyncratic view of his poetic heritage, the novelty of the "dolce stil novo" depends as much on his theologized version of the lyric beloved as on any refinement in poetic technique. Looking back on his poetic career from the vantage point of *Purgatorio*, Dante considers the first *canzone* of the *Vita Nuova* as a turning point in his understanding of love and love poetry; the "nove rime" and the "dolce stil nuovo" belong to him alone, as the first Italian poet to equate the lady of his heart's desire with "l'amor che move il sole e le altre stelle" ["the Love that moves the sun and the other stars"] (*Paradiso*, 33.145).[97]

[97] The debate over the meaning of "dolce stil nuovo" continues to be one of the most contentious areas in Dante studies. Francesco De Sanctis was the first to use Bonagiunta's phrase to describe a "school" of poets, including Dante, who wrote vernacular love lyrics in a refined, sophisticated, scholastic style. Foremost among this group of "stilnovisti" were Guido Guinizelli and Dante's friends Guido Cavalcanti, Lapo Gianni, and Cino da Pistoia. That there existed a younger generation of urban poets who shared a common poetic language is a matter of historical fact, but it is not at all clear that Dante means to refer to these poets with the phrase "dolce stil novo." Robert Hollander, Teodolinda Barolini, and others have argued persuasively that the term "dolce stil novo," in its original context, has little to do with a "school" of poets with a coherent poetic agenda. To refer to the group of young intellectuals writing love poetry in the cities of central Italy during the 1270's and 80's as "stilnovisti" or as members of a self-defined "dolce stil novo" is to miss the central point Dante is trying to make in the

The conceptual breakthrough that enabled Dante to describe "Donne ch'avete" as "nove rime" and the poetics of the *Commedia* as a "dolce stil novo" involved a rejection of the main assumptions of the tradition of Italian vernacular love poetry that blossomed for the first time among the poets of the so-called Sicilian School at the imperial court of Frederick II in the early decades of the thirteenth century.[98] The intellectuals and imperial functionaries of Frederick's Magna Curia who successfully transplanted the conventions of Provençal troubadour lyric from the feudal countryside of southern France to the cosmopolitan world of Palermo devoted particular attention to the supplicatory rhetoric of love. The largest collection of early Italian lyric poetry, the so-called *Canzoniere Vaticana* (Vat. Lat. 3793), shows the poets of the *scuola siciliana* writing in the Provençal style about a lover's service to a high born lady (Ital. *madonna*; Prov. *midons*), from whom he hoped to receive a reward (Ital. *guiderdone*, Prov. *guerdon*) in return for his faithfulness and devotion. At its conceptual core, this kind of poetry assumed a "rhetorical situation" in which the lover petitioned for the lady's favor by describing his

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pilgrim's conversation with Bonagiunta: that Dante's style is entirely unique because he bases his love poetry on a theologized conception of the lyric beloved. For an overview of the question, see E. Pasquini, "Il 'dolce stil novo'," in *Storia della letteratura italiana* (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1995), I: 649-721. Hollander's important contribution is "Dante's 'Dolce Stil Novo' and the *Comedy*," in *Dante: Mito e Poesia: Atti del Secondo Seminario Dantesco Internazionale, Ascona, 23-27 Giugno 1997* (Firenze: F. Cesati, 1999), 263-281. See also Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the* Comedy (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 85-91. For an alternative view, see Lino Pertile, "Dante's *Comedy* Beyond the Stilnovo," *Lectura Dantis* 13 (1993): 47-77, and "Il Nodo di Bonagiunta, Le Penne di Dante e Il Dolce Stil Novo," *Lettere Italiane* 46, no. 1 (1994): 44-75.

[98] For an overview of the history of early vernacular Italian lyric, see Christopher Kleinhenz, *The Early Italian Sonnet: The First Century (1220-1321)* (Lecce: Milella, 1986). Barolini offers a more Dante-focused account in "Dante and the Lyric Past," in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 23-45.

sufferings for love and supplicated for her mercy (Ital. *merzé* / *mercé* / *mercede*; Prov. *merci*).[99]

The supplicatory nature of these love poems is evident, for example, in the plaintive notes of unfulfilled desire that are sounded in the *congedo* of Pier della Vigna's *canzone* "Amore, in cui disio ed ho speranza." Borrowing a common convention of the troubadour *canso*, the speaker addresses his poem and orders it to bring a message to his lady. The personified *canzonetta* is to describe the lover's suffering and ask the lady what more he can do to earn her favor.

Mia canzonetta, porta esti compianti
a quella ch'a 'n bailïa lo meo core,
e le mie pene contale davanti
e dille com'eo moro per suo amore;
e mandimi per suo messag[g]io a dire
com' io conforti l'amor chi lei porto;
e s[ed] io ver' lei feci alcuno torto,
donimi penitenza al suo volire. ("Amore in cui disio ed ho speranza," 33-40)[100]

My canzonetta, take these laments

[99] I borrow the phrase "rhetorical situation" from Patrick Boyde, *Dante's Style in His Lyric Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 265-268. The structure of supplication and petition embedded in the Provençal *fin amor* love drama is discussed extensively by Maurice Valency, *In Praise of Love: An Introduction to the Love-Poetry of the Renaissance* (New York: Macmillan, 1958).

[6] For the text of Pier della Vigna's poem, I use Gianfranco Contini, *Poeti del Duecento* (Milano: Ricciardi, 1960), I: 121-122. The translation is taken from Frede Jensen, ed., *The Poetry of the Sicilian School* (New York: Garland, 1986).

to the lady who has my heart in her possession
and relate my sufferings before her
and tell her how I am dying because of my love of her;
and may she, through her messenger, send me word
how I may strengthen my love for her;
and if ever I did her any wrong,
may she give me penance at her will.

Pier's *congedo* figures the poet as a suppliant, the poem as a supplication for the lady's pity, and the lady as the receiver of a supplicatory gesture. The speaker of the *canzonetta* presents himself as a petitioner, a humble worshipper, ready to endure any "penitenza" the lady may impose on him in order to gain acceptance as her lover. The lover's petition for favor, which in Pier's case is displaced onto the *canzonetta*, performs the rhetorical situation of love lyric in which, as Patrick Boyde observes, "the lover is pleading for the lady to requite his love, and his discourse is rhetorical in the special sense that it is designed to persuade and move."[101] The rhetorical similarity between love poetry and oratory is borne out in theorizations of rhetoric that appear in thirteenth-century handbooks and rhetorical manuals. In his commentary on the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Dante's mentor Brunetto Latini sets out to explain how classical precepts on the art of speech-making can also apply to the letter-writing of the

[101] Boyde, *Dante's Style in His Lyric Poetry*, 268.

ars dictaminis tradition.[102] In the course of describing the six parts of an oration and how they map on to the conventions of medieval epistolography, Brunetto makes an analogy between the dialectical structure of opposing speeches in the context of a political debate and the rhetorical discourse of erotic poetry. Just as speakers and letter writers presenting opposite views of the same issue try to persuade each other using the art of rhetoric, so a lover and his lady debate in poetry over the acceptance or rejection of a love suit.

> Cosìe usatamente adviene che due persone si tramettono lettere l'uno all'altro o in latino o in proxa o in rima o in volgare o in altro, nelle quali contendono d'alcuna cosa, e così fanno tencione. Altressì uno amante chiamando merzé alla sua donna dice parole e ragioni molte, et ella si difende in suo dire et inforza le sue ragioni et indebolisce quelle del pregatore.[103]

> Thus it is common for two people to exchange letters with one another either in Latin, whether in prose or in verse, or in *volgare* or other languages, in which they argue with one another and therefore create a dispute (*tencione*). Similarly, a lover begging for grace from his beloved says words and gives many arguments and she defends her position and advances her argument and weakens those of her petitioner.

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[102] For Brunetto's rhetorical theory, see Ronald G. Witt, "Brunetto Latini and the Italian Tradition of Ars Dictaminis," *Stanford Italian Review* (1983): 5-24, reprinted in *Italian Humanism and Medieval Rhetoric* (Aldershot: Ashgate/Variorum, 2001).

[103] Brunetto Latini, *La Rettorica. Testo Critico di Francesco Maggini* (Firenze: F. Le Monnier, 1968), 146. I use the translation by Witt, "Brunetto Latini and the Italian Tradition of Ars Dictaminis," 12.

The point Brunetto wants to make here is that the kind of rhetorical treatment described in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* can be applied to any form of *tencione*. But in the course of his argument, he reveals that supplicatory persuasion lies at the heart of the structure of love poetry as well as speech-making. The basic structure of love poetry in the troubadour tradition, as Brunetto sees it, is that of petition and response.

The domestication of the language of Provençal love poetry in Italian had tremendous consequences for the vernacular tradition once it migrated from the imperial court in Sicily to the urban atmosphere of the towns of Tuscany, Umbria, and Emilia-Romagna. Italian love poetry on the peninsula quickly began to interrogate the metaphor of the lover as a suppliant for the lady's *mercé*. Guido Guinizelli, who exchanged sonnets with both Bonagiunta da Lucca and Guittone d'Arezzo – and was satirized by the former for the scholastic and theological obscurity of his language – wrote conventional complaints about the lady's refusal of *mercé*: "ché 'n lei non trovo alcuna bona entisa / und' ardisc' a mandare umilemente / a lei merzé chiamare" ["For I find no encouragement from her / By which I might dare to sue humbly / and call for mercy from her"].[104] But at the same time he inaugurated a mode of writing which took the language used to describe the lyric beloved not as an accidental metaphor but as a metaphysical reality.

Guinizelli's *canzone* "Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore" is case in point.[105] After dedicating four stanzas to the inextricable relationship between love and the "cor

[104] The passage is from Guinizelli's *canzone* "Madonna, il fino amor ched eo vo porto," 64-66. See Contini, *Poeti Del Duecento*, II: 453-456. All translations are from Robert Edwards, ed., *The Poetry of Guido Guinizelli* (New York: Garland, 1987).
[105] For an insightful reading of Guinizelli's *canzone* in relation to the previous lyric tradition, see Barolini, "Dante and the Lyric Past," 29-32.

gentil," Guinizelli suddenly shifts into a theological register. Just as the heavens and the angelic intelligences obey God, so the lover must always be constant in his fidelity to his lady: "così dar dovria, al vero / la bella donna, poi che 'n gli occhi splende / del suo gentil, talento / che mai di lei obedir non si disprende" ["So truly should the beautiful lady, / When she shines in the eyes of her noble lover, / Inspire a wish that he will never / Cease in his obedience to her"] ("Al cor gentil," 47-50). Guinizelli's analogy sets up a perilous comparison between God and the *madonna*; she should be treated with the same reverence that heavenly beings show to the divine creator. In conflating the devotion owed to God and the beloved, Guinizelli self-consciously rejects the censorious view of love taken by Guittone d'Arezzo and charts a course in which the two objects of love – God and the lady – are analogous rather than mutually exclusive.[106] In fact, the final stanza of "Al cor gentil" flirts with the idea that the two forms of love are the same; with tongue firmly in cheek, Guinizelli defends himself against accusations of idolatry by arguing that if the beloved is so often compared to an angel the poet cannot be blamed for thinking she actually is one.

> Donna, Deo mi dirà, "Che presomisti?,"
> siando l'alma mia a Lui davanti,
> "Lo ciel passati e' nfin a Me venisti
> e desti in vano amor Me per semblanti:
> ch'a Me conven le laude

[106] The relationship between Guinizelli and Guittone is taken up in Teodolinda Barolini, "Guittone's *Ora parrà*, Dante's *Doglia mi reca*, and the *Commedia*'s Anatomy of Desire," in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 47-69.

e a la reina del regname degno

per cui cessa onne fraude."

Dir Li porò, "Tenne d'angel sembianza

Che fosse del Tu regno;

Non me fu fallo, s'in lei posi amanza." ("Al cor gentil," 51-60)

Lady, God will say to me when my soul

Stands before Him, "How could you presume?

You went past heaven, coming finally to me,

And tried to compare Me to a vain love.

All praises are due to me alone

And to the Queen of this noble realm

Through whom all evil ends."

But I shall say to Him, "She had the likeness

Of an angel from your kingdom.

It's not my fault if I fell in love with her."

Guinizelli's repartee with God points up the seriousness of the game he and his fellow poets are playing. How do we know whether the conventions of erotic discourse are simply a set of metaphors or whether the metaphors reflect a metaphysical truth about the ontological status of the beloved? Guido's half-joking, half-serious self-justification at the throne of divine judgment addresses precisely this question: he acknowledges that he has gone too far in making the lady analogous to God – i.e. in misunderstanding the

lady's similarity to a heavenly being as an indication of her true metaphysical essence – but at the same time he mischievously accuses God of using misleading signifiers. The conventions of love lyric tell us that the beloved is an angelic creature; how do we know she isn't one? In suggesting that the lady's resemblance to the divine may be more than a metaphor, Guinizelli takes a step along the road which Dante will eventually travel in creating a lyric beloved who collapses the distinction between the earthly creature whose beauty points toward the transcendent and the transcendent itself. The poetic engine for this fundamental development in the lyric tradition, as we will see, will be Dante's invention of a non-supplicatory language for writing about love.

Guinizelli's immediate successors, however, did not take up the implicit theologization of the beloved in "Al cor gentil" nor did they linger over the crisis Dante would soon explode by questioning whether an angelic embodiment of divine *caritas* could properly be the object of erotic supplication. Guido Cavalcanti, under whose tutelage Dante seems to have begun his poetic apprenticeship, is content to call his lady an "angelicata criatura" who is "oltra natura humana" ("Fresca rosa novella," 16, 31), but her supernatural qualities are never taken as an indication of a heavenly reality. Instead, Cavalcanti uses the always unsteady analogy between the lady and a goddess to accentuate the unbridgeable distance between himself and his beloved – a distance filled with the laments, sighs, sufferings, and torments for which Cavalcanti's poetry is justly renowned. The Cavalcantian lover despairs not just of gaining the lady's *mercé*, but anticipating something of the Petrarchan mode, of even being able to speak to her at all. He is so paralyzed by the effects of love-sickness that he cannot even approach her to ask for pity; all his spirits fail before the power of her presence. When he does address his

lady directly, as in the *congedo* of the *canzone* "Io non pensava che lo cor giammai," he asks the song to bring to his lady "li spiriti fuggiti del mio core / che per soverchio de lo su' valore / eran distrutti, se non fosser vòlti" ["the spirits that have fled from my heart / Which would have been destroyed by her excess of power / If they had not turned in flight"] ("Io non pensava," 48-50) and to present them to her as an image "d'un che si more sbigottitamente" ["of one who is dying in dismay"] ("Io non pensava," 55).[107] The rhetorical situation of supplicatory petition is acted out obliquely through the recitation of his deathlike sufferings.

The dark Cavalcantian lexicon of words like "distrutti" and "sbigottitamente," corresponds with the poet's pessimistic vision of love as a passion that destroys one's ability to apprehend the world beyond the senses. The lover, possessed by violent emotions that lead him from one lady to the next, seeks the ideal but is always denied access to it. In Cavalcanti's version of a programmatic *canzone,* "Donna me prega, per ch'eo voglio dire," the speaker-lover specifically defines love as non-rational, that is, belonging to the faculty of the senses rather than the faculty of reason. A person in love "non ha segnoria" ["does not have self-mastery"] ("Donna me prega," 41) and is constantly near death. Once under love's rule, the lover has no control over himself; each infatuation results in the same cycle of inner torment and impotence. This sense of powerlessness reappears in "Gli occhi di quella gentil foresetta," where the speaker is so overcome by his suffering that he lacks the ability to ask for mercy even in his mind ["Sì mi sento disfatto, che mercede / già non ardisco nel penser chiamare"] ("Gli occhi di

[107] The Italian text is Guido Cavalcanti, *Rime con le Rime di Iacopo Cavalcanti*, ed. Domenico De Robertis (Torino: Einaudi, 1986). The English translation comes from *The Poetry of Guido Cavalcanti* (New York: Garland, 1986).

quella," 18-19), much less aloud to his lady. The lover's petition for *mercé* is submerged in the language of hopeless longing, and the lady's response, contingent on the petition, all but disappears.

It would be an understatement to say that Cavalcanti had a powerful effect on Dante's poetic development; his early lyrics abound in Cavalcantianisms.[108] Dante refers to his fellow Florentine poet twice in the *Vita Nuova* as his "primo amico," and his *Rime* include several correspondence poems with Guido. From the perspective of Dante's negotiation of the conventional lyric rhetoric of *mercé*, however, one point remains crucial: Dante's poetic development is, at least in large part, the story of a gradual emancipation from Cavalcanti's influence. The central effort of the *Vita Nuova* is to dramatize the shift in Dante's love poetry from the supplicatory rhetoric of petition – which has as its goal the carnal love of an earthly woman – to the autotelic poetry of praise, which finds an end in nothing but the joy itself of praising the beauty and goodness of the lady. In taking this poetic step, Dante rejects Cavalcanti's view of love as a destructive passion and returns to the Guinizellian notion of the lady as an angelic miracle. Along with Dante's repudiation of Cavalcanti's negative view of love comes the invention of a new style of poetry – the "nove rime" of *Purgatorio* 24. Dante's new

[108] Dante's relationship to Cavalcanti has been the subject of extensive study. In *Dante's Lyric Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), Foster and Boyde identify poems 6/6a and 15/15a as exchanges between the two poets. The classic study remains Gianfranco Contini, *Un' idea di Dante: saggi danteschi* (Torino: Einaudi, 1976). Contini's emphasis on the complexity of the relationship between the two poets has been taken up more recently by Teodolinda Barolini, "Dante and Cavalcanti (On Making Distinctions in Matters of Love): *Inferno* 5 in Its Lyric and Autobiographical Context," *Dante Studies* 116 (1998): 31-63. See also Antonio Gagliardi, *Guido Cavalcanti e Dante: una questione d'amore* (Catanzaro: Pullano, 1997), and Zygmunt G. Baranski, "Guido Cavalcanti and His First Readers," in *Guido Cavalcanti tra i suoi lettori*, ed. M. L. Ardizzone (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2003), 149-175.

conception of the beloved as an actual miracle, an earthly incarnation of the transcendent, demands a different style of love poetry that constitutes a fundamental shift in the vernacular lyric tradition. After Dante, the lyric supplication for *mercé* is no longer the default form for writing about love. Dante provides an alternative style that disinvests love poetry of its supplicatory structure – a move which will have a profound impact, as we will see shortly, on the literary development of the young Francis Petrarch.

The *Vita Nuova*: From Petition to Praise

In his now classic study of the structure of the *Vita Nuova*, Charles Singleton argues that the work consists of three distinct phases: "the effects of love on the lover," which Singleton refers to as the "Cavalcantian stage," "the praise of the lady," and "the death of Beatrice," which prompts another shift in style as Dante searches for a way to talk about his dead beloved who is now in heaven among the saints.[109] Like the Augustine of the *Confessions*, writing after the fact of his conversion, the voice that speaks in the opening chapter of the *Vita Nuova* is that of someone who has experienced enlightenment and intends to share the revelation of that experience with his readers – a gesture that will be familiar from the opening poem of the *RVF*.[110] The gap between the

[109] Charles S. Singleton, *An Essay on the Vita Nuova* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949). Singleton's book has been particularly influential in American Dante studies; its merits and flaws are discussed by Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Body of Beatrice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 4-13.

[110] Petrarch was heavily influenced by Dante's decision to gather his disparate lyrics into a narrative in which plot-oriented prose sections provide a storyline for the inserted lyrics. This move in and of itself represents a significant departure from the lyric tradition. With the creation of the narrative frame, Dante is able to transform his youthful poetic efforts into a philosophical account of the gradual process through which he comes to understand the Christological significance of Beatrice. See Robert Pogue

narrator and the protagonist of the "libello" constitutes one of its fundamental narrative strategies. The voice of the narrator introduces the work as a historical account, taken from the "libro de la mia memoria" ["the book of my memory"] (*Vita Nuova*, 1.1), which will tell the story of how he has been altered from what he was.

Yet despite the promise in the opening chapter of a linear narrative of enlightenment, the story developed in the *Vita Nuova* is not a strictly teleological sequence, as Singleton's schematic breakdown would suggest; rather, the chapters gather into episodic clumps punctuated by major breakthroughs. The first grouping centers on the significance of Beatrice's greeting. In the first twelve chapters, Beatrice's "saluto" functions for Dante as a form of *mercé*; it is the reward he seeks for his love-service, the reciprocation he desires for his erotic petition: "per la sua ineffabile cortesia, la quale è oggi meritata nel grande secolo, mi salutoe molto virtuosamente, tanto che me parve allora vedere tutti li termini de la beatitudine" ["with that indescribable graciousness that today is rewarded in the eternal life, she greeted me so miraculously that I felt I was experiencing the very summit of bliss"] (*VN*, 3.1).[111] The first crisis in the story comes when, as a result of gossip about Dante's infatuation with the second "screen lady," Beatrice refuses to greet her poet. Dante's anguish at being deprived of Beatrice's "saluto" makes him realize that it has become more than a simple greeting; it is the

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Harrison, "Approaching the *Vita Nuova*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 34-44.

[111] The complex editorial history of the *Vita Nuova* is summarized by Teodolinda Barolini, "Editing Dante's *Rime* and Italian Cultural History: Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca ... Barbi, Contini, Foster-Boyde, De Robertis," in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 245-80. I follow the text and numbering of Dante Alighieri, *La Vita Nuova*, ed. Michele Barbi (Firenze: R. Bemporad, 1932). English translations of the poems are from Foster and Boyde, *Dante's Lyric Poetry*. Translations of the prose are taken from *Vita Nuova*, trans. Mark Musa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

source of his “salute” or salvation: “Sí che appare manifestamente che ne le sue salute abitava la mia beatitudine” [“it is most evident that in her salutation lay my blessed happiness”] (*VN*, 11.4).

Nevertheless, Dante’s first impulse after being denied the “saluto” is to try to recuperate what he has lost. Chapters 12-17 document Dante’s repeated attempts to write petitionary poetry that will elicit Beatrice’s pity for his miserable condition cut off from the blessedness inspired by her “saluto.” The first of these poems, “Ballata, i’ voi che tu ritrovi Amore,” uses the conventional strategy of addressing the personified song and asking it to bring the lover’s petition to his lady. The second stanza utilizes the rhetoric of supplication to persuade Beatrice to restore Dante into her good graces.

Con dolze sono, quando se’ con lui,
comincia este parole,
appresso che averai chiesta pietate:
‘Madonna, quelli che mi manda a vui,
quando vi piaccia, vole,
sed elli ha scusa, che la m’intendiate.
Amore è qui, che per vostra bieltate
lo face, come vol, vista cangiare:
dunque perché li fece altra guardare
pensatel voi, d ache non mutò’ l core.’ (“Ballata, i’ voi che tu ritrovi Amore,” 15-24)

> With sweet melody – once you are with him – begin to speak these words (after pleading mercy): 'My lady, if it so please you, he who sends me to you begs that, if he has any valid excuse, you would hear it from me. Love is here, Love who, just as he pleases, makes him change countenance by means of your beauty. Judge then for yourself why love made him look at another – seeing that his heart has not changed.

Scholars have described this *ballata* and the three sonnets in chapters 14-16 as "Cavalcantian" in that they lament the torments of love and the cruelty of a pitiless lady,[112] but this group of poems also represents the tradition of suppliant lyric in which the recitation of the lover's anguish is aimed at evoking the lady's pity. The *ballata* of chapter 12 belongs to the Provençal genre of the *escondig*, in which the lover engages in an attempt to justify or exculpate his behavior, along the lines suggested in *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1.4.6-1.7.11 for arguing cases before an unsympathetic audience. Foster and Boyde rightly point out that the poem "enters the field of rhetoric proper…i.e. rhetoric conceived not just as the art of fine writing, but as the art of persuasion."[113] Dante himself points to this aim in chapter 17 in a retrospective glance back at the sonnets in 14-16: "Poi che dissi questi tre sonnetti, ne li quali parlai a questa donna però che furono narratori di tutto quasi lo mio stato … mi parea di me assai avere manifestato" ["After I had written these three sonnets in which I spoke to this lady, and in which little concerning my condition was left untold … it seemed to me that I had sufficiently

[112] Domenico De Robertis, *Il Libro della Vita Nuova* (Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1970), 71-85.
[113] Foster and Boyde, *Dante's Lyric Poetry*, II: 68.

indicated my condition to her"] (*VN*, 17.1). The purpose of the sonnets has been to describe his state to Beatrice in order to elicit her pity for his condition. His poetry is still undergirded by the supplicatory rhetoric of *mercé*.

All this changes in chapters 18-19. Having previously placed his happiness in Beatrice's "saluto," Dante decides that he will no longer write poetry seeking to gain signs of her favor; he wants a more stable form of bliss, and so resolves not to petition, but to praise. The stylistic transformation from petitionary poetry to "lo stilo de la sua loda" ["the style of her praise"] (*VN*, 26.4) has its roots in Dante's new conception of the beloved, of which the *canzone* "Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore" is a manifesto. As Barolini observes, "the lover's conversion, from one desire (the possession of her greeting) to another (the ability to praise her, to celebrate the miracle of her sacramental existence), is here explicitly stated in poetic terms, is indeed presented as a poet's conversion as well, since his desire for a transcendent Beatrice is formulated as a desire for the words with which to laud her."[114] In "Donne ch'avete" Beatrice is presented as a heavenly creature who has been given to the world only for a brief time so that it can experience the effects of her blessedness. Unlike Cavalcantian ladies, her presence inspires rapturous joy and virtuous action. No one leaves her company without being touched by her goodness: "Ancor l'ha Dio per maggior grazia dato / che non pò mal finir chi l'ha parlato" ["Again, God has given her this greater grace, that no one who has spoken with her can come to an evil end"] ("Donne ch'avete," 41-2)

In autotelic praise poetry, therefore, Dante finds a form of happiness independent of Beatrice's "saluto." For Dante, the poetry of praise has no rhetorical aim, no strategy

[114] Barolini, "Dante and the Lyric Past," 24.

of persuasion, no need for the dialectic of supplication and response. This reassessment of the status of the lady and the kind of poetry that can be written about her continues to unfold in the second half of the *Vita Nuova*, as Beatrice's status as an earthly embodiment of divine *caritas* becomes more and more evident. The crisis in the new "stilo de la sua loda" comes with Beatrice's death, when Dante finds that he has difficulty in continuing to write poems in her praise when she is no longer present to radiate her salvific effect; ultimately, the *Vita Nuova* provides no resolution for this impasse. A number of scholars, Singleton in particular, have been overly confident that the *Vita Nuova* successfully transitions from the second phase – the poetry of praise – to a third stage, which finds a way to write about a dead woman who was a miracle of divine love when she was alive. In fact, Dante concludes the "libello" with the resolution not to write anything more about Beatrice until he can invent a style worthy to describe the "mirabile visione" he has of her – and he promises, if he lives long enough, "di dicer di lei quello che mai non fue detto d'alcuna" ["to write of her that which has never been written of any other woman"] (*VN*, 42.2). Dante breaks off the narrative, projecting the continuation of the story into the unwritten future.

The *Vita Nuova*, therefore, begins to close the door on the supplicatory language of desire. The disaggregation of supplication and love with which the *Vita Nuova* tentatively concludes – and which we saw fully fledged in the story of Trajan and the Widow – takes its first confident steps in the opening moments of the *Commedia*. When Dante sees the faint figure of Vergil in the spiritual darkness of the "selva oscura," his first words to the shade of the ancient poet place the language of petition firmly in a penitential context. Dante's anguished cry "*Miserere* di me" ["Have pity on me"]

(*Inferno*, 1.65) echoes the opening line of Psalm 50, traditionally linked to David's repentance for his adulterous affair with Bathsheba. Dante's use of the Latin form *Miserere* associates him with David – another poet, prophet, and sinner – and inscribes his petition to Vergil in the liturgical language of penitence and supplication for God's grace. The penitential voice of petition, like the Widow's appeal to Trajan's sense of justice, ensures that in the *Commedia*, we are not tempted to confuse "have mercy on me" with "come away with me and be my love." When Beatrice returns in *Purgatorio* 30 to upbraid Dante for his waywardness, the lyric relationship between lover and beloved has been so transformed that supplication completely drops out.

The *Africa*: Supplication, Mercy, and Desire

The immediate reception of the *Commedia* had a seismic impact on the lyric tradition.[115] With the transformation of the beloved into a Christ figure, Dante had

[115] Dante's "overwhelming contemporary *auctoritas*" is discussed by Zygmunt G. Baranski, "Petrarch, Dante, Cavalcanti," in *Petrarch & Dante: Anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition*, ed. Zygmunt G. Baranski and Theodore J. Cachey (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 56-57. Baranski treates the topic of Dante's fourteenth-century reception more extensively in *Chiosar con altro testo: Leggere Dante nel trecento* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2001). For other recent studies of Dante's early reception, see Gian Carlo Alessio, "*La Comedia* nel Margine dei Classici," in *Studi di filologia medievale offerti a D'Arco Silvio Avalle* (Milan and Naples: Riccardi, 1996), 1-25, Saverio Bellomo, "*La Commedia* attraverso gli occhi dei primi lettori," in *Leggere Dante*, ed. L. Battaglia Ricci (Ravenna: Longo, 2002), and Albert Russell Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). If we are to believe Petrarch himself, however, Dante had little impact on him at all. See Petrarch's protestations of indifference to Dante in *Familiares* 21.15: Francesco Petrarca, *Rerum Familiarium Libri*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975). As many recent Italian philologists and literary critics have demonstrated, however, Petrarch's lyric poetry is shot through with Dantean echoes. See especially Marco Santagata, *Per Moderne Carte: La Biblioteca Volgare di Petrarca* (Bologna: Mulino, 1990). Santagata's first two chapters, "Presenze di Dante 'comico'

effectively led vernacular love poetry into a dead end. For Francis Petrarch, who began writing lyric poems in the early decades of the fourteenth century, the way out of the impasse turned out to be a return to the poetry of supplication, but now filtered through the supplicatory patterns illustrated in the literature of antiquity. In a lyric tradition heavily negotiated by Dante, Petrarch discovered a surprising precedent for a return to erotic supplication in the yellow vellum sheets of Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*. As we will see, in Petrarch's rewriting of the tragic love story between Sophonisba and Massinissa in Book 5 of the *Africa*, classical supplication provides a vehicle for re-imagining the relationship of lover and beloved as suppliant and supplicated and allows Petrarch to re-entangle the discourses of mercy and love. In reaching back to the modes of feeling of the deep past, Petrarch seeks to re-open a series of questions posed by the medieval lyric tradition that Dante had creatively and compellingly learned to close.

Before turning to the *Africa*, however, it will be helpful to consider Petrarch's habits of petition more broadly. As a poet-humanist with an extensive network of social and political ties, Petrarch was no stranger to the many literary forms and affective registers of asking for favor. The patronage Petrarch enjoyed from the Colonna family in particular ensured a steady stream of correspondence in various genres of the supplicatory mode. In *Familiares* 1.4 and 1.5, for example, Petrarch frames his letters as a dutiful response to Giovanni Colonna's request for a description of Petrarch's journey through France in 1333. Casting Giovanni as the petitioner and himself as the obliging respondent, Petrarch negotiates the delicate balance of power between himself and his

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nel *Canzoniere*" and "Dante in Petrarca," document the extensive linguistic presence of Dante in Petrarch's vernacular lyric.

patron. Since it is Giovanni who has made the request, Petrarch has little choice but to oblige him, but by framing the dialectic in Ciceronian terms, he draws attention to his special intimacy with the cardinal. According to Petrarch, Giovanni had expressed his request with the same sentiment Cicero attributes to Atticus in the line: "Scribe, dixisti, quidquid in buccam venerit."[116] In the logic of the quotation, Petrarch figures as the eloquent Cicero while Giovanni becomes the less glamorous Atticus who has asked him to "write whatever comes to your mouth." In the rhetoric of the letter, Petrarch subtly manipulates the hierarchical structure of petition to suggest that the man of letters is equal – if not superior – to his patron.

Closer to the kind of petition we will see in the *Africa* are Petrarch's letters of intercession and recommendation. Writing to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV, Petrarch invokes his own experience of Charles' mercy to persuade the emperor to accept his friend Laelius at the imperial court. Among the many other more illustrious names in Laelius' list of recommenders, Petrarch includes himself "as a suppliant … in my friend's behalf."[117] On a more urgent political occasion, Petrarch writes to persuade Doge Andrea Dandolo of Venice not to go to war against Genoa. Citing examples of the benefits of

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[116] Petrarch, *Familiares* 1.5: Inter multa sane que abeunti iusseras, hoc fuit extremum: ut et de terris ad quas ibam, et de singulis que vidissem audivissemque, perinde te certiorem scripto facerem ac verbo soleo; ne calamo parcerem, ne brevitati vel ornatui studerem, neve floridiora decerperem, sed cunta complecterer; denique, tulliano verbo usus: "Scribe, dixisti, quidquid in buccam venerit." I use the Latin text of *Le Familiari* (Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1933). The reference is to Cicero, *Att*. 1.12.4. For Petrarch's development of a rhetoric of intimacy based on his reading of Cicero's letters, see Kathy Eden, "Petrarchan Hermeneutics and the Rediscovery of Intimacy," in *Petrarch and the Textual Origins of Interpretation*, ed. Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 231-244.

[117] *Familiares*, 19.4: audebo me noctuam aquilis, talpam lincibus miscere, et affusus orare ut hunc quem et virtus propria et tantorum caritas commendat, notum primo, deinde, si merebitur, carum habeas … pro amico supplex apud dominum intercedo.

peace from his favorite classical authors, Petrarch concludes the letter with a supplication that mimics the rhetoric of the Ciceronian orator as well as the proponent of Christian brotherhood: "prostrate and tearful before the leaders of two peoples, I implore one thing: cast off your murderous weapons, shake hands, exchange kisses of peace, and join your minds as well as your banners."[118]

Erotic supplication creeps into Petrarch's epistolary rhetoric, suggestively, in the very place where Dante had quarantined it – the story of Trajan and the Widow. In *Epistula Metrica* 2.5, written shortly after the accession of Clement VI, Petrarch engages in the favorite rhetorical device of the suppliant: *ethopoieia*.[119] Taking on the voice of the city of Rome, figured as a wife bereft of her husband, Petrarch begs the pope to return home. The personified city, desolate because of her spouse's long absence, resolves to cross the Alps and throw herself at his feet: "Non litera supplex / Evaluit movisse loco, non ora relicte / Coniugis aut lacrime, quotiens sibi tristis et amens / Occurri gemituque genas madefacta recenti" ["Neither suppliant letter, nor the tear-streaked face of a wife succeeded in moving him from his place, no matter how many times I came to him, sad and frantic, with cheeks freshly wet with weeping"] (*Ep. Metr*. 2.5.3-6).[120] Her suppliant letters have failed, so Petrarch imagines the city herself pleading before her lost husband: "Ante pedes ventura tuos, dulcissime coniunx; / Alme parens, miserere, precor, nostram ve querelam / Suscipe, neu viduam, sponse, patiare senectam ["I come before your feet,

[118] *Familiares* 11.8.34: hoc unum in finem coram duorum populorum ducibus affusus et lacrimosus obsecro: infesta manibus arma proicite, date dextras, miscete oscula, animis animos signis signa coniungite.
[119] For *ethopoieia* as technique of appealing for pity, see above Chapter 1, 37-40.
[120] For the text of the *Epistulae Metricae*, I use Francesco Petrarca, *Epistulae Metricae = Briefe in Versen*, ed. Otto Schönberger and Eva Schönberger (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neuman, 2004). Translations are my own.

sweetest husband; gentle life-giver, have pity, I pray, and receive my complaint; do not, husband, go through old age as a widow"] (*Ep*. *Metr*. 2.5.40-42). She then cites the story of Trajan and the Widow as the most powerful argument for Clement's return to Rome. Petrarch recounts the anecdote in much the same way as Dante, until he reaches the end, where he explains the lesson Clement should draw from Trajan's example of clemency. In Petrarch's version, Trajan has been rewarded with eternal salvation not only because of his Christian mercy, but because he did not put off a petition that required immediate attention; similarly, Rome urges Clement to act now:

> Nec fortius ullo
> Exemplo flectendus eris. Pro coniuge supplex
> Advenio, ne temne preces, neu debita differ
> Tempus in ulterius. (*Ep*. *Metr*. 2.5.164-167)

> You can be convinced by no example more powerfully than this. As a suppliant I come before my wedded husband; do not deny my prayers or put off what is owed to some later time.

The erotically neutral widow of the legend is suddenly transformed into a loving wife kneeling before her estranged husband. She looks back with nostalgia on a previous time when he sought her out and longed to see her face ["congressus optare meos faciemque solebas"] (*Ep*. *Metr*. 2.5.170). The Widow's plea for justice slides effortlessly into the erotic petition of a desperate wife. The marital relationship between the suppliant and her

distant spouse makes the *clementia* she asks for not only a pun on Clement's name but also a plea for erotic reciprocation.

The view of supplication that blends political and erotic, ancient and modern is at the heart of the literary aspirations of the *Africa*. As Petrarch tells us in his Letter to Posterity, the *Africa* was begun in a rapture of inspiration on Good Friday, 1338: "As I wandered in those mountains on certain Good Friday, the idea gripped me to write something in heroic verse about Scipio Africanus the Elder, whose name had been wonderfully dear to me since my earliest childhood."[121] After the initial lightning bolt of poetic fury, Petrarch continued to work on the poem during his sojourn in the Vaucluse from 1338 to 1339, but despite the auspicious beginning, he stopped his work and did not take it up again until 1342-1343 after his journey to Naples and Rome, where he received the laurel crown in 1341. By the end of the second phase of composition in Parma and Selvapiana, the bulk of the poem was in place, even if the *Africa* as a whole would remain incomplete. Just how much of the epic was realized by the end of 1343 is still a matter of critical discussion, but the general consensus is that after that date, Petrarch engaged in a fairly constant process of refinement and revision, but did not add any other major episodes to the work.[122]

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[121] Petrarch, *Seniles* 18.1: Illis in montibus vaganti, sexta quadam feria maioris hebdomade, cogitatio incidit, et valida, ut de Scipione Africano illo primo, cuius nomen mirum inde a prima michi etate carum fuit, poeticum aliquid heroico carmine scriberem. I use the English translation in Francesco Petrarca, *Letters of Old Age = Rerum Senilium Libri*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

[122] The first and still most thorough account of the composition of the *Africa* is Nicola Festa, *Saggio sull' Africa del Petrarca* (Palermo: Sandron, 1926). Festa's conclusions have been somewhat refined by Guido Martellotti, "Sulla composizione del *De Viris* e dell' *Africa*," in *Scritti Petrarcheschi*, ed. Michele Feo and Silvia Rizzo (Padova: Editrice Antenore, 1983), 3-26, and Enrico Fenzi, "Dall' *Africa* al *Secretum*: Il sogno di Scipione e la composizione del poema," in *Saggi Petrarcheschi* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2003). See also

The episode in the poem that has made the deepest impression on readers beginning with Boccaccio is the tragic love story of Sophonisba and Massinissa. In this episode, Petrarch confronts the specter of Dante by re-entangling the strands of supplication, pity, and love that his predecessor had unraveled and lays the groundwork for the version of erotic psychology that will become so central to the *RVF*. At the same time, Petrarch draws attention to the process by which he stages the return to supplication as a model for love. His interaction with Livy performs a version of imitation that resembles the reciprocal relationship of the supplicatory process itself. In his re-writing of Livy, the affective implications of exchange are transferred to the dynamics of imitation. The concept of imitation as a form of reciprocity – responding to a request or giving back when something has been received – is particularly palpable in the way Petrarch alternately clings to and departs from his source, sometimes adopting a suppliant posture of gratitude and humility, sometimes imagining his re-writing as a response to Livy's request. At the same time that Petrarch explores the nature of affective exchange in scenes of supplication, he also considers the metaliterary ethics of a relationship of give and take with his ancient *auctor*.

The story of Massinissa and Sophonisba, as Petrarch would have found it in his mutilated copy of *Ab Urbe Condita*, is itself a masterpiece of historiographical narrative.[123] Livy locates the doomed love affair against the larger backdrop of the geo-political events surrounding the end of the Second Punic War, carefully shuttling between

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Vincenzo Fera, *La revisione petrarchesca dell' Africa* (Messina: Centro di Studi Umanistici, 1984).

[123] The episode has been given extensive treatment by Shelley P. Haley, "Livy's Sophoniba," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 40 (1989): 171-181. See also J. M. K. Martin, "Livy and Romance," *Greece and Rome* 11 (1941-42): 124-129.

the theaters of warfare and romance. Sophonisba makes her first appearance in the narrative toward the end of Book 29, as the Carthaginians anxiously prepare for Scipio's invasion of Africa. Hoping to shore up their defenses against the Romans, the Carthaginians form a political alliance with Syphax, ruler of the neighboring kingdom of Numidia and formerly Scipio's loyal ally. Sophonisba's father Hasdrubal, the *de facto* head of the Barca party during Hannibal's absence in Italy and the main architect of Carthaginian military strategy in Africa, proposes a marriage pact that will tie Syphax to Carthaginian interests. Relying on the allure of Sophonisba's beauty, Hasdrubal proposes a marriage that will secure Syphax's allegiance to the Carthaginian cause. With a Carthaginian princess in the inner sanctum of Numidian power, Hasdrubal hopes to strip Scipio of his main African ally and derail the Roman campaign.

Sophonisba's return in Book 30 makes good on the promise of a romantic vignette in the midst of the politics of war. By the time she re-appears, the fortunes of the Carthaginians and their Numidian allies have shifted. Undaunted by Syphax's defection to the Carthaginian side, Scipio lands his army at Utica and begins a slow march towards Carthage, capturing a series of Carthaginian towns along the way and forcing the combined armies of Hasdrubal and Syphax to retreat. While Scipio focuses his attention on immobilizing the Carthaginian fleet, Laelius and Massinissa contend with Syphax. They defeat the Numidians after a short battle, and Massinissa takes Syphax as his captive. Sophonisba's role in these events is entirely pro-Carthaginian. As her father had hoped, her beauty and powers of persuasion keep Syphax from renewing his alliance with Rome:

> … ad Syphacem legati missi, summa ope et ipsum reparantem bellum, cum uxor non iam ut ante blanditiis, satis potentibus ad animum amantis, sed precibus et misericordia valuisset, plena lacrimarum obtestans ne patrem suum patriamque proderet. (Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 30.7.8-9).
>
> … emissaries were sent to Syphax, who on his part also was making every effort to renew the war, since his wife had influenced him – no longer, as before, by caresses, effectual enough for the temper of a lover – but by prayers and moving entreaty, imploring him, as her eyes filled with tears, not to betray her father and her city.

This portrayal of Sophonisba as a cunning manipulator, ready to flatter, seduce, or plead as the occasion requires, is the background Livy provides for her entrance on center stage when Massinissa arrives at the gate of Cirta to establish himself as the new king of Numidia. Her elevation to the status of protagonist is signaled by the use of her name for the first time since she was introduced in Book 29 and by the ceremonial recitation of her identity as *uxor Syphacis, filia Hasdrubalis Poeni* ["wife of Syphax, daughter of Hasdrubal the Carthaginian"] (*AUC*, 30.12.11). As Massinissa enters the walls of the city, she embraces his knees and begs him, by the kinship he shares with Syphax as a Numidian and by her own royal lineage, to spare her from the humiliation of being enslaved by the Romans.

Livy gives Sophonisba free reign as she begs for mercy. He describes her gestures with particular vivacity and renders her speech of supplication in full direct

discourse. But the emotional explosiveness of the scene is kept under control by the compression of Massinissa's response. Instead of giving Massinissa a chance to speak in reply to Sophonisba's plea, the narrator intervenes to recount – and control – Massinissa's acceptance of her petition. The narrator keeps the reader at a distance from the emotions that prompt Massinissa's compliance, and instead returns to a mode of sententious moralization.

> forma erat insignis et florentissima aetas. itaque cum modo <genua modo> dextram amplectens in id ne cui Romano traderetur fidem exposceret propiusque blanditias iam oratio esset quam preces, non in misericordiam modo prolapsus est animus uictoris, sed, ut est genus Numidarum in uenerem praeceps, amore captiuae uictor captus. (Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 30.12.17-18)

> Her beauty was conspicuous and her age at full bloom. Consequently, while she was clasping now his knees and now his right hand, begging for his promise not to surrender her to any Roman, and her words were now more nearly those of a charmer than of a suppliant, the heart of the victor was moved not to pity only, but with the amorous susceptibility of the Numidian race, the victor was captivated by love of the captive.

With the eye of a distant observer, Livy diagnoses the combination of circumstances that lead to Massinissa's sudden infatuation. Sophonisba's beauty, the erotic overtones of both her gestures and words, and Massinissa's innate concupiscence – which, according

to Livy, he shares with Syphax and all Numidians – come together in a unique way to inflame his passion. Massinissa's response to her plea is described in terms of pity that rapidly bleeds into love, but in coding his response as characteristic of an entire race of people, Livy regulates the reader's experience of his emotion and attempts to contain the erotic potential embedded in the ritual of supplicatory petition.

From this point the story proceeds rapidly to its tragic conclusion. Despite the objections he knows will come from Scipio and Laelius, Massinissa swears to fulfill Sophonisba's request and resolves to make her his new queen. The wedding takes place on the very same day, before Laelius can return to intervene. Once word of the hasty marriage reaches the Roman camp, Scipio summons Massinissa to a private conference and chastises him for his lack of self-restraint, while at the same time asserting the Roman prerogative to adjudicate Sophonisba's fate. Massinissa returns to his private chamber in shame and despair, eventually resolving to remain faithful to his promise to Sophonisba; instead of handing her over to the Romans, he sends her a poisoned cup, which she drinks with fearless resignation.

Modern assessments of the story focus on the contrast Livy develops between Roman *temperantia* and "barbarian" lust, and it is clear from Petrarch's marginal annotations in his copy of Livy that these themes engaged him as well. The page of the Harleian Livy manuscript devoted to the story of Massinissa and Sophonisba is among the most heavily annotated of the third decade, with the marginalia ranging from textual emendations and content glosses to hortatory sigla.[124] Petrarch pays particular attention

[124] The complex history of ms. Harley 2493 is described with exquisite care by Giuseppe Billanovich, "Petrarch and the Textual Tradition of Livy," *Journal of the Warburg and*

to Scipio's speech to Massinissa, marking off the beginning of the speech with a bracket and highlighting in the margins the passage in which Scipio speaks sententiously about the perils of pleasure: "Non est, non – mihi crede – tantum ab hostibus armatis aetati nostrae periculi quantum ab circumfusis undique voluptatibus. Qui eas temperantia sua frenavit ac domuit multo maius decus maioremque victoriam sibi peperit quam nos Syphace victo habemus" ["There is no danger – believe me, there is none – so great to our time of life from armed enemies as from pleasures all about us. Whoever has checked and mastered them by his self-control has gained for himself a far greater distinction and a greater victory than is ours by the defeat of Syphax"] (*AUC*, 30.14.7). Scipio's subsequent exhortation "vince animum" ["conquer your spirit"] (*AUC*, 30.14.11) also receives Petrarch's paratextual approbation.

But while Petrarch's retelling of Livy's third decade in the *Africa* certainly owes much to his interest in Scipio's reputation for self-mastery, there is far more to the story than the triumph of duty over desire. Massinissa's susceptibility to passion provides a counterpoint for the version of Roman virtue Petrarch seeks to extol,[125] but recent readings which take Book 5 as a moral allegory for the victory of self-restraint over carnal desire do not succeed in capturing what is at stake for Petrarch in his retelling of

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Courtauld Institutes 14 (1951): 138-151. The story of Sophonisba and Massinissa is transcribed on f. 213.

[125] Petrarch's particular interest in Scipio as the paragon of Roman virtue is explored in depth by Aldo S. Bernardo, *Petrarch, Scipio, and the* Africa*: The Birth of Humanism's Dream* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962). For the poem's status as an encomium, see Craig Kallendorf, *In Praise of Aeneas: Virgil and Epideictic Rhetoric in the Early Italian Renaissance* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989).

the story[126] – what drives him to expand the Livian material to create the tragic narrative which, in a letter to Francesco Nelli, he calls the "pathetice materie fundamentum" of his epic.[127] Where Livy had constrained the affective dimension of supplication, Petrarch opens the floodgates of emotion. In expanding three short chapters of prose into over 800 Latin hexameters, he launches a much more profound investigation into the intersection of different registers of supplicatory petition. Even as he recognizes with a flash of sympathy Livy's representation of the slippage between pity and love, he responds by disaggregating the elements of Livy's supplication-as-seduction in a way that gives voice to both suppliant and supplicated. Livy's narrative reveals the latent eroticism of Sophonisba's appeal for pity and the eroticism potentially available in every act of supplication – which Dante had sought to purge from vernacular love poetry. Responding to Dante through imitation of Livy, Petrarch grafts the erotic discourse of asking for pity onto a petition that is, in fact, not motivated by love. By allowing the stitch marks of his borrowings from Livy to show, Petrarch invites us to see the unstable and poetically generative energy that flows from the untidy enmeshment of supplication, imitation, and desire.

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[126] For the argument that the *Africa* describes the defeat of lust in the allegorical mode Petrarch uses to interpret the *Aeneid,* see J. Christopher Warner, *The Augustinian Epic, Petrarch to Milton* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

[127] In *Familiares* 18.7, Petrarch uses Sophonisba's unstudied elegance as an analogy for the best epistolary style. Like Sophonisba's simple, artless beauty, the style of a letter should be spontaneous, charming, enticing, and unaffected. The relevant passage regarding the *Africa* reads: "Talem fuisse Sophonisbam reor, dum Massinissam cepit victa victorem, quod in Africa olim gestum, nunc in Africe nostre libris pathetice materie fundamentum est" ("Such, I believe, was the conquered Sophonisba when she vanquished her victor Massinissa, as once happened in Africa and as now occurs as a pathetic moment in my *Africa*"). For a detailed analysis of the passage in relationship to Petrarch's theory of epic, see Johannes Bartuschat, "Sofonisba e Massinissa: dall' *Africa* e dal' *De Viris* ai *Trionfi*," in *Petrarca e i suoi lettori*, ed. Vittorio Caratozzolo and Georges Guntert (Ravenna: Longo, 2000), 109-141.

It must be noted, however, that in developing his version of the story of Sophonisba and Massinissa, Petrarch takes his cue not only from Livy, but also from Vergil; Book 5 of the *Africa* is an expansion of *Ab Urbe Condita* inflected in Vergilian terms. As Johannes Bartuschat has observed, "Virgilio gli fornisce lo spunto per parlare di passioni amorose in un' opera epica volta, in conformità col genere, a celebrare fatti bellici ed esempi di virtù."[128] The story of Massinissa and Sophonisba as it unfolds in the *Africa* becomes an erotic digression on the model of Vergil's Dido and Aeneas. Sophonisba occupies the place of the powerful and exotic African queen who courageously ends her own life, places a prophetic curse on Scipio, and foretells his future suffering at the hands of the Romans (*Africa,* 5.719-66); Massinissa, on the other hand, plays Aeneas to Sophonisba's Dido, tormented by an inner conflict between duty and love. But while Petrarch imports the framework of the Vergilian narrative, he transforms the Dido and Aeneas model to suit his own poetic purposes. By shifting the burden of the transgressive love affair from the poem's hero onto one of his subordinates, Petrarch leaves Scipio untainted by illicit desire. He stands outside the love-affair as a voice of moral rectitude who, like Vergil's Mercury, redirects the errant Massinissa back to the proper course. With Scipio uninvolved, Petrarch minimizes the possibility of a genuine romance deviation; the epic's love-story cannot threaten to overpower the main narrative. In this way, Petrarch pushes back against the romance versions of the *Aeneid* that were so popular in his lifetime – Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructionis Troiae* and the widely circulated *Roman d'Enéas*. Even more crucially for the purposes of this chapter, Petrarch reconfigures the gender dynamics of Vergil's story so that the

[128] Bartuschat, "Sofonisba e Massinissa: dall' *Africa* e dal' *De Viris* ai *Trionfi*," 116.

"burden of erotic passion" is born by the male protagonist.[129] Unlike Dido, Sophonisba is not struck with the love-wound; instead Petrarch casts Massinissa as the feminine Dido who burns with the torments of love.

With this Vergilian macrostructure supporting the edifice of Book 5, Petrarch develops his response to Livy's formulation of the slippery-slope relationship between pity and love by circumscribing the Sophonisba-Massinissa story within the lyric language of *fin amor*. In the opening lines of Book 5, Sophonisba is introduced in the vocabulary of praise used to describe the idealized lyric beloved. In an extensive blazon of more than fifty lines, the captive queen is endowed with all the qualities of the lyric *madonna*. Her forehead is white as snow ["stabat candore nivali frons"] (*Africa*, 5.22-23); her golden hair falls loosely around her neck and flutters in the breeze ["fulgentior auro / Quolibet, et solis radiis factura pudorem / Caesaries spargenda levi pendebat ab aura / Colla super"] (*Africa*, 5.25-28); her cheeks are like roses mixed with lilies ["Candida purpureis imitantur floribus alme / Lilia mixta gene"] (*Africa*, 46-47); when she walks, her feet move with the grace of a goddess ["illosque moveri / Mortali de more neges; sic terra modeste / Tangitur, ut tenere pereant vestigia plante, / Ethereum ceu servet iter"] (*Africa*, 56-59). In Petrarch's hands, Sophonisba steps into the world of Guinizelli's praise poem "I vogl' del ver al mia donna laudare" and Cavalcanti's "Fresca rosa novella." Livy's humiliated queen is transformed into the lyric beloved whose

[129] Simone Marchesi, "The *Africa*: Petrarch's Epic of Philology," in *Petrarch: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, ed. Victoria Kirkham (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Marchesi argues that Petrarch's version of the Dido and Aeneas story aims to replace Vergil's fictitious legend with the alternative account of the chaste Dido of history.

golden tresses and goddess-like walk anticipate the description of Laura in *RVF* 90:[130] "Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi / … / Non era l'andar suo cosa mortale / Ma d'angelica forma" ["Her golden hair was loosed to the breeze … Her walk was not that of a mortal thing but of some angelic form] (*RVF*, 90.1, 9-10).

Sophonisba is suddenly transformed into the lyric beloved, and the verbal anticipations of *RVF* 90 connect her more specifically to Laura. The link is forged definitively when, in describing the beauty of her eyes, the narrator of the *Africa* represents Sophonisba as a Medusa-figure, capable of turning men's hearts to marble:

> Vis inerat radiansque decor, qui pectora posset
> Flectere quo vellet, mentesque auferre tuendo,
> Inque Meduseum praecordia vertere marmor. (*Africa*, 5.37-39)

> Her glance divine
> Cast all around her a compelling charm,
> And where she wished to turn it she could rouse
> Desire or bend a will however firm
> Or to Medusan marble change the heart
> Of an admirer. (*Africa*, trans. Bergin, 5.49-54)

[130] Santagata, *Canzoniere*, ccvii, claims that this poem appears for the first time in the so-called Correggio redaction of the *RVF* which belongs to the years 1356-58. Though no manuscripts of this version exist, Santagata believes that it included *RVF* 1-142 and 264-292. For the classical subtexts of *RVF* 90, see Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 111-15.

The Medusa myth is already present in one of the sonnets gathered in the so-called "first form," which both Wilkins and Santagata date to the period of 1336-1338, just prior to the "Vaucluse phase" of the composition of the *Africa*.[131] In the sonnet that would become number 179 in the collection, the Medusa-like powers of the beloved describe not only her own stony pitilessness, as in Dante's *Rime petrose*, but also her petrifying effect on the lover:

> Ovunque ella sdegnando li occhi gira
> (che di luce privar mia vita spera?)
> le mostro i miei pien d'umiltà sì vera,
> ch'a forza ogni suo sdegno indietro tira.
>
> Et ciò non fusse, andrei non altramente
> a veder lei, ch 'l volto di Medusa,
> che facea marmo diventar la gente. (*RVF*, 179.5-11)

> Whenever she angrily turns her eyes, who hopes to
> deprive my life of light, I show her mine full of such true
> humility that she necessarily draws back all her anger.

[131] For the phases of composition and redaction of the *RVF*, see Ernest Hatch Wilkins, *The Making of the "Canzoniere" and Other Petrarchan Studies* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e letteratura, 1951), 81-92; Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. Marco Santagata (Milano: A. Mondadori, 2004), ccv-ccxi. The "prima raccolta" consistsed of 24 sonnets (with two by poets other than Petrarch) and the canzone "Nel dolce tempo della prima etade." It is preserved on 11 folio pages of Vat. Lat. 3196.

And if that were not so, I would not go to see her otherwise than

to see the face of Medusa, which made people become marble.

The extended prefatory blazon in Book 5 of the *Africa*, therefore, links Sophonisba to the tradition of the *donna petra* as it was being developed in Petrarch's own vernacular poems. Petrarch separates himself from previous versions of the stony lady by emphasizing the communicability of petrification; the Petrarchan lady's ability to turn men into stone functions both as an indication of her own hard-hearted cruelty and of her debilitating effect on the lover.[132] The power of the *madonna*-as-Medusa lies in her ability to transform the viewer, and this is precisely what happens to Massinissa. He falls in love even before he hears Sophonisba's petition; the sight of her is enough to turn him into a petrified lover. Petrarch, therefore, grafts the mythological vocabulary of the psychologically volatile relationship of the lyric lover and his beloved onto the interaction between the conqueror and his captive. Just as Sophonisba takes on the role of lyric lady, Petrarch describes Massinissa's *inamoramento* in terms that place him firmly in the role of lyric lover, whose experience of erotic *pietà* is one of radical inner instability and self-dissolution.

[132] For Petrarch's treatment of the Medusa myth in the *RVF*, see Kenelm Foster, "Beatrice or Medusa," in *Italian Studies Presented to E. R. Vincent*, ed. C. P. Brand, K. Foster, and U. Limentani (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1962); Durling, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, 29-33; Sara Sturm-Maddox, *Petrarch's Metamorphoses* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985); and Gordon Braden, *Petrarchan Love and the Continental Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 24-27. John Freccero's essay "Medusa: The Letter and the Spirit," in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 119-135, focuses primarily on the Medusa-myth as it appears in Dante, but suggests that Petrarch too viewed the figure of Medusa as an emblem for the idolatry of love poetry in which the beloved is a source of the poet's immortalization: "Petrarch's enduring fame as the weeping lover suggests that if he was turned to stone because of idolatry, at least a stone lasts forever" (132).

Ilicet ergo

Vulnus inardescens totis errare medullis

Ceperat: estivo glacies ceu lenta sub estu

Cera vel ardenti facilis vicina camino,

Liquitur ille tuens, captiva captus ab hoste,

Victaque victorem potuit domuisse superbum. (*Africa*, 5.69-74)

Massinissa felt

a flame consume his marrows, even as ice

melts in the heat of summer or as wax

dissolves in the proximity of fire,

so as he looked he melted, captive prey

of captive foe, a haughty conqueror

subdued by conquered victim. (*Africa*, trans. Bergin, 5.93-99)

Massinissa's experience of falling in love points to a linguistic overlap in the classical and vernacular vocabularies of love; in both cases, love is represented metaphorically as a dissolution into impotence. The juxtaposition of metaphors of love as a wound and as a flame that burns through the marrow is closely modeled on Vergil's description of Dido's growing passion: "est mollis flamma medullas / interea et tacitum vivit sub pectore vulnus. / Uritur infelix Dido" ["The flame keeps gnawing into her tender marrow hour by hour / and deep in her heart the silend would lives on. / Dido burns with love – "] (*Aeneid*, 4.66-8; Fagles, 4.84-6). This Vergilian beginning is soon

joined by a simile which continues the description of love in a more Ovidian vein. The melting of the lover like ice in the sun has a parallel in the story of Herses and Aglauros in the *Metamorphoses*: "liquitur, ut glacies incerto saucia sole [(she) wastes away like ice touched by the fitful sunshine"] (*Metamorphoses*, 2.808).[133] The images of wax and snow will come together again in *RVF* 133: "Amor m'à posto come segno a strale / come al sol neve, come cera al foco" ["Love has set me up like a target for arrows, like snow in the sun, like wax in the fire"] (*RVF*, 133.1-2). The reconstruction of supplicatory love poetry relies on amatory conventions, both ancient and modern.

By the time we arrive at Sophonisba's supplicatory petition, therefore, Petrarch has brought the relationship between Massinissa and the queen into unprecedented poetic terrain. Picking up the erotic dimension of Livy's suppliant narrative, Petrarch frames the act of post-war supplication for mercy in the conventional language of a lyric love scenario in the Cavalcantian-Petrarchan mode; the lady is the summit of perfections, so beautiful and divine as to be inaccessible, and the lover's passion results in the dissolution of his identity. The *fin amor* staging of the scene makes the next move in the sequence – no matter how familiar the story is from Livy – startling and disorienting. After the lyric fanfare we expect the lover to appeal for pity as a sign of erotic reciprocation. But instead, an entirely different psychological scenario unfolds. Petrarch throws the affective roles of the poetry of supplication into confusion. The petition for pity comes from the beloved Sophonisba, not from the lover Massinissa, and the pity she seeks is not of an erotic nature. Despite the description of her as an idealized lyric

[133] For the Latin text, see Ovid, *P. Ovidi Nasonis Metamorphoses*, ed. R. J Tarrant (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004). I use the translation in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, rev. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

beloved, she makes her request in the language and gestures of a martial suppliant asking for political mercy:

> Si michi victricem fas est attingere dextram
> Captive vidueque tuam, per numina supplex
> Cuncta, precor, miserere mei. (*Africa*, 5. 80-82)

> If I, a captive and a widow, may
> touch your victorious hand, let me implore
> by all the gods your pity and your grace. (*Africa*, trans. Bergin, 5.107-9)

Sophonisba's speech clings to its Livian source. Livy's Sophonisba also begins her petition in the conditional mode: "si captiuae apud dominum uitae necisque suae uocem supplicem mittere licet, si genua, si uictricem attingere dextram" ["if a captive may utter words of supplication before one who is master of her fate, if she may touch his victorious right hand"] (*AUC*, 30. 12). Petrarch's heroine repeats the phrase of her Livian prototype *victricem attingere dextram* and carefully performs the same gestures, embracing Massinissa's knees, touching his hands, and verbalizing her plea. The Livian vocabulary of the petition separates it from the narrative saturated with the language of *fin amor*. The gap between the expectation of a petition for erotic pity and the actual performance of a request for political mercy creates a visible seam between the classical and modern elements of the encounter. The seam invites us to watch the process of imitation that is underway in Petrarch's recreation of the episode by making the boundaries clear between what Petrarch receives from Livy and what he gives in return.

Petrarch's demarcation of the lines between himself and his ancient model casts Livy's text as a petitioner calling out from the depths of time for a response. As Sophonisba and Massinissa play out their drama of petition and reply, Petrarch's own drama of reciprocity with his source peers through in the self-conscious transition from one supplicatory discourse to another.

Unlike Livy's Sophonisba, Petrarch's captive queen does not ask for the kind of pity that is code for love, but rather the merciful treatment that the exigency of her situation deserves. Petrarch downplays the self-consciously seductive element of her plea in order to put pressure on Massinissa's response. The appropriate response to a defeated suppliant begging for pardon is to show mercy. Petrarch's position on how to respond to a petition for clemency is abundantly clear from other scenes of supplication in the *Africa*. In Book 6, Scipio agrees to a truce with the Carthaginians because he cannot help but be moved by their extreme circumstances – even though he knows their plea for peace is a duplicitous stalling tactic. Similarly in Book 8, after the lengthy petition of Hasdrubal Haedus, the members of the Roman Senate "heard / with hearts less hard the old man's righteous plea."[134] Hasdrubal's appeal for peace – "it is the noblest revenge to spare / a prostrate suppliant[135] – is based on the same precepts of Senecan political theory that Petrarch uses in *Familiares* 12.2 to exhort the young king of Naples to be mild in his exercise of punishment: "Why become enraged against anyone when he could actually punish calmly and exercise the most noble form of vengeance – pardon?"[136] The concept

[134] *Africa*, 8.835-837: Ceperat auditis iam mitior ira Senatus / Inflecti et sensim lenito pectore iustas / Exaudire preces.
[135] *Africa*, 8.806-7: Pulcra est vindicta precanti / Parcere prostrato.
[136] *Familiares*, 12.2.25: cur in quempiam excandescat, cum possit etiam tranquillus ulcisci, possit et parcendo vindicte genus nobilissimum exercere? For a recent account of

that the victor or ruler should be more inclined to pardon than to punish appears in the dialogue *De Vindicta* in *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae,* where in response to Joy's declaration "It is honorable to take revenge," Reason replies: "Honestius est misereri: multos clementia honestavit, nullum ultio. Nichil tam necessarium inter mortales, nichil tam commune quam venia: nemo est enim qui non peccet, nemo cui non misericordia opus sit" ["It is more honorable to be merciful. Clemency ennobles many, revenge none. Among mortals nothing is more needed, nothing more appropriate than forgiveness"].[137] Similarly, Petrarch argues that a prince should "impress upon his mind that through mercy a ruler becomes very similar to God."[138] The Stoic philosophers who condemned pity as a weakness could not have been more wrong. As in Dante's story of Trajan and the Widow, pity for the suffering of another leads to the merciful action of a pious prince.

But if elsewhere Petrarch clearly describes what to do with a suppliant asking for pardon, in the case of Massinissa the emotional entailments of mercy are more problematic. The discourse of mercy blurs into the discourse of love. Cast in the role of the Petrarchan lover who desires evidence of the lady's erotic pity, Massinissa is caught between Trajan's clement *pietà* and the erotic grief of a lover. The conventional economy of desire in love lyric is utterly confounded by the collision of two different codes in which a suppliant asks for pity. In a total reversal of convention, Sophonisba, the beloved, asks for pity, while Massinissa, the lover, pities. Sophonisba's supplication for pity thus becomes a jaggedly displaced manifestation of the erotic pity Massinissa desires

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Seneca's influence on Petrarch's political philosophy, see Peter Stacey, *Roman Monarchy and the Renaissance Prince*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[137] Francesco Petrarca, *Petrarch's Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, trans. Conrad H. Rawski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 274.

[138] *Familiares*, 12.2.29: affigatque animo regem misericordia simillimum Deo fieri et penitus errasse philosophos qui misericordiam damnaverunt.

from her. The result is an asymmetrical entanglement of desire that spills out from the ritual structures of supplication and bleeds into the rest of the narrative.

Thus, Massinissa's response to Sophonisba's supplication – for which there is no equivalent in Livy – conflates the merciful magnanimity of a conqueror toward a suppliant whose request for pardon he deems worthy of acceptance with the misery of a lover uncertain of his fate in the eyes of his beloved. Massinissa's pity for Sophonisba's sudden fall from queen to slave – expressed in the overflowing tears of grief with which he lifts her from her suppliant pose – is also a version of the self-pity that will surface repeated in the *RVF*. His tears for Sophonisba stem as much from the grief of the Petrarchan lover who fears that his love will go unrequited as from pity for her miserable fate:

> Hic humilem complexus heram, multumque diuque
> Ora salutiferis referentem tristia plantis
> Sublevat illacrimans. (*Africa*, 5.117-19)

> Then, when for a long time she had clung
> clutching her liberator's feet in all
> humility, with suppliant lips, the king,
> in tears himself, bent down and raised her up.
>
> (*Africa*, trans. Bergin, rev. LW, 5.161-64)

The king's tears belong both to the martial economy of supplication and the alternative discourse of the torments of love, so often expressed in terms of weeping. The entanglement of these two different contexts for pity produces an affective dissonance in Petrarch's version of the encounter. A scene which might have looked like Trajan's response to the supplication of the Widow becomes caught up in the dynamics of erotic passion. Sophonisba's petition is successful: her life is, for the moment, saved, and she gains assurance that Massinissa will fulfill her request that she die rather than be subject to Roman scorn. But because of its abrupt collision with the lyric language of pity, the successful supplication leaves an emotional remainder; the pity Massinissa expresses for Sophonisba does not end his emotional attachment to her, but rather generates the ongoing anguish of unrequited desire. The emotional displacement of pity in Sophonisba's petition for pardon and Massinissa's desire for her erotic pity becomes the narrative engine for the remainder of Book 5, as Massinissa seeks ways to alleviate his erotic suffering while at the same time remaining faithful to his promises, both to Scipio and to Sophonisba. At the end of the book, he will have another cause to weep, since keeping his promise to Sophonisba means becoming her murderer.

In relation to Dante and the medieval lyric tradition, the story of Sophonisba and Massinissa represents a return to the erotic discourse of *mercé*, now reconfigured not only as a re-invention of the supplicatory modes of Provençal lyric, but as part of Petrarch's dialogue with antiquity. Petrarch's re-imagining of the supplication scene between Massinissa and Sophonisba represents a reconstruction of the historical past that goes far beyond the straightforwardly philological; Petrarch engages in the precarious, daring enterprise of affective archaeology, excavating the modes of feeling of the past to bring

new life to the love poetry of the present. As he develops Livy's story of erotic supplication into an exploration of the psychology of the self in love, Petrarch makes imitation of the ancients into a vehicle for his contemporary investigation of the permeable relationship between pity and desire.

The tenor of Petrarch's engagement with Livy on this issue is not that of a poet consumed by the awareness of his own historical isolation and irrevocable separation from a world that he loves more than his own.[139] The Petrarch who actively seeks to reconstruct the unwritten affectivity of Livy's narrative is a poet that sees himself in a relationship of familiar exchange. The incompleteness of Livy's story acts like a petition, inviting the reciprocal response of the imitator. In demarcating the places where his reliance on Livy begins and ends, Petrarch adopts a stance towards his *auctor* that is both conscientious and respectful. He takes what Livy gives, but responds with the awareness of what it is like to petition his own readers. Violating the imitative theory of *Familiares* 1.8 and 23.19, which calls for the thorough digestion of any pieces of text that belong to others,[140] Petrarch prefers to signal the boundaries of imitation, responding to the petition of Livy's text by breathing into it a fuller version of the affective stakes of supplication.

I would like to be able to say that by blurring the lines between the lyric rhetoric of *mercé* and the classical language of supplication, Petrarch invites interrogation of a discursive system which frames the relationship of lover to beloved in terms of conqueror

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[139] This view of Petrarch's relationship to the classical past is developed persuasively by Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry*. I am sympathetic to Greene's reading, but at the same time want to rehabilitate a sense of Petrarch's intimacy and familiarity with his ancient interlocutors.

[140] For Petrarch's theories of imitation see G. W. Pigman, III, "Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance," *Renaissance Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 1-32; M. L. McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Literary Imitation in Italy from Dante to Bembo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

and conquered, but in fact, the Sophonisba-Massinissa episode seems to reinforce the inequality at the heart of the romance language of desire. Massinissa's role as the love-torn lyric subject places him in a role of abject subjection to the lady who is, in fact, his captive. To the extent that they both become captives – Massinissa of love, Sophonisba of fate – Sophonisba's supplication produces an inversion of hierarchical roles. She begins as a suppliant, but becomes the supplicated lady. Sophonisba's death is the only way out of this hierarchical trap; Massinissa's attempt to elevate her to equal status through marriage fails, and she can only maintain her dignity by drinking the poison he sends her. The subjugation of the powerful to the control of love continues to be one of Petrarch's favorite themes, and the rhetoric of supplication, as we will see, continues in the *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*. Nevertheless, Petrarch's juxtaposition of the medieval rhetoric of erotic petition and the classical discourse of supplication sets in motion an interrogation of conventional lyric tropes, which in the later Petrarchan tradition results in the parody of the lover as helpless suppliant and eventually allows for the disentanglement of pity and desire.

Transposing Supplication in the *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*

In representing the collision of multiple supplicatory modes, Petrarch's story of Sophonisba and Massinissa not only re-introduces erotic petition into post-Dantean love poetry, but also reveals that the standard lyric paradigm of the suppliant lover's petition for pity can be fractured and reconfigured in countless ways to capture different aspects of inner experience. When Petrarch entangles classical clemency with erotic pity in the *Africa*, he redistributes the affective elements of supplication so that the conventional

roles of petitioner and petitioned become fluid and interchangeable. I will conclude this chapter by considering how Petrarch continues to develop the emotional structures of supplication in the *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*, where the relationship between suppliant lover and supplicated lady also has consequences for the narrativity of the lyric collection.[141] For Petrarch, the contingency of the supplicatory relationship is crucial to his representation of the volatility of the self in love, and therefore to the generic status of the *RVF* as a whole. By adjusting the affective elements of lyric supplication, Petrarch creates the poetic energy for multiple variations of the relationship between the speaker and Laura, and multiple possibilities for the direction of the narrative – all the while locating supplication at the heart of his transformation of the language of desire into a philosophical exploration of multi-faceted interiority.

Of the variations of the relationship between suppliant lover and supplicated lady that appear in the *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*, it comes as no surprise that the most frequent pattern is a request for *pietà* followed by rejection.[142] In this subset of poems, the supplicatory mode is used to explore the range of feeling precipitated by the lady's refusal of the lover. In *RVF* 11, a classic formulation of this pattern, Laura looks at

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[141] The question of the narrative status of the *RVF* has been a major preoccupation of Petrarch scholars. For Barolini, "The Making of a Lyric Sequence: Time and Narrative in Petrarch's *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*," Petrarch invokes the impulses of both teleological narrative and unconnected lyric experience. Picone, *Il Canzoniere*, 13, adds that another factor in the collection's narrative irresolution is that the story of the *RVF* is told from the perspective of its evolution, not from a point of view that knows the conclusion. For a discussion of Petrarch's constant state of psychological flux see Peter Hainsworth, "Rhetorics of Autobiography in Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio," *Journal of the Institute of Romance Studies* 3 (95 1994): 53-63.

[142] Braden, *Petrarchan Love and the Continental Renaissance*, 19, sees the characteristic stance of the lyric persona as "affirmation of the adequacy of the unreal." The self-deluding speaker contents himself with the illusion that the mental image of Laura is enough to satisfy him.

Petrarch kindly until he is emboldened to speak his passion. As soon as he makes his love known, she veils her face and blocks the lover from receiving the light of her eyes. For the lyric speaker, the removal of the veil is akin to the experience of death: "sì mi governa il velo / che per mia morte et al caldo et al gielo / de' be' vostr' occhi il dolce lume adombra" ["thus the veil controls me and to cause my death shades the sweet light of your lovely eyes in both warm and icy weather"] (*RVF*, 11.12-14). This scenario becomes the structural basis for the celebrated *canzone delle metamorfosi* (*RVF* 23), where a series of supplications for erotic pity are met with refusal and rebuke. [143] Each refusal results in a physical transformation that reflects a transformation of the lover's inward state. As Durling observes, "The theme of the poem is the incomprehensible changeability of the self in love, which is so violent as to call its very identity into question."[144] The lover's metamorphosis from stone to fountain to flint to stag describes in the mythical language of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* the increasingly debilitating psychological effect of the denial of erotic pity. At the same time the emotion left over from a rejected petition turns out to be a generating force for poetry.

The *canzone delle metamorfosi* is usually presented as the culmination of Petrarch's development of the language of interiority, but while the pattern of petition and refusal is Petrarch's most characteristic supplicatory mode, it is not the only version that occurs in the *RVF*. Petrarch's treatment of the affective elements of petition as moveable parts in a constantly changing relationship allows him to envision the

[143] Of the many studies of this poem, see especially Durling, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, 26-33; Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry*, 127-136; Sturm-Maddox, *Petrarch's Metamorphoses*; and Leonard Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis & The Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 208-214.
[144] Durling, *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, 27.

possibility of Laura's reciprocation – a point that is often neglected in studies that treat "Petrarch" as synonymous with unrequited love.[145] By manipulating the roles involved in erotic supplication, as he does in the *Africa*, Petrarch flirts with alternative narrative versions of the *RVF* that tell a story of successful romance. *RVF* 63, for example, imagines Laura responding positively to the physical manifestation of Petrarch's love-sickness.

> Volgendo gli occhi al mio novo colore
> che fa di morte rimembra la gente,
> pietà vi mosse; onde benignamente
> salutando, teneste in vita il core. (*RVF*, 63.1-4)
>
> Turning your eyes to my strange color, which makes people remember death, pity moved you; wherefore, kindly greeting me, you kept my heart alive.

The motif of the lady's "saluto," familiar from the *Vita Nuova*, unfolds into a scenario that would be unthinkable in the emotional landscape of Dante's "libello." Whereas Beatrice's willingness to bestow her greeting on Dante was contingent on the secrecy of his passion – as in the case of *RVF* 11 – here Laura's greeting grows out of the pity she feels as a result of seeing Petrarch's "strange color." The erotic petition implicit in

[145] Braden, *Petrarchan Love and the Continental Renaissance*, xiii, describes the subject matter of the Petrarchan tradition as "desire for someone you cannot have."

Petrarch's "novo colore" – glossed by Castelvetro as "passione amorosa" – receives a pitiful response that has the potential to turn the sequence into a story of love returned.[146]

The motif of the "saluto" offers another occasion for Petrarch to explore the possibility of Laura's erotic *pietà*. In *RVF* 111 she responds to Petrarch's visible passion in a way that even more powerfully reconfigures the pattern of petition and refusal.

La donna che 'l mio cor nel viso porta,
là dove sol fra bei pensier' d'amore
sedea, m'apparve; et io per farle honore
mossi con fronte reverente e smorta.

Tosto che del mio stato fussi accorta
A me si volse in sì novo colore
ch'avrebbe a Giove nel maggior furore
tolto l'arme di mano, et l'ira morta.

I' mi ricossi; et ella oltra, parlando,
passò, ché la parola i' non soffersi,
né 'l dolce sfavillar degli occhi suoi.

Or mi ritrovo pien di sì diversi
piaceri, in quel saluto ripensando,

[146] See *Canzoniere*, ed. Santagata, ad loc., 322.

che duol non sento, né sentì' ma' poi. (*RVF* 111.1-14)

The lady on whom my heart always gazes appeared to me where
I was sitting alone with lovely thoughts of love, and I to do her
honor moved with reverent and pale brow.

As soon as she became aware of my state, she turned to me with
hue so changed that it would have disarmed Jove in his greatest
fury, and would have killed his wrath.

I trembled, and she, conversing, passed onward, for I could not
endure her speech or the sweet sparkling of her eyes.

Now I find myself full of such varied pleasures, thinking back on
that greeting, that I feel no pain nor have ever felt any since then.

As in poem 63, Laura appears unexpectedly and finds Petrarch lost in thoughts of love. His response to her gaze reveals his condition; the brow he reverently bends to acknowledge her presence is "smorta" – deathly pale with love-sick passion. But this time, it is Laura's face that takes on the "novo colore;" as Santagata explains, "L'impallidire della donna esprime dunque un momento di corresponsione amorosa."[147] But unlike Petrarch's passive state of deathlike love, Laura's expression of erotic

[147] Ibid., 522.

reciprocation is described in terms of the active effect of her gaze on an imagined viewer – none other than Jove in his most angry mood. We are invited to imagine a scenario that amounts to a transposition of another supplication scene, in which Laura herself becomes a suppliant and pleads with an expression so pitiful that it mitigates Jove's wrath. In the Ovidian passage on which Petrarch models this image, the speaker's anger upon discovering that his mistress has been unfaithful is appeased only by the promise that she will give him kisses as sweet as those she gives his rival:

> Ut faciem vidi, fortes cecidere lacerti;
>
> defensa est armis nostra puella suis.
>
> qui modo saevus eram, supplex ultroque rogavi,
>
> oscula ne nobis deteriora daret.
>
> risit et ex animo dedit optima – qualia possent
>
> excutere irato tela trisulca Iovi. (*Amores,* 2.5.46-52)

> When I looked on her face, my brave arms dropped; my love was protected by armor of her own. But a moment before in a cruel rage, I was humble now, and even entreated her to give me kisses not less sweet than those. She smiled, and gave me her best with all her heart – kisses that could make irate Jove let drop from his hand the three-forked bolt.[148]

[148] For the Latin text, see Ovid, *P. Ovidi Nasonis Amores, Medicamina Faciei Femineae, Ars Amatoria, Remedia Amoris* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). I use the translation in Ovid, *Heroides and Amores*, trans. Grant Showerman, rev. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

In Ovid's blatantly sensual poem, there is little ambiguity about what makes Jove drop his thunderbolt. Ovid's promiscuous mistress disarms Jove with her kisses, and once again *amor* proves stronger than *arma*. In Laura's case, however, we are faced with a more ambiguous situation. Has she succeeded in calming Jove's anger with an actively pitiful look that means love, or a look of distress, like Sophonisba's, that asks for non-erotic pity from the viewer? How are we to tell the difference if *pietà* means both love and grief? The entanglement of these elements – supplication, grief, and desire – allows Petrarch to destabilize the representation of Laura as a pitiless *donna petra* and to open the narrative strand suggested by the "vista pietosa" of Dante's *donna gentile*. Laura's "novo colore" indicates the possibility of an acceptance, and with this alternate narrative comes another variation of selfhood. Following Laura's pitiful "saluto," Petrarch's inward pain is transformed into a multiplicity of "diversi piaceri" (*RVF,* 111.12-13), and when he proclaims that he has never felt any pain since then, he makes a strong gesture toward narrative resolution. The potential of a positive conclusion flickers for a moment before the reader's eyes, before it vanishes with the arrival of the next poem.

The inner world of the suppliant lover takes on a different shape in two poems that draw on the conflation of pity and desire that informs Massinissa's tears in the *Africa* and Laura's appeasement of Jove's anger in *RVF* 111. *RVF* 155 re-deploys the image of angry Jove precisely to explore the slippage between a pitiful response to suffering and the erotic pity that inflames the viewer with passion. Pulling out the erotic potential implicit in Ovid's version of Jove's disarmament and combining it with an allusion to Julius Caesar's decidedly non-erotic *clementia*, Petrarch describes the instability of his own feelings by imagining himself as the spectator of Laura's suffering:

Non fur ma' Giove et Cesare sì mossi
(a folminar colui, questo a ferire)
che pietà non avesse spente l'ire. (*RVF*, 155.1-3)

Jove and Caesar were never so moved, the former to thunder, the latter to wound that pity would not have put out their anger.

Laura is weeping – we don't know why (though the motif of the lady's grief may come from Beatrice's lament at the death of her father) – and Petrarch's response to her distress is to feel sorry for her in such a way that his pity increases his passion. Here we are again in the world of Sophonisba and Massinissa: Laura's distress, erotic or not, produces in the lover a disorienting confusion of pity and desire. The sight of Laura's tears turns Petrarch, paradoxically, into an amorous Jove and a merciful Caesar. His inner turmoil is the result of an unstable supplicatory encounter that is at once erotic and non-erotic, modern and antique.

Petrarch returns to this psychological conundrum in *RVF* 241, where Amor is responsible for piercing the speaker "with a burning arrow of love" ["con un ardente et amoroso strale"] (*RVF*, 241.4) and a "dart of pity" ["una saetta di pietate"] (*RVF*, 241.7). Again Laura is suffering, and the result is that Petrarch has two wounds:

L'una piaga arde e versa foco et fiamma,
lagrime l'altra, che 'l dolor distilla

per li occhi mei del vostro stato rio. (*RVF*, 241.9-11)

One wound burns and pours forth smoke and flame; the other,
Tears, which sorrow distills through my eyes on account of your
suffering state.

The speaker, caught between grief and passion, experiences both feelings as "piaghe." The burning flame of the one wound and the wet tears of the other constitute the quintessential metaphor of the Petrarchan divided self. This inner conflict, which brings the speaker to a point of paralysis and the narrative to a potentially indefinite stasis, is the result of the fundamental instability in the vocabulary of lyric supplication. The multiple registers of *pietà* ensure that the discourses of love and pity will always bleed into each other, and leave the suppliant lover in a recurring state of emotional bewilderment.

We might expect the poetry of supplication to drop out in the poems *in morte* that follow Laura's death, but unlike in Dante, in the *RVF* death does not end supplicatory poetry; the relationship between suppliant lover and supplicated lady continues even when the beloved has reached the ultimate degree of unattainability. While a number of the *in morte* poems attempt to turn Laura into a version of Beatrice, some of the most erotic exchanges of the sequence occur when Petrarch supplicates his lady in heaven for her *pietà*. Consider *RVF* 285, where Laura returns to Petrarch "dal suo eterno alto ricetto" ["from her eternal home"] (*RVF*, 285.6) with "doppia pietate" ["double pity"] (*RVF*, 285.8) – that of a mother and that of a lover. This is the first time we have heard

Laura described so explicitly not simply as an object of love, but as a lover herself. In this way she resembles more closely the Laura of the *Trionfi*, who confesses to nearly full reciprocation of Petrarch's love: "Fur quasi eguali in noi fiamme amorose" ["Almost equal flames of love were in us"] (*Triumphus Mortis*, 2.139).[149] In *RVF* 285, it is Laura who seems to be divided by the very same passions that have tormented Petrarch: "or teme or arde" ["now she fears, now she burns] (*RVF*, 285.9). What is more, the affection she shows is "usato" ["usual"] (*RVF*, 285.7). For the purposes of this poem, Laura's love is something the poet has come to know well. Laura's *pietà* may be partly maternal – the poem depicts her giving advice to Petrarch on how to amend his life – but it is also explicitly erotic, and Petrarch's response to her demonstration of affection is not that of a reformed sinner seeking his salvation, but the full ardor of a man in love: "only while she speaks do I have peace – or at least a truce" ["sol quant' ella parla ò pace, o tregua"] (*RVF*, 285.14).

In fact, Laura's death liberates Petrarch's fantasy to imagine versions of the relationship of supplication in which Laura is both supplicated beloved and suppliant lover. The fantasy of RVF 356 is that Laura's death frees Petrarch to speak to her in a way that he never could when she was alive. He tells the story of his enamorment, the gnawing torment of his passion, the confusion of happiness and despair. Her response is to look at him steadily "di pietà depinta" ["her face the color of pity"] (*RVF*, 356.9). Even in this poem at the very end of the sequence – the *canzone* begging for the Virgin's mercy is only ten poems away – we are still unsure whether Laura's change of color is meant to indicate grief or love. Her sighs and her tears communicate both possibilities.

[149] Francesco Petrarca, *Trionfi, Rime Estravaganti, Codice Degli Abbozzi*, ed. Vinicio Pacca and Laura Paolino (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1996).

For Petrarch, these states will always be intertwined, and the ambiguity of the response of the supplicated beloved opens a new facet of interiority. The poem ends when Petrarch awakes to discover that his exchange of feeling with Laura has been a dream, but the degree of emotional wish-fulfillment inside the dream-world points to a crucial element in Petrarchan psychology: voluntary self-delusion. By continuing to write suppliant poetry even after Laura's death – suppliant poetry that holds out the possibility of her erotic reciprocation when it is most finally unachievable – Petrarch invites us to see the lover's passion as self-created and self-generating. He does not need Laura to be available if he can make her respond in his imagination. The persistence of the relationship of supplication throughout the whole sequence allows for the expression of an inner state of conscious self-deception that has never found voice in love poetry before.

The multi-faceted interiority of the *RVF*, as it turns out, is generated by Petrarch's conscious manipulation of the affective roles in the suppliant drama. Petrarch responds to Dante by insisting that without the suppliant lover and the supplicated lady, love poetry loses its ability to offer a genuine philosophical account of the inner life. Dante would undoubtedly reply that it is better to lose the self and find God, but the Petrarch of the *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta* opts for interiority and the "vario stile" that comes with it. Just as Petrarch manipulated the emotional structure of supplication to explore the affective overlap between classical and modern vocabularies of love in the *Africa*, so supplication becomes central to the *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*'s revolutionary exploration of narrative of the self.

III

SHAKESPEARE'S DRAMA OF SUPPLICATION: *TITUS ANDRONICUS*, *CORIOLANUS*, AND *THE TEMPEST*

The spectacular international success of the *Canzoniere* ensured that the rhetoric of supplication would have a lasting home in Renaissance love poetry, but by the end of the sixteenth century, supplicatory gestures had also colonized the stage. The dynamic bodily interaction between the petitioner and petitioned in the structure of supplication – evident even in the epic context of the *Aeneid* and the lyric framework of the *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta* – begs for performance in the theater where the physicality of the gestures can be fully realized. It comes as no surprise, then, that suppliants crowded the playhouses of Elizabethan and Jacobean England. From the virgins of Damascus begging for mercy from Marlowe's implacable Tamburlaine (*1 Tamburlaine*, 5.2.11-42) to Marston's Sophonisba pleading for death "with hands / Vnusde to beg" (*The Wonder of Women or The Tragedie of Sophonisba*, 5.3.20-21), stage petitioners used the iconic gestures of kneeling, bowing, and stretching out the hands as part of the wordless language of the theater.

But if nearly all the English dramatists of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries show some interest in staging supplication, Shakespeare stands out among his contemporaries both for the sheer concentration of supplicatory gestures in his plays, and more importantly, for the dramatic weight those gestures are made to bear. For Shakespeare, the ceremonial drama of suppliant and supplicated becomes a powerful point of access into some of the key questions of his plays: the politics of social order and

hierarchy, the intersection of ritual and performance, the relationship of external gesture and inward reality, and the nature of the theater itself. As early as the *Henry VI* plays, Shakespeare uses the stage image of kneeling as a visual structuring motif to track the shifting allegiances and chaotic inversions of authority unleashed by the struggle for power among the English nobility during the War of the Roses.[150] In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* we find him experimenting with an ecphrasis of supplication in a way that anticipates the treatment of rhetoric and the emotions in the tapestry scene of *The Rape of Lucrece*. In order to persuade Valentine to give up hope of winning Silvia's love, Proteus paints a rhetorical picture of a scene of supplication between Silvia and her father. In Proteus' account of the imaginary encounter, Silvia kneels to beg for Valentine's release from the doom of banishment, but "neither bended knees, pure hands held up, / Sad sighs, deep groans, nor silver-shedding tears / Could penetrate her uncompassionate sire." (3.1.228-230). The success of Proteus' deceit depends on his ability to convey an emotional impression of merciless rigidity that will convince Valentine of the hopelessness of his case. He calculates – correctly – that a vivid mental portrait of the kneeling figure of Silvia, prostrate with grief, is more likely to persuade Valentine of the Duke's implacability than the most unambiguous proclamation of his banishment. Proteus' rhetorically filtered representation of Silvia's passion is more eloquent than her father's action.

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[150] See especially the analysis of *2 Henry VI*, 5.1.122-28 in John T. Onuska, Jr., "Bringing Shakespeare's Characters Down to Earth: The Significance of Kneeling," *Iowa State Journal of Research* 56, no. 1 (1981): 31-41, as well as Ann Slater, *Shakespeare the Director* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982), 65-67. For the larger issue of Shakespeare as creator of theatrical scenes, see Emrys Jones, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

In *Richard III*, Shakespeare stages another powerfully affective response to supplication, not through a description of a kneeling suppliant, but through the on-stage performance of supplicatory gesture. The supplication of the Earl of Derby, who kneels before the king to ask for pardon for a servant guilty of homicide, provokes a strangely mimetic response in Edward: it dawns on him that when his own brother's life was at stake, there was no one to "beg for his life" (2.1.131). Edward upbraids the noblemen at court for their lack of feeling, but his bitterest recriminations are left for himself: "But for my brother, not a man would speak, / Nor I, ungracious, speak unto myself / For him, poor soul" (2.1.127-29). Anticipating the play-within-a-play in *Hamlet*, the on-stage performance of the very stage action that Edward wrongfully omitted generates his confession of guilt. In this case, it is not a rejected supplication that does the work of emotional unlocking but the fact that under Edward's pitiless rule no supplicating took place at all.

These early examples give a sense of the range and depth of Shakespeare's interest in the expressive capacities of supplication even at the outset of his career, but supplication only increased in dramaturgical importance as Shakespeare's professional experience in the theater grew. In *Richard II*, he develops the ceremonial gesture of kneeling into a means of communicating political and personal reversal: Richard's acceptance of Bolingbroke's supplication for the title of Lancaster symbolically enacts his deposition (3.3.30-195). Before Bolingbroke consents to kneel to the king, Richard must descend from the walls of Flint Castle and perform with his body his own descent

from power.[151] Supplicatory gestures also emerge in conjunction with dramatic choice. Isabella's hesitation over whether to kneel to the Duke to save Angelo's life in *Measure for Measure* (5.1.435-46) communicates in stage image her struggle to decide between mercy and justice.[152] Furthermore, supplication allows Shakespeare to explore the staging of scenes where gesture replaces words: Lear, waking up to find Cordelia kneeling before him, confusedly kneels to her in turn, not realizing that his gesture conveys the humility and penitence that would be appropriate for him to express towards someone he has wronged. (4.6.50-73).[153]

But Shakespeare's engagement with the structures of supplication reaches its pinnacle in *Coriolanus*, where the rhetoric and gestures of petition not only focus the play's investment in the questions of politics, ritual, selfhood, and performance, but also become a vehicle for tragic action. Shakespeare's exploration of the dramatic potential of supplication, therefore, is fundamentally bound up with his intimate relationship with the literature of antiquity. In his ongoing dialogue with Vergil and Plutarch – fueled by his renewed interest in representing ancient Rome in the late 1590's – Shakespeare found both the material and the method for making supplication the subject of tragedy. In the

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[151] See David Bevington, *Action Is Eloquence: Shakespeare's Language of Gesture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 166-67; John T. Onuska, Jr., "Bringing Shakespeare's Characters Down to Earth: The Significance of Kneeling," 34.

[152] Bevington, *Action Is Eloquence*, 167, notes that "Isabella's kneeling is enlarged from a gesture of supplication to one of choosing; paradoxically, she who has sought justice must now judge Angelo through her kneeling or refusing to do so."

[153] Lear's kneeling is not specified in the stage directions, but it is implied by Cordelia's preceding line "No, sir, you must not kneel" (4.6.57). See Slater's beautiful reading of the gesture in *Shakespeare the Director*: "As Lear kneels to Cordelia, he implicitly admits his fault…Yet, at the actual moment, Shakespeare deliberately avoids the straightforward moral declarations of his source. As he presents it, Lear's first feeling is simply one of confusion…When he sees this woman kneel, aware that the dignity cannot be for him, he simply kneels as well, in humbleness and a kind of bewildered mimicry" (78).

chapter that follows, I will focus on Shakespeare's re-discovery of suppliant drama in *Coriolanus*, but I will begin, as a point of contrast, with his early experiment in *Titus Andronicus*, where supplication acts an accessory to the logic of revenge. A concluding coda will address the Vergilian overtones of the problematic role of the suppliant in *The Tempest*.

The Culture of Petition in Renaissance England

Before turning to Shakespeare, however, it will be worthwhile to examine some of the forms of petition he would have encountered living in what Annabel Patterson has described as "a petitioning society."[154] Since the early Middle Ages, the business of receiving and responding to suits had been one of the most valued – and most visible – occupations of the monarch.[155] As David Zaret observes, "No communicative practice for sending messages from the periphery to the center had greater legitimacy than petitioning."[156] By 1640 the nature of petitioning would undergo a fundamental transformation; the mid-seventeenth century witnessed the rise of the petition as an instrument of political resistance and reform, which used an archaizing language of submission and humility to mask revolutionary demands. But in the Elizabethan and Jacobean period – the chronological boundaries of Shakespeare's life and the present

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[154] Annabel Patterson, "A Petitioning Society," in *Reading Between the Lines* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 57-79.

[155] See the account of medieval English petitioning in David Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early-Modern England* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 81-83, who notes that in the fifteenth century, the king would regularly receive several thousand petitions every year. For a more extensive account of the history of supplication in the Middle Ages, see Geoffrey Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favor: Ritual and Political Order in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992).

[156] Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture*, 81.

discussion – England was still very much a culture of petitioning where "at every level of authority the petition, by the individual or the group, direct or via an intercessor, was the acceptable form in which requests for social reordering were made."[157] As one contemporary petitioner wryly remarked before making his request, "you know it is a petitioning age."[158] The language and gestures of supplication were an ever-present part of Shakespeare's daily experience, and he mined them for dramatic material with characteristic opportunism.

Making a petition was fundamentally an act of performance. Whether enacted in writing or in person, petitioning involved an exchange between two people with emotional consequences for both parties.[159] Far from being an anonymous bureaucratic procedure, the petition cultivated and sometimes jeopardized personal relationships. As a result, a tremendous amount of attention went into creating an appropriate rhetorical and gestural space for the interaction to take place. The performance of petitioning began in the humanist classroom.[160] The rhetorical focus of humanist pedagogy gave the petition –

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[157] Patterson, "A Petitioning Society," 62.

[158] As cited in Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture*, 83.

[159] For the social relationship of exchange, see Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000). Davis builds on the work of historians and anthropologists writing in the wake of Marcel Mauss' seminal study of *The Gift* to suggest that in early modern France a gift economy co-existed with more commercial forms of trade. For an application of gift-theory to early modern England, see Jason Scott-Warren, *Sir John Harington and the Book as Gift* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[160] It is a critical commonplace that the explosion of imaginative literature in England in the second half of the sixteenth century is bound up with the fortunes of humanist education. The relationship between humanist education and Renaissance literature has been complicated and enlivened by a number of recent studies. See especially Colin Burrow, "Shakespeare and humanistic culture," in *Shakespeare and the Classics*, ed. Charles Martindale (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 9-27; Alan Stewart, *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance*

as an incarnation of persuasion – a place at the center of the curriculum. Elizabethan schoolboys who started their training with Lily's Latin grammar and proceeded to translation exercises with short passages from the *Sententiae Pueriles*, the Distichs of Cato, Aesop, Terence, and Mantuan, would encounter in the upper forms the more difficult task of composition.[161] Students were eventually meant to compose complete orations and poems, but the process of transforming an English schoolboy into a Ciceronian orator began with writing petitionary letters.

The letter provided a short literary form in which the pupil could practice the lessons in rhetoric that he had learned from the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Cicero's *Topica*, Erasmus' *De Copia*, and the rhetorical manuals of Talaeus and Susembrotus; ideally, in the utopian mindset of the pedagogical reformers, without excessive fatigue or tedium. In an early chapter *De Conscribendis Epistolis*, Erasmus urges the schoolmaster "to give [his students] frequent practice in short epistolary themes," choosing the material with care "in order to present those topics in particular that will attract and interest boys of that age … For the more enjoyable these exercises, the more useful they will prove, and this aim will be accomplished if the themes are novel, or amusing, or otherwise congenial to boy's minds."[162] Among the suggested topics, Erasmus includes many that are petitionary: a young man in love seeks the favor of his lady, Horatius begs his father

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(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), and Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (forthcoming).

[161] Still essential for this terrain is T.W. Baldwin, *William Shakspere's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944). See also Michael Van Cleave Alexander, *The Growth of English Education, 1348-1648: A Social and Cultural History* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990) and Kenneth Charlton, *Education in Renaissance England* (London: Routledge, 1965).

[162] Desiderius Erasmus, *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 25: 24.

to defend him against a capital charge, the senators of the Roman Republic entreat Camillus to return to Rome to fight the Gauls.[163] Erasmus devotes a special section of *De Conscribendis Epistolis* to composing letters of petition, describing the language, arguments, and tropes to be used, while at the same time furnishing pupils with a collection of passages, many from Cicero's letters, illustrating various petitionary styles. The heart of his advice concerns the attitude that the petitioner should show towards the addressee:

> First of all [we must exaggerate] the need that besets us, showing what a great weapon neediness is, how useless modesty is to a person in need, and that we are well aware of the shamelessness of making so large a request of a person for whom we have never done anything to deserve it. After that we shall gradually demonstrate in subtle ways that no slight hope is afforded by his singular kindness, which prompts him to give assistance even to unknown and undeserving persons because of the extraordinary goodness of his nature, which is disposed to lighten all men's miseries. This restrained manner commends the petitioner highly, just as presumption serves to estrange the other's feelings. For no one willingly grants a kindness to one who expects it as if it were his due and who makes a demand rather than a request.[164]

Erasmus is effectively describing the rhetorical *ethos* of a petitioner, the persona a suppliant must adopt to win his request. Writing a letter of petition is a rhetorical

[163] Ibid., 25: 24-26.
[164] Ibid., 25: 172-173.

performance, which, like an oration, requires that the writer create a recognizable role both for himself and his audience. To some extent that *ethos* will depend on the circumstances of the petition, but its fundamental attributes – neediness, powerlessness, and humility – remain constant in the rhetoric of petitioning. At the very end of the sixteenth century, Angel Day, author of *The English Secretary: or Methods of Writing Epistles and Letters* (1599), echoes Erasmus' advice for writing "epistles petitorie," focusing especially on the *ethos* of humility:

> In this place a more then ordinarie bashfulnes would bee admitted, which giveth no small furtherance to everie demaund, as audacious and wainscot impudencie on the other side returneth the greatest impediment in anie thing to be obtained. For no man willingly would do benefit to such a one who in manner goeth about as of duety and not of curtesie to eract the same, and rather as a commaunder than a craver, would impudently thrust himself to the obtaining thereof.[165]

Day's manual went through seven editions before it was printed for the last time in 1626, testifying to the continued vitality and efficacy of the principles Erasmus had laid out nearly a century before. The popularity of Day's more straightforward vernacular handbook also suggests that advice for writing letters of petition was even more widely in demand in 1599 than in 1522. Indeed, the second printing coincides with the first attempt by the Elizabethan Privy Council to control the vast influx of petitions to court by

[165] Angel Day, *The English Secretary: or, Methods of Writing Epistles and Letters (1599): A Facsimile Reproduction*, ed. Robert O' Evans (Gainesville, FL: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1967), 92.

institutionalizing the process of petitioning.[166] By the time Francis Bacon became Clerk of the Star Chamber, the business of handling petitions was the primary occupation of king's councilors. As a result, when George Villiers, the future Duke of Buckingham, was chosen as the king's new "favorite," Bacon took it upon himself to instruct his protégé in devising an efficient system for effectively organizing, processing, and responding to suits.[167]

But what did Elizabethan and Jacobean petitions actually look and sound like? Lupold von Wedel, a German nobleman with a passion for foreign travel, records a visit to the queen's residence at Hampton Court, where he saw her walk out to the palace chapel along a path thronged with people. It was a Sunday, and as she made her way to the church "the people standing on both sides fell on their knees, but she showed herself very gracious, and accepted with an humble mien letters of supplication from rich and poor."[168] In kneeling to the queen with their letters of supplication, the supplicants communicated their submission, reverence, and dependency on royal favor, while at the same time, their bowed knees reminded the queen of the duty of generosity she incurred by virtue of her power. Elizabeth, for her part, responded with the appropriate reciprocal gesture. By accepting the supplications of her subjects with "an humble mien," she

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[166] Elizabeth's efforts to create order out of the chaos of the petitioning process are indicated in the titles of two proclamations in the *Short Title Catalogue*: "A commandment that no suitors come to the Court for any private suit except their petitions be endorsed by the masters of Requests" (*STC* 8239); "A proclamation to reform the disorder in access to the court" (*STC* 8233). The process was more thoroughly institutionalized under James I. See Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture*, 85.

[167] For the text of Bacon's "Letter of Advice" to George Villiers, see ed. James Spedding, *The Letters and the Life of Francis Bacon* (London: Longman, Greens, Reader and Dyer, 1872), 9-26.

[168]"Journey through England and Scotland Made by Lupold Von Wedel in the Years 1584 and 1585," trans. Gottfried von Bulow, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* n.s., 9 (1895): 250.

acknowledged her obligation to give freely, just as she had received her authority as a free unmerited gift from God.

Suppliants were a regular presence at the Elizabethan court, but petitions were made in writing as often as in person. The most vivid petitionary rhetoric of the period comes from one particular subcategory of written petitions – supplications for pardon.[169] These documents, scattered in various repositories, from official state papers to collections of private correspondence, allow us to hear the voices of petitioners at the moment when they had the most at stake: when they were pleading for their lives.[170] The lucky few who had direct access either to the sovereign or to the Privy Council have left behind the most eloquent documents. In a letter written from the Tower in 1571 after his

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[169] The most comprehensive account of pardon practices in Early Modern England is K. J. Kesselring, *Mercy and Authority in the Tudor State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For the medieval period, see Naomi Hurnard, *The King's Pardon for Homicide Before A.D. 1307* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969). See also the excellent summary of the role of pardoning in English governance up to the time of the Civil Wars in Cynthia Herrup, "Punishing Pardon: Some Thoughts on the Origins of Penal Transportation," in *Penal Practice and Culture, 1500-1900: Punishing the English*, ed. Simon Devereaux and Paul Griffiths (Houndsmills, Baskingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 125-129. For the role of juries in pardon decisions, see Thomas Andrew Green, *Verdict According to Conscience: Perspectives on the English Criminal Trial Jury, 1200-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), and J. M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 400-449.

[170] Since the early Middle Ages, it had been customary for offenders guilty of certain excusable crimes to receive a royal pardon *de cursu*. In these cases the judges presiding over the local assize courts would send a list of names of convicts recommended for pardon to the Chancery, where they would be certified and processed by the authority of the Secretary of State or the Privy Council. Pardons *de gratia*, however, required the specific intervention of the monarch. In some situations, the judges at a trial would decide of their own accord that an offender who was legally ineligible for pardon *de cursu* ought to be recommended specifically to the queen's mercy because of youth, good character, or genuine signs of penitence. More often offenders were left to navigate the complex web of patronage relationships at court on their own. For a comprehensive account of pardon practices in the system of assizes and home circuit courts, see J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Calendar of Assize Records*: Home Circuit Indictments, Elizabeth I and James I, "Introduction" (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1985), 113-26.

arrest for complicity in the plot to put Mary, Queen of Scots, on the English throne, Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk begs the queen to remit his sentence. He admits that he is unworthy of her compassion, but reflects that "when I look on your manifold mercies, which so many have tasted since your prosperous reign, I am emboldened to make my trembling hand offer you my most humble and lowly submission."[171] Using language that metaphorically figures the physical gestures of supplication, he writes: "I now prostrate at your feet myself, my children, and all that I have, hoping more of your clemency than is my desert." Norfolk makes no attempt to justify or excuse his actions, but using the penitential language of Scripture, he confesses "I am as a man that has run astray" and promises that his "service in time coming shall be such that you will have no cause to repent your mercy." Norfolk, of course, did not survive to make good on his promise. Nevertheless, his letter is a particularly eloquent example of the formulas and expressions that were customarily used by suppliants for pardon. Pardon letters occasionally included an assertion of innocence, but normally the petitioner was expected to confess his guilt, express remorse, and humbly submit himself to the mercy of the Crown. The emphasis on humility and penitence characteristic of pardon petitions also appears in the judicial system; court records indicate that one of the most common reasons for a jury to show mercy was if a criminal seemed genuine sorry for his crime.[172]

An illuminating counterpoint to Norfolk's learned plea is offered by three pardon petitions from 1606 written to the Earl of Salisbury by a certain Timothy Haies, who describes himself as "a poore prisoner in the Gatehouse." Haies relies not on confession of guilt, but on elaborate protestations of humility and a pity-inspiring description of his

[171] *Calendar of State Papers*, Vol. XIX, 364.
[172] Green, *Verdict According to Conscience*, 105-52.

abject need. Without the Earl's help, he writes, "he had long since ben starved for want of meanes having neither father nor mother nor other meanes of maintenance." He is "altogether destitute of all frendes" and so begs "with tears most humbly" for release.[173] In the second petition, written a few weeks later, Haies reminds Salisbury that "your poore peticioner lyeth as yet in prison in very great misery and that his acquaintance is soe smale that there are none which for love will seeme to doe for him."[174] Now he also complains that a man imprisoned with him for the same crime has already received his pardon: has the Earl forgotten about Haies? By the time he writes a third petition, this time to Salisbury's secretary, we have a sense that Timothy Haies' desperation is increasing. He paints an even more lively picture of his miserable condition: "My estate is so extreame poore that in very deed I am not able to pay for smale and extraordinary trifles necessary for me, the kings maiestie not withstanding moste graciously paying for my dyet and chamber, so that I cannot request any favor of your hands in hope to requite your great kindenes but only for gods sake, to whome I shall acknowledge my selfe always bounde to pray for your aeternall happiness if that you vouchsafe at this time to helpe, who am in reason of great necessity constrained with a brazen face to request very praesumptiusly of great favors of strange and unknowne frendes, whose hartes I hope will rather be moved of charity and for gods sake, then for any worldly gayne of affection to helpe me nowe that am left alone in such extremities.[175] He concludes by beseeching the secretary to speak to the Earl.

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[173] Cecil Papers, Petitions 37: Timothy Haies to the Earl of Salibsury [Before October 1606]
[174] CP Petitions 1: Timothy Haies to the Earl of Salisbury [October 1606]
[175] CP 118/7: Timothy Haies to Mr. Lavinus [Munck], Secretary to the Earl of Salisbury [15 October 1606]

The rhetoric of these two strikingly different petitioners nevertheless points to the key aspects of petitioning which were constant throughout the period. Both Norfolk and Haies connect the sovereign's power to pardon crimes with divine forgiveness, conflating politics with religious authority. Haies is more tentative in this regard, but he clearly draws on the notion that good deeds done in this life will reap a heavenly reward. Similarly, both petitioners emphasize their personal connection to the addressee. Norfolk accomplishes this, paradoxically, by adopting a tone of reverent distance from a woman whom he saw and spoke with on a daily basis. Instead of focusing on his relationship to her as intimate of the court, he cites their kinship by blood. Haies, on the other hand, uses his very indebtedness to Salisbury as a premise for further requests. Salisbury's previous "gracious allowance" establishes a relationship of benefit, which Haies invites his benefactor to continue. Whether or not there was such a relationship is a different question; Haies describes the role he desires Salisbury to play, just as he fashions for himself the persona of a "poore suppliant." The element of performance also finds its way into Norfolk's figurative supplication. As he conjures up an image of himself, his children prostrate at the queen's feet, begging for mercy, the physical gestures of submission which would accompany a face-to-face supplication are acted out on the page.

Titus Andronicus: Supplication and the Logic of Revenge

In the supplicatory rhetoric of Norfolk and Haies, we see the confluence of religious and secular conceptions of pardon, as well as the inherently theatrical quality of

petitioning in everyday life. It is perhaps no accident, then, that the first known illustration of a Shakespeare play is a scene of supplication. Little else can be said for certain about the document generally referred to as the "Longleat manuscript,"[176] a single folio sheet with a pen-and-ink drawing at the top of the page that ostensibly depicts a "medley of moments" from *Titus Andronicus*.[177] At the center of the drawing, Tamora kneels before Titus to plead for mercy for her son Alarbus, as she does in Act 1 Scene 1, but the other details of the scene have no correspondence in extant versions of the play. To the left of Titus stand not his sons or the "men bearing two coffins covered with black" specified by the stage directions, but two soldiers in elaborate non-Roman costume. On Tamora's right, two young men kneel with their hands tied – almost certainly her sons Chiron and Demetrius – but next to them is Aaron the Moor with sword raised and finger pointing menacingly as if to threaten the two prisoners.

The puzzle of the drawing increases when it is considered along with the forty lines of text transcribed underneath. The text begins with an invented set of stage directions – "Enter Tamora pleadinge for her sonnes going to execution" – and continues with seventeen lines from Tamora's speech of petition at 1.1.104-120. The last twenty lines of the passage replicate, with a few slight differences, Aaron's defiant boast at

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[176] The sketch is reproduced and discussed in detail by R. A. Foakes, *Illustrations of the English Stage, 1580-1642* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 48-51. For the questions of dating, authorship, and significance of the manuscript, see the summaries in Eugene M. Waith, ed., The Oxford Shakespeare *Titus Andronicus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 20-27; Alan Hughes, ed., The New Cambridge Shakespeare *Titus Andronicus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 15-22; Jonathan Bate, ed., The Arden Shakespeare *Titus Andronicus* (London: Routledge, 1995), 38-43; and G. Harold Metz, *Shakespeare's Earliest Tragedy: Studies in Titus Andronicus* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996), 234-47.

[177] Tiffany Stern, *Making Shakespeare: From Stage to Page* (London: Routledge, 2004), 102.

5.1.124-145 where he claims to regret only that he has not done more evil. In an effort to create one continuous flow of dialogue, these two passages from opposite ends of the play are sewn together by three lines attributed to Titus, which conflate his words to Tamora at 1.1.121-125 with Lucius' words to Aaron at 5.1.123. The text, therefore, combines elements from *Titus Andronicus* in a way that corresponds neither to the play nor the sketch.

Most scholars believe that the text transcribed in careful secretary hand is the work of Henry Peacham, author of *The Compleat Gentleman* (1622), whose signature appears on the lower left side of the page. But if Peacham was the scribe, was he also responsible for the drawing? Another marking on the reverse side of the sheet declares that the document is "Henrye Peachams Hande," but the words are written in another script, perhaps that of the nineteenth-century Shakespearean critic and forger John Payne Collier.[178] It is impossible to say for certain whether Henry Peacham was the scribe and author of the text, and if so, whether he also made the sketch. Even if we assume that he was responsible for both, the relationship between drawing, text, and play remains another part of the mystery.[179]

In the absence of definitive evidence, it is generally accepted that Peacham made the sketch and copied out the lines of text at some point in 1595 after seeing one of the productions of *Titus Andronicus* recorded in Henslowe's *Diary* in the summer of 1594,

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[178] Waith, *Titus Andronicus*, 23; Foakes, *Illustrations of the English Stage*, 48.

[179] June Schlueter, "Rereading the Peacham Drawing," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (1999): 171-184 has recently argued that the drawing has no direct relationship to Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, but instead is based on a German version of the play. Richard Levin, "The Longleat Manuscript and Titus Andronicus," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (2002): 323-340, persuasively refutes this argument and reconnects the sketch with Shakespeare's play.

when the players were on tour in the countryside.[180] The mismatch between the drawing, text, and play can be accounted for in a variety of ways: Peacham may not have been aiming to portray what he saw in the production; he may have wanted to create a "composite representation;" or he may have misremembered some of the details of the play.[181] But regardless of the reason behind them, Peacham's inaccuracies and misrememberings are more valuable than the most exacting representation of what *Titus Andronicus* may have looked like on stage. The Longleat manuscript constitutes not simply a visual reproduction of stage imagery, but a suggestive interpretation of the play. Whether he realized it or not, Peacham hit upon a key aspect of the infrastructure of *Titus Andronicus* and tapped into the underlying logic of its mad bursts of violence. The balance and symmetry of the composition, the starkness and simplicity of the arrangement of the figures against the empty white background, and the careful attention to gesture all confirm John Kerrigan's sense that the sketch "shows a gifted contemporary looking through, or thinking back over, Shakespeare's tragedy, and being struck by a violent orderliness at its heart."[182]

The oxymoronic quality of "violent orderliness" is conveyed even in the most elemental aspects of the composition. In Peacham's hands, the ceremonial regularity of the scene of supplication in Act 1 becomes an aggressive confrontation between the agents of Titus and Tamora. The prominent vertical line of Titus' staff divides the scene

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[180] Hughes, *Titus Andronicus*, 21-22.

[181] For the view that Peacham's drawing works in the iconographic tradition of "composite" compositions that represent chronologically distant events as occurring at the same time, see Metz, *Shakespeare's Earliest Tragedy*, 242-47; Bate, *Titus Andronicus*, 41-43.

[182] John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 195-6.

in two, with Titus and his subordinates on one side and Tamora and hers on the other. The central figures face each other in profile. Tamora kneels before Titus in an ornate gown that conceals her entire body except her hands, which are lifted towards Titus with palms together, creating a line that corresponds precisely to the vector of Titus' sword as he stands holding his staff. The alignment of the sword and pleading hands simultaneously suggests the order of ceremony and the chaos of aggression and conflict. This is corroborated by the gestures of the subordinate figures to the left and right. On Titus' side of the dividing staff, the angle of his sword is picked up by the soldiers' more antagonistic haliberds; in the same way, Aaron's uplifted weapon gives a violent energy to Tamora's praying palms.[183] Aaron's sword, raised at the same angle as the soldier's haliberds, as if to retaliate against an attack, is Peacham's masterstroke. For in *Titus Andronicus* supplication is deeply bound up with play's thinking about the logic of revenge.

We have seen supplication and revenge intertwined before in the last moments of the *Aeneid*, where the image of Pallas' baldric works against Turnus' plea for mercy, turning Aeneas into a wrathful avenger instead of a clement victor.[184] In *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare takes the compressed scene at the end of the *Aeneid* and opens it out into a double plot of vengeance. Beginning with Titus' refusal to accept Tamora's

[183] This reading of Aaron's role in the drawing is supported by Levin, "The Longleat Manuscript and *Titus Andronicus*," 333, who argues: "His function within the scene, it seems to me, is to depict an ominous threat to Titus and Titus's family. He is placed there not as a "composite representation"of his eventual capture and punishment but as a kind of proleptic figure warning us of the crimes to follow in Acts 2 and 3."

[184] See above Chapter 1, 57-65. For the play's treatment of the *Aeneid*, see Heather James, "Blazoning Injustice: Mutilating Titus Andronicus, Vergil, and Rome," in *Shakespeare's Troy: Drama, Politics, and the Translation of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 42-84.

plea, the two movements of the play – Tamora's revenge and Titus' counter-revenge – both explore the way supplication interacts with the structure of retribution.[185] In the phase of Tamora's ascendancy, rejected supplication becomes both the motive and the means for vengeance. By staging scenes in which her enemies are forced to supplicate when there is no hope of reconciliation, Tamora turns supplication into a weapon of revenge. Her removal of the contingent element of the exchange – the possibility of a positive response – indicates her willingness to accept the psychologically disfiguring process by which the revenger becomes an even more monstrous version of the original malefactor. When excessive grief finally transforms Titus from a passive sufferer to an active agent of harm, he initially resists the inevitable psychological consequences of his role and tries to delay the fulfillment of his revenge. But Titus cannot escape the role imposed on him, and the motif of supplication returns at the end of the play to signal the inevitability of self-annihilation that makes revenge such a compelling vehicle for tragedy.

These claims require some unfolding, and so I will begin at the most basic level with the nature of the revenge plot before turning to its relationship to the structure of supplication. Revenge relies on a principle of negative reciprocity, in which harm is returned for harm and injury for injury. The result is a potentially limitless sequence of repetitions.[186] If A harms B, the logic of revenge demands retribution: B must harm A in

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[185] For Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare*, 97, the play's two movements both focus on Titus, "the first dominated by passionate suffering, the second by purposeful revenge." I find Jones' description of the structure of the play convincing, but I want to emphasize that the phase of Titus' "passionate suffering" can also be described in terms of Tamora's revenge.

[186] For the repetitive nature of revenge, see especially Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy*, 108-109, 201-202, 267-270; Katharine Eisaman Maus, ed., "Introduction," in *Four Revenge*

return. By the same logic, A or the agents of A must then harm B or the agents of B, creating new victims and new avengers in an endlessly self-perpetuating cycle. The paradox of the revenger is that in paying back an eye for an eye he repeats the action of his victim and becomes indistinguishable from the enemy he is trying to destroy. As Michael Neill has observed, the "symmetrical compulsions of revenge are liable to convert the revenger into the image of what he most abhors, turning the action back on himself in self-consuming fury."[187] But at the same time that revenge repeats and self-destructs, it also ramifies and distends. In his quest to restore the equilibrium upset by the original offense, the revenger almost inevitably exceeds the measure of the crime. As Atreus declares in Seneca's *Thyestes,* the play that most fueled the Renaissance passion for tragedies of revenge: *scelera non ulcisceris* / *nisi vincis* ("Thou never dost enough revenge the wronge, / Exept thou passe").[188] Thus, as revenge repeats, it also escalates. The cycle continues inexorably, endlessly repeating with endless forward motion, until an end is imposed from the outside. This double logic of repetition and escalation – while ethically catastrophic for any human society – is a structure uniquely congenial to the playwright. Hence the "long love-affair," as John Kerrigan calls it, between revenge and drama.[189]

Tragedies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), ix-xxxi; Michael Neill, "English Revenge Tragedy," in *A Companion to Tragedy*, ed. Rebecca Bushnell (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 328-350.

[187] Neill, "English Revenge Tragedy," 337.

[188] Seneca, *Thyestes*, 195-96, as translated in *Seneca His Tenne Tragedies* (London: Imprinted in Fleetstreete neere vnto Saincte Dunstans Church by Thomas Marsh, 1581), 24r.

[189] Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy*, 3. For a revent account of the popularity of revenge drama in the Renaissance that draws on its connection to legal, economic, political, and social systems of unfairness, see Linda Woodbridge, *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Supplication also operates on a principle of reciprocity, though the exchange is that of benefit for benefit rather than harm for harm. The suppliant appeals for present favor on the basis of past service or future benefit, inviting an exchange of mutual profit and advantage.[190] The structure of supplication, like the structure of revenge, encourages tit-for-tat mimetic action. The suppliant seeks to persuade the person he supplicates of their fundamental similarity. He reaches out for commonalities, aiming to bring antagonists closer together on the premise of shared values and mutual experience, and to transform potential opponents into allies or friends. On the other hand, as Peacham's sketch suggests, supplication comes with a tableau-like stasis; in the ceremonial world of ritual gesture, the temporality of plot recedes into the background, and the stage action comes to resemble even more closely the stillness of a picture. The exchange of petition and response creates a narrative suspension, pressing back against the forward motion of revenge.[191] The contingency of the ritual – the space between the request and the reply – introduces a pause, a moment of openness and instability, when possibilities that will soon be foreclosed are fully available. A has harmed B, and B prepares to retaliate. But what if A supplicates B? Will B accept A's supplication and move toward

[190] Even in situations where mercy is granted, there is usually some thought given to the personal advantage of being merciful. The Senecan tradition of *clementia* recommends mercy not out of disinterested benevolence, but because clemency is an effective political tool. In earning the love and admiration of his subjects, the ruler secures his own power. Mercy must be distinguished from forgiveness, which is a spontaneous feeling rather than a deliberate policy. For modern attempts to safeguard forgiveness, see Charles L. Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), and Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2001).

[191] An analogous point is made by James Dawes, *The Language of War: Literature and Culture in the U.S. from the Civil War Through World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), who argues that inserting language into a situation of violence can have the effect of slowing down or forestalling that violence.

reconciliation? Or will B refuse, continuing the repetition of violence and putting off the end for another round? In a story of revenge, therefore, supplication can work both for and against the forward movement of the plot. By encouraging the opponents to see themselves as twins of each other, supplication abets the logic of revenge. And yet, at the same time, the suppliant's plea insists on a halt to the action, introducing a moment where multiple outcomes co-exist and can be fully felt before they go underground to wait for the next opportunity of resurfacing.

As an example of this dynamic interaction, let me examine the one successful supplication in the play.[192] Titus has killed his son Mutius in a fury of mistaken loyalty to Saturninus and now refuses to bury him in the ancestral tomb. Titus' brother Marcus, and his remaining sons Lucius, Quintus, and Martius all vehemently condemn the deed and reproach Titus for his rashness. Titus stands firm: he will never allow a son of his "basely slain in brawls" (1.1.353) to be buried in the vault with his brothers who have died honorably as soldiers in the service of Rome. Titus' obstinacy is based on a misunderstanding of Mutius' motives for keeping Saturninus from marrying Lavinia. Marcus attempts to reason with his brother, but the conflict escalates as Quintus and Martius declare they will bury their brother nobly, no matter what Titus says, and violence is on the verge of erupting between father and sons when Marcus intervenes again.

Titus. What, would you bury him in my despite?

[192] For a discussion of this scene in conjunction with several other episodes of pleading in the play, see Judith M. Karr, "The Pleas in *Titus Andronicus*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1963): 278-279.

Marcus. No, noble Titus, but entreat of thee

To pardon Mutius and to bury him. (1.1.361-363)

Marcus' entreaty brings the conflict to a standstill, and we are transported into the timelessness of image and ceremony. Titus' sons kneel with their uncle to beg Titus to relent in his anger toward Mutius. Their defiance melts into reverence as they address Titus with humility and respect: "Dear father, soul and substance of us all –" (1.1.374). Marcus gently asserts Mutius' innocence – he "died in honor and Lavinia's cause" (1.1.377) – and invites Titus to imitate the Greeks who were persuaded to give Ajax a hero's burial even after he committed suicide.[193] In this case, Titus relents, responding to his brother's supplication, albeit begrudgingly, with the customary expression of acceptance: "Rise, Marcus, rise" (1.1.383). But before he does, the halting effect of the ceremony allows for a range of possibilities to bubble to the surface, each with their own implications for the direction of the narrative. Will Titus be persuaded? Pacified? Further enraged? Will he be won over by his brother's words? Will he be moved by the submission of Quintus and Lucius? Or will he stand by his resolution that the dead Mutius no longer deserves to be called his son? All these possibilities converge, creating a narrative openness that gives the scene an unexpected richness of texture.

[193] Commentators debate the source of Marcus' reference to this particular aspect of the story of Ajax. It is certainly not Ovid, who leaves out the altercation over Ajax's burial from his version of the story in Book 13 of the *Metamorphoses*. Both Waith and Bate follow the standard line that Shakespeare took the story from Lambinus' commentary on Horace (*Satires*, 2.3.187), which was a sixteenth century school text, but it is also possible that Shakespeare knew the plot of Sophocles' play, which was available in Latin translation from 1557. For further discussion, see John Harvey, "A Note on Shakespeare and Sophocles," *Essays in Criticism* 27 (1977): 259-70.

The scene also demonstrates the mimetic impulse of supplication that aligns it with the structure of revenge. As suppliants, Marcus and Titus' sons lower their bodies, hoping that their physical gesture of acknowledging their fault and asking for pardon will encourage Titus to see that he has been wrong in his judgment as well. In this they are successful. Even though Titus continues to feel himself dishonored and disapproves of the burial – "The dismall'st day is this that e'er I saw: / To be dishonoured by my sons in Rome! / Well, bury him, and bury me the next" (1.1.389-391) – to the extent that he relents in his anger, Titus at least acknowledges the justice of the claims represented before him in the kneeling bodies of his brother and sons. By the end of the scene, the two conflicting sides have grown a tiny bit closer together, in the same uncanny way that in the process of carrying out his violent act of vengeance, the revenger comes to resemble more and more the identity of his victim.

With these concepts in place, let us return to the play's first movement. The beginning of *Titus Andronicus* is filled with ceremony and spectacle – the altercation between the factions of Saturninus and Bassanius, Titus' triumphal entrance into Rome, the burial of his dead sons – but the ceremonial mood takes an unexpected turn when Lucius asks for a human sacrifice to appease the shades of his dead brothers. The political question of electing an emperor is temporarily supplanted by the life or death situation provoked by Lucius' demand for "limbs" and "flesh":

> Give us the proudest prisoner of the Goths,
> That we may hew his limbs, and on a pile
> *Ad manes fratrum* sacrifice his flesh

Before this earthly prison of their bones. (1.1.96-99)

Titus' matter-of-fact response to Lucius' request for a human sacrifice – "I give him you, the noblest that survives, / The eldest son of this distressed queen" (1.1.102-103) – is one of the indications that the Rome of *Titus Andronicus* is in a phase of moral as well as political decline. As Jonathan Bate has argued, "Rome prided itself on not allowing human sacrifice: this is the first sign that the city is becoming barbaric in its practices."[194] We are suddenly in a primitive ethical universe: Alarbus, like Hecuba's daughter Polyxena to whom he will soon be compared, is to be sacrificed in a post-heroic act of butchery. With an eye to the contradictions of empire, Shakespeare reads the end of the *Aeneid* as programmatic for the future of Rome: the human sacrifice that ensured the founding of the Roman Empire becomes not a barbarous anomaly but an unthinking routine.

Like Marcus' plea for Mutius' burial, Tamora's ceremonial act of kneeling and petitioning introduces a moment of narrative suspension, bringing the movement of the proposed sacrifice to a stop. In this instant of stasis, we are confronted with multiple possibilities for the direction of the play. The rhetoric of Tamora's supplication adds to the instability of the scene. She begins with two arguments that draw on the suppliant's plea for identification and connection. Like Turnus before Aeneas, Tamora asks Titus to identify with her suffering through the relationship between parent and child: "And if thy sons were ever dear to thee, / O think my son to be as dear to me" (1.1.107-108). While

[194] Bate, *Titus Andronicus*, 6. See also Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 42-75, for the play's inversions of the Roman concept of *pietas*.

subordinating herself physically, Tamora represents herself as Titus' equal in parental affection, inviting her captor to consider her feelings as though they were his own – and in this case, there is no baldric to stand in the way.

Similarly, in a rhetorical move straight out of the Ciceronian category of argument *ex similitudine*, she appeals to Titus' fatherly patriotism, asking him whether he would have wanted his sons to act differently than Alarbus in defense of their country: "But must my sons be slaughtered in the streets / For valiant doings in their country's cause? / O, if to fight for king and commonweal / Were piety in thine, it is in these" (1.1.112-115). Clearly, if Titus applies to Tamora's sons the standards he would demand of his own, he can hardly deny that Alarbus has done his duty. Tamora's arguments are based on the premise that she and Titus are alike, that they share the same values of family and country. Only a turn of Fortune's wheel has made one the conqueror and the other the captive. Another turn could find their roles reversed, and in theory, the knowledge of the fragility of good fortune should make Titus sympathetic to Tamora's plea.

In case this strategy fails to accomplish her desired ends, Tamora concludes her speech with a daring argument from the opposite perspective. After asking Titus to identify with her as an equal, a human being like himself but different only in fortune, Tamora changes tactics by elevating Titus to the status of a divine benefactor: "Wilt thou draw near the nature of the gods? / Draw near them then in being merciful" (1.1.120-121). In this way, Tamora approaches the rhetoric of the Elizabethan pardon petitions we saw in the previous section. She does not express the guilt or remorse so often found in sixteenth-century pardon pleas, but she does use the foundational rhetoric of early

modern theories of monarchy: in showing clemency, the ruler comes closest to resembling the divine.[195] Like Norfolk in his letter to Elizabeth, Tamora assimilates the power of the monarch to pardon with God's mercy. By appealing to Titus' pity as a fellow-parent, his fear of the reversal of fortune, and his hope of resembling the gods, Tamora seems to have made an unrefusable plea.

But despite the fact that Tamora has just arrived on stage, we already know that she is dangerous. In fact, the very virtuosity of her supplicatory rhetoric makes her motives suspect. Her arguments are a little too deft, a little too ready at hand. Her motherly grief is just a little forced. As a result, Titus is presented with an impossible choice. If he accepts her supplication, he will be honoring the wishes of a character who is clearly evil, and whose advancement should be hindered at every step. If he rejects her, he commits himself to an act of barbarous brutality. Tamora's supplication, therefore, arouses conflicting audience desires, and raises fundamental questions about the ethical entailments of supplication. What happens if it is wrong both to accept and to reject a suppliant's plea? In Titus' case, both choices are bad. His imperviousness to Tamora's petition is both a relief and a signal of his impending downfall – the sea of sorrow in which he is drowned in Act 3 is the *contrapasso* for his lack of feeling here. For now, Titus' blank refusal – he does not engage with any of Tamora's arguments – generates the forward motion of the play, and Demetrius' response tells us exactly what kind of play it will be:

[195] The idea of coming to resemble the gods through mercy is a *topos* of the clemency tradition. See above Chapter 2, 112-13, and Stacey, *Roman Monarchy and the Renaissance Prince*, 188-96.

> Then, madam, stand resolved, but hope withal
> The selfsame gods that armed the Queen of Troy
> With opportunity of sharp revenge
> Upon the Thracian tyrant in his tent
> May favour Tamora, the Queen of Goths
> (When Goths were Goths, and Tamora was queen),
> To quit the bloody wrongs upon her foes. (1.1.135-141)

Tamora is to be like Hecuba – whether in Ovid's version of the story in Book 13 of the *Metamorphoses* or in Erasmus' Latin translation of Euripides' *Hecuba* or, most likely, both – orchestrating vengeance on Titus in retaliation for the death of her son.[196] The generic signal immediately translates into Tamora's Hecuba-like gusto for the task of revenge. She embraces the role of revenger eagerly and glories in carrying out a form of revenge that precisely replicates the nature of the original crime. Since Titus has refused to take up the invitation to mimetic action suggested by the ritual of supplication, Tamora's revenge will be to turn him into a weeping suppliant whose prayers go unanswered. Supplication is assimilated into the logic of revenge not only as a motive, but now as a form of retaliation.

Thus, Tamora begins her revenge plot by trapping Titus into a performance of supplication, where he is made to humiliate himself even though there is no possibility of acceptance. Supplication stripped of its contingency becomes an instrument for torment. Instructing the Andronici to kneel and ask pardon from Saturninus for their disloyalty,

[196] Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare*, 90-107, makes the case that Eurpides' play is as important here as Ovid's retelling of it.

Tamora promises to prevail on the emperor to grant their suit, while secretly planning to ensure that their petition for grace fails. She tells Saturninus in an aside:

> Yield at entreats; and then let me alone,
> I'll find a day to massacre them all,
> And raze their faction and their family,
> The cruel father and his traitorous sons,
> To whom I sued for my dear son's life;
> And make them know what 'tis to let a queen
> Kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain. (1.1.449-455)

One gets the impression from this speech that Tamora is as grieved at the humiliation of begging for grace in vain as she is for the loss of her son. She is spurred to action by Titus' refusal and plans to "make them know" what it is like to "kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain." If Titus and the other Andronici cannot be made to identify with her suffering through ceremony, Tamora will force them to understand through experience.

Lavinia is the first victim of this strict logic of supplication-as-revenge. When she sees that Bassanius has been stabbed to death by Chiron and Demetrius, Lavinia begs Tamora to "show a woman's pity" (2.2.147) and be merciful out of respect for the mercy she was given by Titus.

> Lavinia. O, let me teach thee for my father's sake,

That gave thee life when well he might have slain thee.

Be not obdurate, open thy deaf ears.

Tamora. Hadst thou in person ne'er offended me,

Even for his sake am I pitiless.

Remember, boys, I poured forth tears in vain

To save your brother from the sacrifice,

But fierce Andronicus would not relent.

Therefore away with her and use her as you will. (2.2.158-167)

As a suppliant, Lavinia hopes to invoke the logic of benefit for benefit: Titus saved Tamora's life, so Tamora should spare Lavinia. But in her ignorance of what actually transpired between Titus and Tamora, she naively touches precisely the nerve of Tamora's injury: not only did Titus refuse to spare her son's life, but he forced her to "pour forth tears in vain." Tamora's vengeance requires that Lavinia similarly plead to no avail, and Demetrius encourages Tamora to prolong Lavinia's useless supplication: "Listen, fair madam, let it be your glory / To see her tears, but be your heart to them / As unrelenting flint to drops of rain" (2.3.139-141). In refusing Lavinia, Tamora willingly takes on the attributes of her enemy Titus: she becomes cruel, unfeeling, and pitiless. And just as Titus' pitilessness generated the "lopped" limbs of Alarbus, so the physical manifestation of Tamora's refusal comes in the form of Lavinia's rape and mutiliation. The brutality of Chiron and Demetrius functions as a spilling over of the hostile energy produced by the rejection of Lavinia's plea. The primary moment of vengeance occurs

when the suppliant's petition is refused; physical violation arises from the violation of ceremony.

In the second phase of her revenge, Tamora focuses on turning Titus himself into a rejected suppliant, continuing the logic of commensurability that informs both supplication and vengeance. When Titus' sons Quintus and Martius are discovered dead in the pit with Bassanius, Titus kneels before the emperor and begs him to be merciful, but his request is interrupted before it has been fully made.

> Titus. High Emperor, upon my feeble knee
> I beg this boon, with tears not lightly shed,
> That this fell fault of my accursed sons –
> Accursed if the fault be proved in them –
> Saturninus. If it be proved! You see it is apparent. (2.4.288-292)

When Titus' supplication to Saturninus fails, and his sons are condemned to death, he pleads to the Judges, Tribunes, and Senators: "O reverend tribunes! O gentle aged men! / Unbind my sons, reverse the doom of death, / And let me say, that never wept before, / My tears are now prevailing orators" (3.1.23-26). In this moment Titus learns what it means to pour forth tears that elicit no response from their addressee. The note of reprisal is sounded in the verbal echo of Tamora's vengeful oath when Lucius says to Titus, "O noble father, you lament in vain" (3.1.27). And as in the case of Lavinia, the rejected supplication has its physical embodiment in the two heads and the hand that are sent back to Titus as repayment – a mocking recompense for Titus' amputation of his

own hand. This again is part of Tamora's plot to turn the structure of supplication, which in its true form always allows for the contingency of reconciliation, into an inflexible instrument of retribution.

By the end of Act 3 Scene 1, Tamora's revenge has been so complete that Titus has been reduced to a realm of grief in which he has "not another tear to shed" (3.1.265), and he begins to make the psychological move from sorrow to a form of hatred that can find relief only in revenge. But whereas Tamora had accepted the psychologically deforming nature of revenge with blind glee, Titus takes on the role of revenger more slowly. His dithering contrasts with Tamora's evident pleasure in executing a form of vengeance that turns her into a replica of her tormentor; rather, anticipating the psychic drama of Hamlet, Titus' delay suggests that he is wary of what he will become if he embraces the demand that revenge should not only equal but surpass the crime in cruelty. By allowing Titus to drag out the process of his retaliation, Shakespeare creates the illusion that the self-annihilating logic of revenge can be escaped, but the image of supplication – with its logic of likening and assimilation – returns to remind us that no amount of postponement can keep Titus from becoming even more barbarous than his barbarian victim.

The emotional swing from grief to vengeance ostensibly occurs when Titus erupts in indecorous laughter: "Ha, ha, ha!" (3.1.263). His next move is to ask the way to Revenge's cave, swearing "I shall never come to bliss / Till all these mischiefs be returned again / Even in their throats that hath committed them" (3.1.271-273). The rest of Act 3 and all of Act 4, however, are consumed with various devices of dilation. The author of the fly scene (3.2) – whether it was Shakespeare himself, embellishing the play

with an additional episode that did not make it into print until the Folio edition, or, as some editors have suggested, Ben Jonson[197] – picked up on this strategy when he contrived to make Titus' first act of revenge a displacement of Titus' anger toward Aaron onto a similarly "coal-black" fly (3.2.79). Other signs of Titus' dawdling are the weapons he sends to Chiron and Demetrius wrapped with lines from Horace, *Odes* 1.22 (4.2.1-30); the arrows he shoots to the gods for redress (4.3.1-61); and the knife wrapped in a "supplication" that the clown delivers to Saturninus. Titus' vengeance only begins in earnest when Tamora comes to his study disguised as the goddess Revenge and promises that she "will bring in the Empress and her sons, / The Emperor himself, and all thy foes, / And at thy mercy shall they stoop and kneel, / And on them shalt thou ease thy angry heart" (5.2.116-119). Titus is propelled out of the inactivity of madness by an image of supplication.

But here Tamora overestimates her power. Imagining that Titus could be satisfied with the mere reproduction of the injuries done to him, she foolishly agrees to leave her son's in Titus' care. Titus, spurred on by the vision of his enemies supplicating in vain, takes on the mantle of revenger and accepts the psychological distortion that comes with it. Binding Chiron and Demetrius and preparing to slit their throats, Titus informs them fully of how he plans to requite the wrongs that have been done to him and even exceed them in cruelty. He will follow the law of disproportionate vengeance: "For worse than Philomel you used my daughter, / And worse than Procne I will be revenged" (5.3.194-195). And yet, hideous as the Thyestian banquet becomes, from the perspective of the audience, the moment of over-going occurs when Titus demands: "What would you say if

[197] For an argument in favor of Shakespearean authorship, see Bate, *Titus Andronicus*, 177-120.

I should let you speak? / Villains, for shame you could not beg for grace" (5.3.178-179). The transformation of Titus from insensitive conqueror to desensitized revenger is captured in this new relationship to supplication. At the beginning of the play he was immune to feeling and refused Tamora's plea; now he reduces his victims to inhuman speechlessness. In refusing to allow Chiron and Demetrius the voices to plead, Titus succumbs to the logic of revenge that makes the revenger worse than his victim, that reduces both perpetrator and victim to a subhuman level of violence. But throughout the play, and even at this last moment, Shakespeare uses supplication as a reminder that it need not be this way. The openness of supplication, its function of narrative suspension, of allowing multiple possibilities to enter the world of the play before one is chosen, offers a continual vision for a way out of the logic of revenge. If the element of contingency in the structure of supplication remains intact, the reciprocal dynamic of suppliant and supplicated has the generic potential to turn a tragedy of revenge into a comedy of reconciliation.

Coriolanus: The Re-invention of Suppliant Drama

At the time of writing *Titus Andronicus,* Shakespeare seems to have been thinking about the story of Coriolanus as another plot of revenge. When Lucius returns to Rome at the head of an army of Goths to take vengeance on Saturnine, he "threats, in course of his revenge, to do / As much as ever Coriolanus did" (4.4.66-67). A Coriolanus play of the early 1590's may very well have looked like *Titus Andronicus*: a representation of a self-consciously unhistorical Rome, with supplication either advancing or destabilizing the progress of revenge. To compare *Coriolanus* with *Titus Andronicus* on these terms is

to bring the distinctive qualities of both plays into full relief. *Coriolanus* is not only consciously historical in its depiction of the social, political, and ideological world of republican Rome;[198] it also introduces an entirely novel approach to supplication, one that moves the rhetoric and gestures of petition from the periphery to the center of dramatic action. In this late play, Shakespeare invites us to view supplication from the inside, to accompany the protagonist into the affective world of suppliant and supplicated, and to consider the psychological, emotional, and dramatic entailments of both roles. In making the issues of supplication – hierarchy, ritual, reciprocity, theatricality – the main subject of his last tragedy, Shakespeare reaches back into the literary past, giving new life to the ancient form of suppliant drama.

The climax of *Coriolanus* takes place in the stage directions. At the end of Act 5 Scene 3, when Volumnia kneels in a last attempt to persuade her son to abandon his attack on Rome, the First Folio tells us: [*He holds her by the hand, silent*].[199] Coriolanus'

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[198] For Shakespeare's historicist approach to representing ancient Rome, see Paul A. Cantor, *Shakespeare's Rome, Republic and Empire* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976). The play's interest in the institutions of the Roman Republic has led to a number of superb political readings. See especially Anne Barton, "Livy, Machiavelli, and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*," *Shakespeare Survey* 38 (1985): 115-29, and Andrew Gurr, "*Coriolanus* and the Body Politic," *Shakespeare Survey* 28 (1975): 63-69. Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), links the play to the political context of the 1607 Midlands Uprising, but overstates the case for a pro-republican reading of Shakespeare's plebeians.

[199] Since the copy-text of *Coriolanus* used by the compilers of the First Folio was that of the book holder or the playwright himself, we are very close to the way the play was originally imagined on stage. For a discussion of the copy-text with particular focus on the stage directions, see R. B. Parker, ed., *Coriolanus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 138-48. Lee Bliss, "Scribes, Compositors, and Annotators: The Nature of the Copy for the First Folio Text of *Coriolanus*," *Studies in Bibliography* 50 (1997): 224-61, argues that *Coriolanus* was set from a scribal transcript that was complete enough to have been used for production in the theater. For a reconstruction of the supplication scene as it might have been seen by Elizabethan theater-goers, see John Ripley, "Coriolanus' Stage Imagery on Stage," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1987): 344-47. Ripley

wordless gesture brings the conflict of the play to an end: Rome is safe; Volumnia has won the day; there will be peace between the Romans and the Volscians. And yet, this successful supplication, which by any ordinary application of the logic of the ritual should bring about the protagonist's reconciliation with his family and city and the comic ending of the play, is felt – both by the audience and by Coriolanus himself – to be the moment of his undoing. Immediately after reaching out to hold his mother's hand, Coriolanus cries out in recognition: "O mother, mother! / What have you done? … You have won a happy victory to Rome; / But for your son, believe it, O believe it, / Most dangerously you have with him prevailed, / If not most mortal to him" (5.3.183-184, 187-190).[200]

Actors tend to prolong the moment as long as possible to heighten its dramatic power. In Trevor Nunn's 1973 production for the Royal Shakespeare Company, Nicol Williamson, who played the title role, hesitated for sixty seconds before turning to reach for his mother's hand and then continued his silence for ninety more seconds before beginning his next speech.[201] But the gesture raises a host of questions. Why is it that accepting a suppliant – acknowledging the ties of mutual dependency and reciprocal obligation, performing a ritual to its proper conclusion, allowing the body to both shape and reflect the inner movement of feeling – functions as the symbolic act of Coriolanus' destruction? Why doesn't this scene follow the usual pattern of successful supplication

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argues that "the austere visual strength of this sequence was largely unknown to playgoers from the mid-eighteenth century until after World War I" (45).

[200] I follow the text of William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, ed. R. B. Parker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[201] Alan Brien, "Coriolanus," *Plays and Players* 21, no. 3 (1973).

and move the play toward re-integration and reconciliation? What, in the end, are the stakes of supplicating in *Coriolanus*?

The questions that arise from the play's final supplication scene are, in fact, intimately bound up with Shakespeare's discovery and adaptation of the generative material that he found in Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*. While there is ample evidence to suggest that Shakespeare had already encountered North's translation of the *Lives* by the time he wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and perhaps even before, critics continue to agree that Shakespeare's renewed engagement with Plutarch's representation of ancient Rome in preparation for the production of *Julius Caesar* in 1599 had a transformative impact on his conception of drama.[202] Cynthia Marshall is one of several recent readers to observe that the return to Plutarch marks "the establishment of our culture's prevailing model of character as one that is at once intensely performative and putatively interiorized." With *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare moves from the "richly inventive but largely plot-driven plays of the 1590's" to the "deeply characterological dramas that follow."[203]

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[202] Gordon Braden, "Plutarch, Shakespeare, and the alpha males," in *Shakespeare and the Classics*, ed. Charles Martindale and A. B. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 189, argues that the list of Theseus' erotic conquests in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2.1.77-80) appears to be based on Plutarch's *Life of Theseus* (8, 19-20, 26; North, 1:36, 45-48, 55). Robert Adger Law, "The Roman Background of *Titus Andronicus*," *Studies in Philology* 40, no. 2 (1943): 145-153, makes a case for Plutarchan influence as early as *Titus Andronicus*. For the breadth of Shakespeare's reading in the *Lives*, see E. A. J. Honigmann, "Shakespeare's Plutarch," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (1959): 25-33. For the impact of Plutarch on Shakespearean drama, see J. A. K. Thomson, *Shakespeare and the Classics* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1952).

[203] Cynthia Marshall, "Shakespeare, Crossing the Rubicon," *Shakespeare Survey* 53 (2000): 73, 80.

Plutarch's *Lives* offered Shakespeare a wealth of classical material already deeply imbued with the narrative strategies of drama.[204] Plutarch consistently imagines himself as engaging in a mimetic enterprise similar to that of staging a play. He regularly refers to the reader as a "spectator" (θεατής) and organizes his biographies around "strong visual scenes and tense personal encounters."[205] In fact, a number of recent critics have demonstrated that Plutarch constructs many of his *Lives* on the patterns of Athenian tragedy, using a tragic lens to mould the material of his stories of great men.[206] Christopher Pelling has made a case for the use of this technique in the *Life of Lysander*: "The reversals combine to create a *peripateia* of peculiar neatness. It is indeed highly

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[204] For a comprehensive account of Plutarch's approach to writing biography, with emphasis on the dramatic texture of the *Lives*, see Timothy E. Duff, *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999). Duff explores the contrast Plutarch develops between works of art that do not benefit those who look at them and works of virtue that arouse the desire for emulation. Works of art may give pleasure to the viewer, but it is seeing the actions of the men whose lives Plutarch proposes to represent that spurs the spectator to imitation. As Duff observes, Plutarch aligns "his own literary activity in writing the *Lives* with the deeds of virtue of his subjects rather than with other works of art" (36).

[205] C. B. R. Pelling, "The Shaping of Coriolanus: Dionysius, Plutarch, and Shakespeare," in *Plutarch and History: Eighteen Studies* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2002), 387. See also Pelling, ed., *Life of Antony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 37-45, and Judith Mossman, "Plutarch and Shakespeare's Henry IV parts 1 and 2," in *Shakespeare's Plutarch*, ed. M.A. McGrail, *Poetica* 48 (1997): 99-117.

[206] There has been much recent interest in Plutarch's use of theatrical images and tragic patterning in the *Lives*. In "Plato, Tragedy, the Ideal Reader and Plutarch's 'Demetrios and Antony'," *Hermes* 132, no. 3 (2004): 271, Duff argues that Plutarch "invites the reader to approach Demetrios and Antony as tragic heroes." Judith Mossman, "Tragedy and Epic in Plutarch's Alexander," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 108 (1988): 83-93, finds Plutarch "introducing tragic atmosphere" in the *Life of Alexander*. The presence of Euripides' *Bacchae* at the end of the *Life of Crassus* has been the subject of two studies: David Braund, "Dionysiac Tragedy in Plutarch, Crassus," *The Classical Quarterly* 43, no. 2, New Series (1993): 468-474, and A. V. Zadorojniy, "Tragedy and Epic in Plutarch's 'Crassus'," *Hermes* 125, no. 2 (1997): 169-182. On the whole, the most compelling argument for the pervasive influence of tragic patterns on Plutarch's *Lives* is C. B. R. Pelling, "Seeing a Roman tragedy through Greek eyes: Shakespeare's Julius Caesar," in *Sophocles and the Greek Tragic Tradition*, ed. Simon Goldhill and Edith Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 264-288.

reminiscent of tragedy, where so often people's peculiar characteristics or strengths unleash forces which eventually destroy them, frequently with a chilling symmetry: one thinks of Oedipus, or Clytemnestra, or Ajax, or Hippolytus, or the Creon of *Antigone*."[207]

Plutarch's *Life of Coriolanus* has been particularly responsive to this line of investigation. D. A. Russell has shown that Plutarch compresses and expands his source material from Dionysus of Halicarnassus to create a unified character whose love of honor has a counterpart in his quickness to anger.[208] Most importantly, however, critics have demonstrated that the unity of character in Plutarch's *Life of Coriolanus* is played out in a series of mirror scenes that allow for the development and reversal of the tragic personality. For Christopher Pelling, Coriolanus' total loss of self-control when Aufidius calls him a traitor recalls earlier episodes in the *Life* where Coriolanus exhibits both astonishing self-discipline and a tendency to irascibility.[209] Like the great heroes of Athenian drama, Coriolanus' virtues are also the faults that precipitate his downfall.

Shakespeare's story of Coriolanus takes these structuring principles of tragic narrative – sensing through Plutarch some of the patterning devices of Greek tragedy – and develops them into a vehicle for investigating not the passion of anger, but the matrix of cultural, political, and meta-theatrical issues surrounding the ritual of supplication. Thus, the questions of supplication that explode at the end of the play in the silent gesture

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[207] C. B. R. Pelling, "Aspects of Plutarch's Characterization," in *Plutarch and History: Eighteen Studies* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2002), 296.
[208] D. A. Russell, "Plutarch's Life of Coriolanus," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 53 (1963): 21-28. For Plutarch's treatment of his sources, see also C. B. R. Pelling, "Plutarch's Adaptation of His Source-Material," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 100 (1980): 127-140.
[209] Pelling, "The Shaping of Coriolanus: Dionysius, Plutarch, and Shakespeare," 404-6.

of hand-holding emerge at its opening in Menenius' argument with the unruly crowd of "poor suitors" (1.1.57). In this scene, which culminates in the fable of the belly, Menenius persuades the citizens that they should supplicate rather than rebel: "For the dearth / The gods, not the patricians, make it, and / Your knees to them, not arms must help" (1.1.69-72). Menenius' advice, with its emphasis on the physical gestures of submission that accompany a proper petition, establishes petitioning as a functional mechanism for "sending messages from the periphery to the center."[210] When the plebeians have a concern, they should bring it to the attention of the patricians peacefully, presenting their suit with the proper gestures of humility. That this approach is not only recommended but also effective is evident in Coriolanus' account of the events that have just transpired on the other side of the Capitol. When Menenius asks what has happened with the off-stage group of dissatisfied plebeians, Coriolanus explains:

> They are dissolved. Hang 'em!
> They said they were an-hungry, sighed forth proverbs –
> That hunger broke stone walls, that dogs must eat,
> That meat was made for mouths, that the gods sent not
> Corn for rich men only. With these shreds
> They vented their complainings, which being answered,
> And a petition granted them – a strange one,
> To break the heart of generosity
> And make bold power look pale – they threw their caps

[210] Zaret, *Origins of Democratic Culture*, 81.

As they would hang them on the horns o'th' moon,

Shouting their emulation. (1.1.201-211)

Though Coriolanus mocks their low class manner of speaking ("an-hungry") and dismisses their arguments as "shreds," he is forced to reveal, however circuitously, that the petition of the plebeians has been granted. The play's first concrete action, though it takes place off-stage, is the successful petition that results in the creation of the tribunate.

If the petitioning is established at the beginning of the play as a successful means for the plebeians to communicate with the patricians, in the long mid-section of the play, from Martius' triumphant return from Corioles in 2.1 to his banishment in 3.3, Shakespeare reverses the direction of petition, forcing Coriolanus to adopt the role of suppliant to the people. Coriolanus is an extremely reluctant petitioner, and Shakespeare develops a sequence of scenes that gradually reveal where his reluctance comes from. The first hint appears in Coriolanus' bid for the consulship. Under pressure from Volumnia and the patricians, Coriolanus agrees to run for consul, but when he is asked to plead for the people's votes as part of the ceremony of *petitio consulatus*, he hesitates over the customary rituals that his candidacy will entail:

I do beseech you

Let me o'erleap that custom, for I cannot

Put on the gown, stand naked, and entreat them

For my wounds' sake to give their suffrage.

Please you that I may pass this doing. (2.2.134-138)

According to Plutarch, "the custome of Rome was at that time, that suche as dyd sue for any office, should for certen dayes before be in the market place, only with a poore gown on their backes, and without any coate underneath, to praye to the cittizens to remember them at the daye of election." The purpose of this tradition was to make the candidate more sympathetic by bringing him down to the level of the people – and, as Plutarch remarks in a crucial aside, "because they might shewe them their woundes they had gotten in the warres in the service of the common wealth, as manifeste markes and testimone of their valliantness."[211] Critics make much of the fact that unlike his counterpart in Plutarch, Shakespeare's Coriolanus refuses to follow the custom of showing his wounds; Coriolanus' hostility to wound-showing is often cited as evidence of his unwillingness to reveal any kind of weakness.[212] Just as he equates putting on the gown with standing naked, so he fears that showing his wounds will make him appear bare and unprotected. Janet Adelman has argued that if he were to disclose his wounds to the common people, Coriolanus would be forced to acknowledge his similarity to them: "For his wounds would then become begging mouths (as they do in Julius Caesar [3.2.225-26]), and their display would reveal his kinship with the plebeians in several ways: by revealing that he has worked for hire as they have (that is, that he and his deeds are not sui generis after all); by revealing that he is vulnerable, as they are; and by

[211] Thomas North, *Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, ed. George Wyndam, The Tudor Translations (New York: AMS Press, 1967), 2:158.
[212] See for example, R. B. Parker, *Coriolanus*, 66.

revealing, through the persistent identification of wound and mouth, that he too has a mouth, that he is a feminized and dependent creature."[213]

But while Coriolanus' attitude towards his wounds is central to his reluctance to perform the customary ceremonies associated with a bid for the consulship, behind the issue of the wounds is an objection of even greater importance. Coriolanus cannot endure the idea of taking part in a ritual. Ritual requires the participant to follow a prescribed script for action, and Coriolanus resists the ceremony of *petitio consulatus* because he sees it as acting a role: "It is a part / That I shall blush in acting, and might well / Be taken from the people" (2.2.143-145). By blending the metaphors of ceremony and theater, Shakespeare allows Coriolanus to voice a deep concern about the relationship between ritual and performance. To the extent that any action can be said to be a ritual one, it partly involves, as Roy A. Rappaport observes, "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not encoded by the performers."[214] In Rappaport's anthropological formulation, participants in a ritual are transmitters of messages that do not necessarily correspond to their current psychological, social, or emotional state. Engaging in a ritual requires the participant to accept that he will be communicating messages determined for him by others. If a ritual action does convey something specific about the participant's present reality, it is because there is some variation in the formal structure that allows for spontaneity or individual expression. In the most basic terms, ceremony takes away individual agency. Thus in asking a participant to play a pre-encoded role, ritual demands the suspension of personal

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[213] Janet Adelman, "'Anger's My Meat': Feeding, Dependency, and Aggression in *Coriolanus*," in *Shakespeare, Pattern of Excelling Nature*, ed. David Bevington and Jay Halio (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1978), 114-15.
[214] Rappaport, "The Obvious Aspects of Ritual," 175.

identity – or the acceptance of an identity that is experienced as more or less different from one's own.

In the ceremony of *petitio consulatus*, the messages encoded by the formal gestures of wearing the gown, showing wounds, and begging for votes are those of submission, dependency, and an acknowledgement of a relationship of reciprocity. Even before his bid for the consulship, Coriolanus has shown himself uniquely averse to the theory of social relationship on which the ritual of petitioning is based. After the Roman victory over the Volsces at Corioles, when Cominius tries to acknowledge Martius' role in the campaign's success, Coriolanus rejects any special praise for his actions: "My mother / Who has a charter to extol her blood, / When she does praise me, grieves me. / I have done as you have done, that's what I can; / Induced as you have been, that's for my country" (1.10.13-17). Intuiting the anxiety behind Coriolanus' refusal, Cominius assures his soldier that he conceives of praise not as a reward for action but rather a "sign of what you are" (1.10.26). Even so, Coriolanus refuses both praise and gifts – not, as in Plutarch, out of a genuinely disinterested form of valor, but because he cannot accept the relationship of obligation and dependency involved in gift-exchange. To accept a gift implies that you might need it, want it, or have asked for it – that you are not whole. It is to open yourself to the risk of being obliged to give in return. It is – anticipating Coriolanus' own formulation – to admit that a man is not author of himself, but entangled in a network of reciprocal relationships that bind him to the society in which he lives. In refusing the obligation that comes with accepting a gift, Coriolanus signals his fundamental detachment from the city on whose behalf he claims to hazard his life. Cominius seems to understand the self-contradiction – and potential self-destructiveness

– of this position when he describes Coriolanus as “like one that means his proper harm” (1.10.57).

Coriolanus’ doctrine of self-sufficiency is thrown into jeopardy by the formal elements of the ritual of petitioning for the consulship. The ceremony requires exactly the kind of give and take that Coriolanus wants to be immune from. And, as his earlier theatrical metaphor suggests, the ritual poses an even more serious problem to Coriolanus’ sense of self in making him play a role, which he believes will force him to move his body in ways that will redefine who he is. The crucial scene is 3.2, where, anticipating the rhetoric and gestures she will adopt in 5.3, Volumnia tries to persuade her son to return to the people to ask them to forgive his pride and grant him their votes.

> Go to them with this bonnet in thy hand,
> And thus far having stretched it – here be with them –
> Thy knee bussing the stones – for in such business
> Action is eloquence, and the eyes of th’ignorant
> More learned than the ears – waving thy head,
> Which offer thus, correcting thy stout heart,
> Now humble as the ripest mulberry
> That will not hold the handling. (3.2.75-82)

Relying on the rhetorical axiom that even the most well conceived speech depends on delivery for its success, Volumnia gives her son a lesson in *actio* – a lesson in communicating with the body the *ethos* of the petitioner that we saw described in the

epistolary manuals of Erasmus and Angel Day. Her primary concern in choreographing his movements is to select gestures traditionally used as non-verbal signals of humility – off-capping, kneeling, bowing the head.[215] For Volumnia, taking on the rhetoric and gestures of a suppliant is no different than "to take in a town with gentle words / Which else would put you to your fortune and / The hazard of much blood" (3.2.61-63). It is a question of policy only, with no ramifications for the self. For Coriolanus, the stakes are of an entirely different order. To be a suppliant is to enter a ritual space that compels him to compromise his "bosom's truth" (3.2.59) by physically lowering his body and acting out gestures of submission. He is convinced that he cannot be a suppliant without becoming a different person.

> Well, I must do't.
>
> Away, my disposition; and possess me
>
> Some harlot's spirit! My throat be turned,
>
> Which choired with my drum, into a pipe
>
> Small as an eunuch or the virgin voice
>
> That babies lull asleep! The smiles of knaves
>
> Tent in my cheeks, and schoolboys' tears take up
>
> The glasses of my sight! A beggar's tongue

[215] For a discussion of the history of gestures of submission in Renaissance England, see John Walter, "Gesturing at Authority: Deciphering the Gestural Code of Early Modern England," in *The Politics of Gesture: Historical Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 96-127. Walter elaborates on the ways that the refusal to perform gestures of submission increasingly became a form of protest: "When the Diggers accused the gentry of seeking to make slaves of men, they illustrated this by reference to their insistence that the people 'serve them with cap and knee, &c.'" (119).

Make motion through my lips, and my armed knees
Who bowed but in my stirrup, bend like his
That hath received an alms! – I will not do it,
Lest I surcease to honour mine own truth,
And by my body's action teach my mind
A most inherent baseness. (3.2.113-125)

Menenius and Volumnia have worked to convince Coriolanus that acting the role of a suppliant is a temporary instrument for achieving a desired end. Coriolanus at first allows himself to be persuaded – particularly influential is Volumnia's injunction: "To have my praise for this, perform a part / Thou has not done before" (3.2.111-112) – but as he talks himself through the details of the performance, the intensity of his own rhetoric undercuts his resolution. As the metaphor of the "harlot's spirit" suggests, for Coriolanus, playing the role of suppliant is a form of prostitution, possession, emasculation, and humiliation. It is not simply a question of being unable to tolerate a disjunction between outer expression and inner being; Coriolanus believes that going through the motions of pleading will transform him into a new, corrupted self. The gestures of petitioning that he evokes in his speech – smiling, weeping, pleading, kneeling – threaten to imprint themselves on his character, teaching his mind "a most inherent baseness" that threatens the integrity of his selfhood.

Coriolanus is not alone in considering the stakes of acting to be so vertiginous. As Eve Rachele Sanders has argued, with this speech, Shakespeare "puts *Coriolanus* at the center of contemporary controversy over the legitimacy of theater and over ideas about

the body raised by that debate."[216] Particularly relevant for the question of the impact of performance on the character of the performers were the Oxford theatrical debates of the early 1590's. Incited by a production at Christ Church of William Gager's *Hippolytus* that provoked a pamphlet war between Gager and the puritan divine John Rainolds, this controversy centered on the question of whether it was appropriate to include stage-plays as a part of university education. Gager and his friend Alberico Gentili both believed that play-acting had a moral and psychological impact on the performers, but that impact was for the most part beneficial; any negative effects on the actors were outweighed by the benefits of additional training in rhetorical delivery, greater fluency in Latin, and positive moral instruction through the examples of virtue and vice on the stage. As for the spectators at a performance, Gager is similarly optimistic. Watching plays arouses not "evill affections" but virtuous passions:

> Who doeth not hate the furie of Medea; the revenge of Atreus; the treason of Clytemnestra, and Aegisthus; and the crueltie of Nero? Contrariwise, who doeth not pittie the rage, and death of Hercules; the calamitie of Hecuba and her children; the infortunat valour of Oedipus; the murder of Agamemnon; the banishment of Octavia; and such like?[217]

Rainolds, on the other hand, is much less confident about the moral benefit of the theater. In impersonating wicked characters and performing bodily gestures associated

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[216] Eve Rachele Sanders, "The Body of the Actor in Coriolanus," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57 (2006): 388. I am much indebted in what follows to Sanders' cogent argument.
[217] John Rainolds, *The Overthrow of Stage-Plays* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972), 111.

with low station – not to mention playing the parts of women – students ran the risk of taking on the traits of the roles they acted, of being impressed with an imprint like that of wax from a stamp. As Rainolds describes his argument: "I amplified the unlawfulness of the thing by the inconvenience and hurt which it breedeth, principally to the *actors*, in whom the earnest care of liuely representing the lewde demneanor of bad persons doeth work a great impression of waxing like vnto them."[218] As an example, Rainolds describes an episode from Plutarch's *Life of Cicero* in which an actor "playing the part of Atreus in a tragedie, grew to such a rage by thinking and advising how he might wreake his anger, and be revenged on Thyestes, that with his Mace royall he strooke one of the servants running by, and slew him."[219] Regarding the spectators of these plays, Rainolds is even more skeptical. To Gager's claim that at his production of Seneca's *Phaedra* all the spectators "detested the love of Phaedra; approved the grave counsell of the Nurse to her in secret … did wish Theseus had not been so credulous; and were sorry for the cruell death of Hippolytus,"[220] Rainolds replies that the opposite conclusion could easily be drawn: "by [Gager's] instruction, the death of Hippolytus should have served to teach them, that they must never denie vnto a Nais or Phaedra such requests."[221]

The origins of Rainolds' argument are ultimately Platonic and have a long history in the philosophical and rhetorical tradition that need not be rehearsed here.[222] The point

[218] Ibid., 108.
[219] Ibid., 112.
[220] Ibid., 110.
[221] Ibid., 111.
[222] See Plato's discussions of imitation in Republic 3.3763-398b and 10.595-608b, as well as Chapter 1, 40-41. For the Renaissance connection between play-acting and classical rhetorical tradition of *actio*, see B. L. Joseph, *Elizabethan Acting* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951); Andrew Gurr, "Elizabethan Action," *Studies in Philology* 63, no. 2 (1966): 144-156; Ursula Potter, "Performing Arts in the Tudor Classroom," in *Tudor*

I would like to emphasize, however, is that even though they draw different conclusions, Gager, Rainolds, and Gentili share the fundamental assumption that stage-acting had a powerful psychological influence on the actor and spectator, and all three controversialists place particular stress on the potential damage to the performer. Even Gentili, who took up Gager's side of the controversy later in 1593, admitted as much in his Latin *Commentary on the Third Law of the Title of the Code* 'On Teachers and Doctors':

> Plato used that reason against acting: that imitations of that kind, especially if they have begun in the earliest years, affect the character and nature, and – as far as the physical health of the body is concerned – the very expression of the voice and

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Drama Before Shakespeare, 1485-1590: New Directions for Research, Criticism, and Pedagogy, ed. Lloyd Kermode, Jason Scott-Warren, and Martine Van Elk (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 143-166; Joseph Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 47. For the problematic relationship between actors and orators in antiquity, see Fritz Graf, "Gestures and conventions: the gestures of Roman actors and orators," in *A Cultural History of Gesture*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 36-58; Gregory S. Aldrete, *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Anthony Corbeill, *Nature Embodied: Gesture in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 115-16; Jon Hall, "Oratorical Delivery and the Emotions: Theory and Practice," in *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric*, ed. William Dominik and Jon Hall (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 230; Maud Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 105-6, 114-16; Jody Enders, "Delivering Delivery: Theatricality and the Emasculation of Eloquence," *Rhetorica* 15, no. 3 (1997): 253-278. For the persistence of Platonic ideas about the moral effects of imitation, see Donnalee Dox, *The Idea of the Theater in Latin Christian Thought: Augustine to the Fourteenth Century* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

> the make-up of the mind itself. And I am very certain Plato is speaking the truth.[223]

Thus, when Coriolanus refuses to supplicate the common people because the actions of his body might communicate to his mind "a most inherent baseness," Shakespeare is drawing on a set of assumptions about the relationship between gesture and interiority that were deeply encoded in contemporary theatrical discourse. According to Coriolanus – along with Gager, Gentili, and Rainolds – imitation of action inevitably has an impact on the imitator. By inviting us inside Coriolanus' reflections on the gestures of supplication, Shakespeare allows the audience to see the contours of the hero's inner world – as fixed and unbending as they may be – and constructs a drama in which the stakes of supplication are bound up with the questions of theater.

Given the vehemence with which Coriolanus has rejected the performative gestures of petition, it comes as something of a surprise that the first time we see him after his banishment he is in disguise. He said to his friends when leaving Rome: "While I remain above the ground you shall / Hear from me still, and never of me aught / But what is like me formerly (4.1.52-54). But when he reappears in Act 4 Scene 4, the stage directions tell us that he enters *[in mean apparel, disgused and muffled]*. He is, in fact, very unlike what he has been formerly – not only in his looks, but also in his attitude to supplication. When he comes to the house of Aufidius and explains the "extremity" that "hath brought me to thy hearth" (4.5.79-80) – the traditional place for suppliants – his

[223] Alberico Gentili, *Commentary on the Third Law of the Title of the Code* "On Teachers and Doctors," trans. J. W. Binns, "Alberico Gentili in Defense of Poetry and Acting," *Studies in the Renaissance* 19 (1972): 268.

purpose is to plead for admission into the ranks of the Volscians. He has voluntarily taken on a part – precisely the part of a petitioner that he has previously associated with the destabilization of identity.

Sanders argues that in taking on the role of suppliant before Aufidius, Coriolanus develops a "more plural and variable" sense of self than he had when he was a warrior for Rome. He is "made to acknowledge the unreliability of outward signs as indicators of origins and status," and this change accounts for his sympathetic response to his mother's petition.[224] But this view, as tempting as it is, does not account for the role of supplicatory gestures in making *Coriolanus* a tragedy. If being a suppliant in *Coriolanus* means accepting a relationship of reciprocal obligation and dependence, participating in the de-authorizing nature of ritual, and enacting gestures that have a potentially corrupting effect on one's inner nature – in other words, if supplication poses a threat to selfhood as Coriolanus conceives it – the encounter between Coriolanus and Volumnia in 5.3 comes into focus as a moment of reckoning for Coriolanus' sense of self.

Up to this point, then, we have seen Coriolanus' exquisite sensitivity to the significance of movements of the body.[225] His particular fixation has been with bodily movements of self-abasement or submission, which he fears might have a corrupting effect on his inward nature. What he hasn't taken into account is the effect of other people's bodies on him, and this is precisely what the final act of the play is about. Act 5 Scene 3 presents Coriolanus for the first time as the person supplicated – in theatrical terms, as the spectator of a performance. Both Coriolanus and Volumnia have previously

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[224] Sanders, "The Body of the Actor in Coriolanus," 404, 405.

[225] Joyce Van Dyke, "Making a Scene: Language and Gesture in *Coriolanus*," *Shakespeare Survey* 30 (1977): 135-146, rightly observes that Coriolanus is not insensitive but hypersensitive to rhetoric and gesture.

taken a dim view of the spectator. For Coriolanus, the plebeians' preoccupation with gesture and performance is another reason to despise them: "since the wisdom of their choice is rather to have my hat than my heart, I will practice the insinuating nod and be off to them most counterfeitly" (2.3.94-96). Volumnia, similarly, considers "the eyes of th'ignorant / More learned than the ears" (3.2.78-79). But the climax of the play focuses precisely on what it means to be a spectator – on how Coriolanus responds to the movements of other bodies.

We first hear of his response to physical gesture from Cominius, who verbally relates the details of his unsuccessful attempt to persuade Coriolanus not to march on Rome: "I kneeled before him; / 'Twas very faintly he said 'Rise', dismissed me / Thus, with his speechless hand" (5.1.65-67). Coriolanus' "speechless hand" conveys the conflicted impression of a man who is both emotionally indifferent and also laboring under such extreme emotion that he can barely speak. A similar image of inner conflict is communicated by his exchange with Menenius. While Coriolanus dismisses his former friend with a peremptory "Away!" (5.2.78), he silently gives Menenius a letter: the "cracked heart" (5.3.9) he attributes to the old man he has just sent back to Rome is also his own.

The arrival of the women opens the issue of Coriolanus' reaction to physical gesture more fully. As soon as he hears the shouts that indicate their entrance into the camp, Coriolanus registers an affective response: "Ha, what shout is this? / Shall I be tempted to infringe my vow / In the same time 'tis made? I will not" (5.3.19-21). But when the complete image of his wife, followed by his mother, holding his son's hand, comes into view, it requires than more simple assertion to hold back his emotion: "But

out, affection! / All bond and privilege of nature break; / Let it be virtuous to be obstinate" (5.3.23-25). As he slips from the declarative "I will not" into self-prodding imperatives and wishful optatives, Coriolanus' sentence structure reflects his struggle for self-control. Being a spectator of performance turns out to be just as dangerous as being an actor. Coriolanus is like a hyper-sensitive theater-goer, who responds as much to the physicality of performance as to its language. Virgilia's curtsy, therefore, prompts from Coriolanus a metaphor of psychological unraveling: "I melt, and am not / Of stronger earth than others" (5.3.28-29). Volumnia's bow provokes a hyperbolic acknowledgement of the emotional impact of the gesture and an equally hyperbolic attempt to repress the surge of feeling: "My mother bows / As if Olympus to a molehill should / In supplication nod … / … Let the Volsces / Plough Rome and harrow Italy! I'll never be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand / As if a man were author of himself / And knew no other kin" (5.3. 29-31, 34-37). The very grammar of the sentence, however, betrays his hope of self-authorship. The fatal "as if" belies the fantasy of total self-sufficiency, linked to the physical posture standing. Thus, when he rises from his chair to kneel before his mother in salutation, the counterfactual grammar of "as if" is played out in his gesture. The spectacle of the women's bodies puts the rigid boundaries of his identity under attack.

In the first phase of the scene, the gestures of greeting develop the issues of obligation, ritual, and performance that prepare for the supplication proper. In North, Shakespeare found the following description of Coriolanus' meeting with his family: "his harte would not serve him to tarie their coming to his chayer, but coming down in hast, he went to meete them, and first he kissed his mother, and imbraced her a pretie while,

then his wife and little children."[226] Shakespeare rearranges and adjusts these gestures so that Coriolanus first kisses his wife and then kneels to his mother in salutation, berating himself for the delay in performing his duty: "You gods, I prate, / And the most noble mother of the world / Leave unsaluted! Sink, my knee, i'th' earth" (5.3.48-50). As Shakesepare knew well, kneeling was not a gesture of greeting in antiquity. He leaves behind the historicist representation of Republican Rome and imports the ceremonial conventions of Jacobean England. According to Lawrence Stone, it was customary for children "when at home to kneel before their parents to ask for their blessing every morning, and even as adults on arrival at and departure from the home."[227] Coriolanus' gesture echoes the ceremonial language of many other Shakespearean children kneeling before their parents: Juliet before Capulet (*Romeo and Juliet*, 3.5.158), Laertes before Polonius (*Hamlet*, 1.3.57), Cordelia before Lear (*King Lear*, 4.6.55). For once, Coriolanus seems to have no trouble with ceremony: kneeling to the plebeians was out of the question, but kneeling to his mother is a duty that it would shame him to omit.

He is utterly unprepared, therefore, for Volumnia's response. Instead of accepting his salutation according to the rules of behavior for parents and children, Volumnia deliberately inverts the proper social norms by kneeling to her son. The gesture – which has no parallel in Plutarch – is an attack. As he kneels before her, she joins him on her knees, mocking the duty he has tried to show: "I kneel before thee, and unproperly / Show duty as mistaken all this while / Between the child and parent" (5.3.54-56). Volumnia's salutatory kneeling refashions a ceremonial act of greeting into an assault.

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[226] North, *Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, 2:183.
[227] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 171.

While Coriolanus tries to establish with his kneeling that his duty is deeper "than that of common sons" (5.3.52), Volumnia's theatrical act of counter-kneeling is the equivalent of a slap in the face. Coriolanus, ever sensitive to the nuance of gesture, takes it as the rebuke that it is: "What's this? / Your knees to me? To your corrected son?" (5.3.56-57).

This episode of kneeling and counter-kneeling – with its gestural echoes of the hysterical absurdity of the repeated kneeling by the Duke and Duchess of York in *Richard II* (5.3) – provides a contrast with the way that the ritual plays out in Volumnia's solemn supplication. In this case, Plutarch rather than Jacobean social practice provides the impetus for Shakespeare's innovations. Plutarch streamlines the histrionic gestures of his source with precision and care, stripping away the elements of the melodramatic. As North recounts with tragic dignity: "her selfe, his wife and children, fell downe upon their knees before him."[228] Behind this careful cinematography is the gestural memory of the scenes of supplication of the tragic tradition. In Plutarch's Volumnia, we hear the voice of Clytemnestra begging Orestes to pity the breast that nourished him (Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers*, 896-98; Euripides, *Electra*, 1206-15); Iphigenia pleading Agamemnon to spare the sacrificial knife (Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, 1214-75); Tecmessa imploring Ajax not to commit suicide (Sophocles, *Ajax*, 587-90). All of these scenes are present in this Plutarchan moment. Volumnia's supplication reaches back toward the suppliants of Greek drama, and presents Coriolanus with an impossible choice. As Francesca Albini argues in her commentary on the episode: "Il protagonista Coriolano è

[228] North, *Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, 2:185-86.

di fronte una scelta comunque foriera di mali: sia che risparmi Roma, sia che si batta per i Volsci condanna se stesso."[229]

Similarly, Shakespeare's Volumnia traps her son in ritual of reciprocity, with another set script and another role that he does not want to play. Volumnia begins by describing herself, along with Coriolanus' wife and son, as "suitors" (5.3.79). Anticipating the emotional entailments of being supplicated, Coriolanus tries to forestall her suit, but Volumnia carries on with two impassioned speeches. Rhetorically powerful though they are, her words have little effect on Coriolanus. He is silent throughout Volumnia's pleading. We have a sense of his responses from Volumnia's commentary – "Speak to me son!" (5.3.149), "Why dost not speak?" (5.3.154), "He turns away!" (5.3.169) – but nothing more. He sits to listen, then rises and turns to leave. It is only when Volumnia returns to the language of gesture that Coriolanus responds. She concludes her second speech with a plea to Virgilia and Valeria: "Down, ladies; let us shame him with our knees" (5.3.270). Coriolanus' next move is *[He holds her by the hand, silent]*.

Editors have debated where precisely the stage directions belong – does he reach for her hand while the women are still kneeling or after they rise to leave? I would argue that the full impact of the gesture is felt if Coriolanus grasps his mother's hand once the ceremony of supplication is complete, after she has risen to leave and disowned him as her son:

This fellow had a Volscian to his mother;

[229] Plutarch, *Vita di Coriolano*, ed. Francesca Albini (Milano: Garzanti, 1996), 174 n39.

His wife is in Corioles, and his child

Like him by chance. (5.3.179-81)

By holding her hand, he is, in effect, creating a new ritual. Hand-holding is not one the customary gestures for indicating an accepted supplication; it lies outside the specific ritual context. As Adrian Poole remarks, "it is as if this were itself a kind of ritual gesture which Martius suddenly invents."[230] The gesture itself belongs to Plutarch, who tells us that Coriolanus spoke to his mother "holding her hard by the right hande."[231] John Bulwer, in his 1644 treatise *Chirologia: or the Natural Language of the Hand*, interprets the gesture in Plutarch "as a token of duty and reverential love."[232] This is surely the case with Shakespeare as well: the hand-holding acknowledges Coriolanus' dependency on his mother, and in accepting that obligation, he destroys the self that insisted on being his own author. But there is another register to the gesture. Hand-holding in ancient Rome was also a gesture symbolic of reconciliation, concord, and friendship. The *dextrarum iunctio* carried the signification of a mutual agreement or pact. Coriolanus, therefore, imports the ancient meaning of the gesture to escape the usual hierarchical patterning of supplication. With it, he expresses a hope of reconciliation, consensus and equality. The gesture of hand-holding creates a non-verbal signifier that, for once, communicates precisely what Coriolanus means to say. In this ritual-outside-the-ritual, Coriolanus finally finds a gesture that accurately communicates a polyvalent inner reality. The new

[230] Adrian Poole, *Coriolanus* (Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988), 111.
[231] North, *Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, 2:186.
[232] John Bulwer, *Chirologia: Or, The Natural Language of the Hand, and Chironomia: Or, The Art of Manual Rhetoric*, ed. James W. Cleary (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1974), 94.

ritual signals Coriolanus' acknowledgment of his dependence on others, but it also tries to re-write the structure of the rituals that underpin Roman society.[233] The tragedy is that the polyvalence of Coriolanus' gesture has no space to be felt. Coriolanus' consistent opposition to gestures of submission has unleashed a force that is now larger than himself. He cannot control the meaning of his gestures any more than he can control the effect of other's bodies on him. He cannot fully break out of the conceptual gridlock that supplication has placed him in. Participation in the ritual, either as suppliant or supplicated, amounts to self-destruction.

In this way, the tragic patterning of ancient suppliant drama makes its way into Plutarch's treatment of Volumnia, and into Shakespeare's recognition that supplication offers material appropriate to tragedy. For Plutarch it is clear that Coriolanus' capitulation to his mother's supplication is the beginning of his own destruction, and to create this effect, he seems to be drawing on his knowledge of the dilemmas produced by scenes of supplication in Greek tragedy. Coriolanus is faced with the impossible choice of Pelasgus in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* and of Theseus in Euripides' *Suppliant Women*: both acceptance and rejection threaten devastation. Shakespeare reaches back, intuiting the structures of Greek drama that radiates through the construction of Plutarch's *Lives*. Coriolanus is like Sophocles' Ajax: an unyielding war-hero who can only break, not bend. Shakespeare incarnates this psychological state in the physical bending of the body that accompanies the rituals of petition and supplication. As Coriolanus fears, mind and

[233] The gesture of hand-holding also points ahead to the Quaker use of the handshake as a form greeting between equals. See Herman Roodenburg, "The 'hand of friendship': shaking hands and other gestures in the Dutch Republic," in *A Cultural History of Gesture*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1992), 152-189.

body are mutually informing. Just as Coriolanus' psychological recognition of his dependency on other human beings is given physical reality in the gesture of hand-holding, so performing the gesture changes him into a different self, one that Aufidius can kill.

The Tempest: Tragicomedy and the Absent Suppliant

Shakespeare's intimacy with Plutarch affords him the opportunity to explore supplication in all the richness of its ritual, emotional, and theatrical significations. In the *Tempest* it is Vergil who provides material for returning to supplication, now in connection with the vexed question of genre. *The Tempest* is a notoriously uncategorizable play. In the First Folio it was listed foremost among the comedies, and in 1969 Harry Berger described the prevailing contemporary view as follows: "The action of the play is Prospero's discovery of his enemies, their discovery of themselves, the lovers' discovery of a new world of wonder, and Prospero's own discovery of an ethic of forgiveness, and the renunciation of his magical power."[234] For Berger, this reading "does not hit the play where it lives," and many subsequent scholars, attuned to the play's concern with the problem of sovereignty and the discourses of colonialism, have agreed.[235] To conclude this chapter, I will suggest an explanation for the play's generic instability that relies as much on its classical as its New World intertexts. *The Tempest*

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[234] Harry Berger, "Miraculous Harp: A Reading of Shakespeare's *Tempest*," *Shakespeare Studies* 5 (1969): 253-283.

[235] See especially Stephen Greenblatt, "Martial law in the land of Cockaigne," in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 129-63; Paul Brown, "'This Thing of Darkness I Acknowledge Mine': *The Tempest* and the discourse of colonialism," in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays In Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 48-71.

veers towards problematizing rather than discovering forgiveness – veers, that is, towards tragicomedy – because of the underpresence of the *Aeneid*. The irresolution at the end of the play arises because – contrary to the expectations set up by Prospero – there is no Turnus figure to pardon or to kill.

Critics have long identified the *Aeneid* as part of the imaginative landscape of the *Tempest*, but there is still no consensus about what to make of it.[236] The range of opinions is vast: Geoffrey Bullough omitted the *Aeneid* from his list of narrative and dramatic sources, but in the introduction to the Oxford edition of the play, Stephen Orgel claims that the story of the *Aeneid* is the one Shakespeare is retelling – a story of exile, colonization, and the human cost of empire.[237] Heather James has suggested that *The Tempest* provides a deeply ambivalent response to the *Aeneid* as a prototype of the myths of foundation that were so important to the self-definition of the burgeoning English state. In a similar vein, Craig Kallendorf sees Shakespeare as taking "not the precise

[236] For discussions of *The Tempest* in conjunction with the *Aeneid*, see J. M. Nosworthy, "The Narrative Sources of *The Tempest*," *Review of English Studies* 24 (1948): 281-94; Jan Kott, "The *Aeneid* and *The Tempest*," *Arion* 3 (1976): 424-51; John Pitcher, "A Theater of the Future: The *Aeneid* and *The Tempest*," *Essays in Criticism* 34 (1984): 193-215; Robert S. Miola, "Vergil in Shakespeare: From Allusion to Imitation," in *Vergil at 2000*, ed. John D. Bernard (New York: AMS Press, 1986); Robert Wiltenburg, "The *Aeneid* in *The Tempest*," *Shakespeare Survey* 39 (1987): 159-68; Donna Hamilton, *Vergil and The Tempest: The Politics of Imitation* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1990); James, *Shakespeare's Troy: Drama, Politics, and the Translation of Empire*, 196-210; Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, *Jonson, Shakespeare, and Early Modern Virgil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); David Scott Wilson-Okamura, "Vergilian Models of Colonization in Shakespeare's *Tempest*," *English Literary History* 70 (2003): 709-37; Craig Kallendorf, *The Other Virgil: "Pessimistic" Readings of the Aeneid in Early Modern Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[237] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

substance of [Vergil's] colonial vision, but the process by which imperialism is questioned and qualified by 'further voices' that emerge in the drama."[238]

At this point, there is no need to prove the presence of the *Aeneid* in *The Tempest*. If there are explanations to be made, they would need account for the uncharacteristic citationality of Shakespeare's references to Vergil – and indeed to the play's other main sources: Montaigne's essay "On Cannibals," Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and William Stratchey's *True Repertory of the Wracke*. The verbal echoes of the *Aeneid* in the storm scene, the widow Dido episode, and the appearance of Ariel in the form of a harpy to disturb the banquet of the Neopolitan lords distinguish *The Tempest* from other Shakespearean re-writings of the *Aeneid* by the way they cling to the original. This closeness provides encouragement to consider what *The Tempest* looks like if we take the Vergilian undertow as a given rather than as something to prove.

What emerges is a parallel trajectory from exile to return that takes on a tragic inconclusiveness because of the failure of supplication. At the beginning of the play, Prospero seems determined to fashion a story that will follow the *Aeneid* in its movement from loss to recuperation and reverse Vergil's tragically unresolved ending by staging a scene where the Italian lords beg for mercy and Prospero pardons his suppliants. When he explains the history of the usurpation of his dukedom to Miranda in Act 1 Scene 2, Prospero leaves us in no doubt that he intends to make use of the occasion that has brought his enemies within reach of his island:

[238] Kallendorf, *The Other Virgil: 'Pessimistic' Readings of the Aeneid in Early Modern Culture*, 110.

By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune,

Now my dear lady, hath mine enemies

Brought to this shore; and by my prescience

I find my zenith doth depend upon

A most auspicious star, whose influence

If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes

Will ever after droop. (1.2.179-85)

But as Prospero's plan to recover his dukedom begins to unfold, it becomes clear that he does not simply wish to take vengeance on his enemies; he wants to bring about a psychological transformation that will make them regret their past actions and long for reconciliation.[239] To do this he must arouse the necessary feelings of repentance. When Ariel descends on the lords as they feast at Propero's magical banquet and reminds Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian that they are "three men of sin" (3.3.53), Prospero appears to have successfully put the elements in place for a drama of penitence and reconciliation. According to Gonzalo, "All three of them are desperate. Their great guilt / Like poison given to work a great time after / No 'gins to bite the spirits" (3.3.104-6). Prospero is similarly optimistic that his plan is succeeding:

My high charms work

And these, mine enemies, are all knit up

[239] For the political implications of Prospero's idealism, see David Norbrook, "'What Cares These Roarers for the Name of King': Language and Utopia in *The Tempest*," in *The Politics of Tragicomedy: Shakespeare and After*, ed. Gordon McMullan and Jonathan Hope (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

In their distractions. They are now in my power

And in these fits I leave them. (3.3.88-91)

When the stage is finally set for the conclusion Prospero has designed, he reiterates the vision of reconciliation that he seems to have planned all along. He is determined to show mercy.

Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick,

Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury

Do I take part … They being penitent

The sole drift of my purpose doth extend

Not a frown further. (5.1.25-27, 28-30)

Prospero casts himself in the role of Aeneas, torn between "reason" and "fury." We are meant to understand, however, that unlike Aeneas, when faced with a repentant suppliant, Prospero will be merciful. And yet, the conclusion of the play does not follow the script Prospero has written; he has not factored in the contingency of supplication, the reality that in order to forgive, he must have a suppliant to pardon. The absence of the suppliant in the final scene is felt precisely because a climactic meeting between suppliant and supplicated has been teasingly promised from the beginning of the play. Instead, the pieces of a supplication scene are fragmented and displaced, above all, onto Ariel, who describes the state of Prospero's enemies with supplicating sympathy:

All prisoners, sir,

In the line-grove which weather-fends your cell;

They cannot budge til your release. The King,

His brother, and yours, abide all three distracted,

And the remainder mourning over them,

Brimful of sorrow and dismay; but chiefly

Him that you termed, sir, the good old Lord Gonzalo

His tears run down his beard like winter's drops

From eves of reeds. (5.1.9-17)

Ariel's speech is the first piece of the fragmented supplication that never fully occurs. Painting a rhetorical picture of their suffering, Ariel becomes a suppliant on behalf of the Italian lords. Instead of dwelling on the two usurpers, Ariel lingers over the his description of Gonzalo, the one Italian lord who helped Prospero as he was leaving Milan – and the one who seems to share Prospero's fantasy of a story of repentance and forgiveness. Ariel is given the voice of the poet and suppliant, bringing to life through words the suffering of another and attempting to make Prospero's affections tender. We are not given the promised scene of Turnus before Aeneas, but rather Ariel interceding for the Italian lords through the rhetoric of pity. The drama of supplication one step removed calls attention to what is latent in *Aeneid* 12 – that the voice of the narrator is fused with that of Turnus. Ariel's intercessory petition, in which he performs the function of both suppliant and poet, pulls out this Vergilian narrative technique, and gives the Vergilian narrator's role to a third party character.

The most striking part of Ariel's petition is that it succeeds; through Ariel, "which art but air," Prospero comes to the fundamental point of identification with the suppliant. He is struck thoroughly by the fact that Ariel, who is a spirit, can feel so tenderly towards the lords; through Ariel's non-human sympathy, Prospero recognizes his own inhuman lack of fellow-feeling.

Ariel. Your charm so strongly works
That if you now beheld them, your affections
Would become tender.
Prospero. Dost thou think so, spirit?
Ariel. Mine would, sir, were I human.
Prospero. And mine shall.
Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply
Passion as they, be kindlier moved than thou art? (5.1.17-24)

Ariel's non-human plea forces Prospero to reconnect with his own humanity and the humanity of his victims. More importantly in terms of dramatic structure, Ariel's role as a suppliant on behalf of the lords puts Prospero prematurely into the role of supplicated. The supplication which, in Prospero's plan, was meant to take place between himself and his brother Antonio, is transferred to Ariel. Prospero promises to show mercy, but without the presence of a penitent suppliant asking for pardon.

In the following scene more cracks begin to show in the tidy reconciliation scene Prospero wants to create. At first, clearly still moved by Ariel's report, he expresses his sympathy with Gonzalo: "Holy Gonzalo, honourable man / Mine eyes, ev'n sociable to the show of thine / Fall fellowly drops" (5.1.63-5). He also responds kindly to Alonzo's penitent supplication: "Thy dukedom I resign, and do entreat / Thou pardon me my wrongs (5.1.19-20). But Prospero's final interaction with Antonio does not end so cleanly. As promised, he forgives his brother – though in language which begs the question of whether or not it is true forgiveness: "For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother / Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive / Thy rankest fault – all of them – and require / My dukedom of thee, which perforce I know / Thou must restore" (5.1. 130-134). But given that Antonio has not asked for pardon, Prospero's offer of forgiveness has a high-handedness about it – he is acting the role of supplicated without a suppliant. The scene of successful supplication that Prospero has designed has been forestalled by the fragmenting of the elements of the ritual to other places in the play. The absence of the suppliant in the concluding scene leaves a sense of discomfort that something fundamental has been left unexpressed, unacted, and unfelt.

Shakespeare, instead, turns this missing element of supplication into the epilogue of the play. In a sudden change of registers, Prospero rhetorically bends his knees to the audience, transferring the dynamics of supplication to player and audience. As Prospero begs the audience to "release me from my bands / with the help of your good hands" (5.1.367-8) the language of penitence and forgiveness suddenly becomes part of the play's meta-theatrical vocabulary. The darkening of the comic plot, through the activation and fragmentation of the supplicatory patterns of the *Aeneid*, takes on an even

greater urgency when Prospero supplicates the audience for pardon: "As you from crimes would pardoned be / Let your indulgence set me free" (5.1.377-8). The traditional appeal to the audience's favor that we see in comedies like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is cast in the deathly serious rhetoric of Norfolk's pardon letter to the queen. Prospero wants the audience to think of him as a wrong-doer whose theatrical crimes need to be forgiven.[240] The audience of the court on Hallowmas Nyght or during the festivities celebrating the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to the Elector of Palatine is forced into the uncomfortable position of feeling what it is like to be asked for pardon. Shakespeare clearly wants his audience to leave with a sense of the affective reality that comes with forgiving and asking for forgiveness – and this is part of the generic import of tragicomedy.

Shakespeare concludes the play with a meditation on the emotional complexity of supplication, facilitated by the substructural presence of the *Aeneid*. Aeneas' flash of anger damages the comic potential of the epic irrevocably and makes it certain that the poem becomes a reflection on the fragility of pity in the face of powerful passions like anger. *The Tempest* engages in a similar meditation – less on what Kallendorf calls the "process by which imperialism is questioned" and more on a form of affective therapy. Just as no reader leaves the *Aeneid* without considering what it feels like to ask for pardon and to be asked, Shakespeare encourages his audience to confront the duality of all acts of petition, bringing to bear the modes of feeling of the past on the very real ethical and emotional demands of the present.

[240] Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 113-14, remarks that "authors could imagine themselves producing works that wounded readers and listeners, from whom they had to supplicate mercy."

IV

'THY SUPPLIANT I BEG, AND CLASP THY KNEES': POLITICS, THEOLOGY, AND THE STRUCTURE OF RECONCILIATION IN *PARADISE LOST*

The title page of Milton's *Areopagitica* presents the reader with "A Speech of Mr. John Milton For the Liberty of Unlicens'd Printing" addressed "To the Parliament of England." Divided from the title by a solid black line is a quotation, first in Greek and then in English, from Euripides' play *The Suppliant Women*, performed at the Dionysia in Athens circa 423 BC. Theseus has just heard the petition of the suppliant women of Argos, first from their spokesman Adrastus, the defeated Argive king, and then from his own aged mother, Aethra. Both Adrastus and Aethra beg Theseus to have pity on the suppliant women and ensure the burial of their sons, fallen on the battlefield outside Thebes. At first Theseus hesitates, not wishing to involve Athens in any impiety, but Aethra pleads with him to honor the gods by giving the dead a proper burial. Persuaded by his mother's appeal, Theseus accepts the petition and urges the Argive women to put away their suppliant branches. But just as he turns to leave the temple where the suppliants have taken refuge, Theseus is accosted by a messenger from Thebes. The messenger's inquiry after the master of the land prompts a political excursus recognized already in antiquity as a defense of the Athenian constitution.[241] Athens, Theseus declares, in the passage quoted on the front of Milton's pamphlet, has no master, but is a

[241] The manuscript of *The Suppliant Women* that comes down to us begins with a piece of ancient literary criticism: "The play is an encomium of Athens." See David Kovacs, ed., *Suppliant Women* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 3. For the political context of the play's first performance, with reference to contemporary *encomia* and the Athenian defeat at the battle of Delium in 424 BC, see Sophie Mills, *Theseus, Tragedy, and the Athenian Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 89-128.

place where the people are sovereign and allowed the freedom to speak their minds. Milton's translation of the passage reads:

> το□λεύθερον δ□□κε□νο. Τίς θέλει πόλει
>
> χρηστόν τι βούλευμ□□ς μέσον φέρειν □χων;
>
> κα□ τα□θ□□ χρ□ζων λαμπρός □σθ□, □ μ□ θέλων
>
> σιγ□. τί τούτων □στ□□σαίτερον πόλει; (Euripides, *The Suppliant Women*, 438-41)

> This is true Liberty when free born men
>
> Having to advise the public may speak free
>
> Which he who can, and will, do deserv's high praise
>
> Who neither can nor will, may hold his peace;
>
> What can be juster in a State then this?

The marginal commentary of Milton's edition of Euripides categorizes this passage as an example of the Greek concept of *parrhesia*, or free, frank speech, and the quotation speaks directly to the issue of censorship in the seventeenth century.[242] But Milton's selection of this Eurpidean epigraph gives the title page of *Areopagitica* an even

[242] For a discussion of the *Areopagitica* frontispiece in conjunction with seventeenth-century literary republicanism, see David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric, and Politics, 1627-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 125-39. See also David Davies and Paul Dowling, "'Shrewd Books, with Dangerous Frontispices': *Areopagitica*'s Motto," *Milton Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1986): 33-37. Milton used the 1602 Stephanus edition, *Euripidis tragoediae quae extant*, ed. Paulus Stephanus, 2 vols. (Geneva, 1602).

more complex blend of resonances. With the citation from *The Suppliant Women*, Milton subtly expands the genre of his pamphlet. It is not only a speech, as the title page proclaims in bold capital letters, but also a petition – indeed, a supplication. Like the Argive women who come as suppliants to Athens to ask for Theseus' help, *Areopagitica* supplicates its readers, begging for sympathy and seeking to enlist support in the justice of its cause.

The *Areopagitica* title page showcases the approach to supplication we might expect from Milton.[243] Humble petition appears furtively, tiptoeing across the page, a whisper among the booming voices of self-assertion and political reform. Indeed, supplication is not an immediately obvious concept to associate with Milton at all. The iconic image of the stiff-necked puritan, the morally unimpeachable advocate of chastity and free speech, does not sit well with the bent knee of the suppliant or the

[243] Milton's position on the political practice of petitioning was characteristically anti-royalist. As he declares in *Eikonoklastes*, petitioning was a mechanism by which "men require not favours onely, but thir due." See John Milton, *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. D. M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 3:461. All subsequent references to Milton's prose works will refer to this edition as *CPW*. Milton was not alone, of course, in believing that the petition should be used to demand rights rather than ask favors. By the 1640's petitioning had undergone a transformation in English political life. During the Elizabethan period, as we saw in the previous chapter, petitioning was thoroughly imbedded in the hierarchical cult of monarchy, but in Parliament's struggles with James I and then with Charles I, the petition became a more independent form of political expression. Elizabeth Read Foster has argued that in the early decades of the seventeenth century petitions were wielded with increasing autonomy and political assertiveness. See Elizabeth Read Foster, "Petitions and the Petition of Right," *Journal of British Studies* 14, no. 1 (1974): 21-45. According to Annabel Patterson, "A Petitioning Society" in *Reading Between the Lines* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 77, the seventeenth century witnessed the evolution of the petition "from a ritualized practice that implied a deeply hierarchical system and whose effects in mediating social justice were at best unpredictable," to a form that "gradually acquired a political and ideological force that caused it, through the new machinery of organized protest and more informed lobbies, to reverse its own semantics."

acknowledgement of inferiority involved in making a petition. Milton's self-characterization in his own writings does little to dislodge this impression. His pamphlet persona usually adopts a stance of defensive antagonism rather than self-abasing petition.[244] Nowhere in his pre-Restoration prose does Milton argue for submission as an ethical ideal nor does he seem to take interest in imagining a morally appropriate response to supplication. Richard Strier gone so far as to argue that the word "humility" has a predominantly negative valence in Milton's prose. The Milton of *The Reason of Church Government* and *Of Reformation* is concerned to articulate an ethic of "proper pride" rather than a Calvinist sense of fundamental unworthiness.[245]

Biographical evidence from the Restoration period would seem to corroborate this view, identifying Milton ideologically with the martyrs of the Good Old Cause rather than with former supporters of the Commonwealth who submitted to the restored regime. The inclusion of Sonnet 17 to Sir Henry Vane in a volume commemorating Vane's life after his execution in 1662 reveals a decidedly non-conciliatory attitude towards the Restoration monarchy and continued sympathy for the regicides.[246] Regarding Milton's own experience of the Restoration government, the historical record is tantalizingly

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[244] See Colin Burrow, "Combative Criticism: Jonson, Milton, and Classical Literary Criticism in England," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, III: The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P. Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 487-499.

[245] Richard Strier, "Milton Against Humility," in *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, ed. Claire McEachern and Debora K. Shuger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 258-86. I find Strier's analysis of Milton's prose works persuasive, but as will become clear in this chapter, I disagree with the conclusions he draws about the role of humility in *Paradise Lost*.

[246] Milton originally wrote the Sonnet to Henry Vane in 1652, but it was published for the first time in George Sikes's biographical tribute *The Life and Death of Sir Henry Vane* (1662). David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 433-38, uses the publication of the sonnet to argue that Milton's response to the Restoration was anything but the "retired silence" and "quietism" that has sometimes been ascribed to him.

incomplete. The Declaration of Breda promised "free and general pardon" to all Charles II's subjects and amnesty to regicides who handed themselves over to the new authorities, but how the author of *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, *Eikonoklastes*, and *The Ready and Easy Way* – who did not turn himself in, but went into hiding – escaped Parliament's list of exceptions to the 1660 Acts of Oblivion and Indemnity remains something of a mystery.[247] Milton did not sign the death warrant for Charles I or participate in his trial, but he was more than a simple servant of Parliament or Oliver Cromwell; by 1660, he was known as the public voice of English republicanism and the international defender of tyrannicide. The order from the House of Commons commanding Milton's pardon and release does not survive, but Milton certainly faced the question, at least internally, as to whether or not he should submit the customary petition for release from prison – as Lucy Hutchinson did on behalf of her regicide husband. Maintaining his stance of unrepentant anti-royalism, Milton issued a suit against Parliament to protest the fine he incurred as a result of his imprisonment in 1660. This was not a man to "bow and sue for grace / With suppliant knee" (*Paradise Lost*, 1. 111-12). [248]

Paradise Lost, then, poses a problem in its representation of physical and verbal gestures of submission. It is full of them. Rather than hiding in the folds of allusion, as on the title page of *Areopagitica*, scenes of supplication appear throughout the poem and

[247] David Masson, *The Life of John Milton: Narrated in Connexion with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of His Time* (London: Macmillan, 1859), vol. 6 offers the most detailed portrait of this period in Milton's life. See also Gordon Campbell and Thomas N. Corns, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[248] See Gordon Campbell, *A Milton Chronology* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 194: "JM protests at excessive fees for his imprisonment; the matter is raised by Andrew Marvell in Parliament and referred to the Committee of Privileges."

involve all the central characters. In this chapter I offer an account of the role of supplication in *Paradise Lost* that leads to the very epicenter of Milton's thought. The poem's treatment of scenes of supplication sheds light in a unique way on the intersection of Milton's politics, theology, and poetics – bringing us into the thick of seventeenth-century debates over the religious and political orthodoxy of kneeling, the metaphysics of Christ's atonement, and the use of narrative modes from the classical past to explore affective relationships in the literary present. In tracing the cluster of ideas and cultural practices that gather around the representation of petition, I will show how Milton's anxieties about monarchy and ceremonialist worship are linked – through the conceptual and narrative structure of supplication – to his idiosyncratic version of animist materialism and his unique approach to classical reception. By bringing together ancient forms of supplication with contemporary gestures of political and religious abasement, Milton invites his readers to view theology, politics, and aesthetics as mutually informing and inextricably intertwined in *Paradise Lost*.

Satan and the Religious Politics of Kneeling

It is not by accident that of all the characters in *Paradise Lost* who engage in the gestures of supplication, Satan is unique in his pointed *non*-participation in the reciprocal interaction of suppliant and supplicated. Satan considers the possibility of supplicating, openly refuses to supplicate, and even imagines what it would be like to be supplicated, but nowhere do we find him fully engaged in humble petitioning or receiving a humble

petition.[249] This feature of Satan's history distinguishes him not only from God, the Son, Adam, and Eve, but also from the heroes of prior epics with whom he has often been associated.[250] Unlike his classical prototypes – whether it be a Homeric Achilles, a Vergilian Aeneas / Turnus, or a Lucanian Caesar / Pompey – Satan's relationship to supplication represents another characteristic non-action: alluded to, suggested, but never performed. And yet, Satan's non-participation in the mechanics of supplication functions as a powerful response to what Milton saw as a conflation of political and religious gestures in Jacobean and, more overtly, Caroline religious policy. Satan's persistent objection to physical obeisance, which begins at the chronological origin of the poem with his refusal to perform the suppliant gesture of kneeling to the newly anointed Son, taps into Milton's preoccupation with the structures of hierarchy both in the civic sphere and in the ceremonialism of Laudian liturgical reform. Milton's anxiety over excess ritualism in worship will find expression later in the representation of the Son's highly ceremonialized priesthood in Book 11, but the issue of liturgical practice first emerges as a problem in the poem when Satan refuses to kneel.

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[249] One possible exception would be Satan's acceptance of Sin's petition that he refrain from combat with Death (*PL*, 2.726-844), but even in this case, Sin's intervention is more an assertion of her identity and relationship to Satan, and Satan's reply is an acknowledgment of their connection.

[250] For Satan's classical genealogy, see especially Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 438-67; David Quint, *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); Katherine Calloway, "Beyond Parody: Satan as Aeneas in *Paradise Lost*," *Milton Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (2005): 82-92; John M. Steadman, *Milton and the Renaissance Hero* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); Francis C. Blessington, *Paradise Lost and the Classical Epic* (Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1979). Francis Blessington, "*Paradise Lost* and the Apotheosis of the Suppliant," *Arion* 6, no. 2 (1998): 83-97, calls attention to Satan's role in Milton's reworking of supplication as an epic topos.

In fact, the reader's introduction to Satan is also an introduction to the poem's unfolding concept of supplication. In his speech to Beelzebub – the first utterance in the poem and the first attempt on the part of the rebel angels to cope with the aftermath of the war in heaven – Satan articulates his continued opposition to God's rule in terms of resistance to the physical gestures required of a suppliant:

> What though the field be lost?
> All is not lost; the unconquerable will,
> And study of revenge, immortal hate,
> And courage never to submit or yield:
> And what is else not to be over come?
> That glory never shall his wrath or might
> Extort from me. To bow and sue for grace
> With suppliant knee, and deify his power
> Who from the terror of this arm so late
> Doubted his empire, that were low indeed,
> That were an ignominy and shame beneath
> This downfall. (*Paradise Lost*, 1.105-116)

The military language of the passage links Satan's first speech closely with its post-martial context, but from the perspective of the reader, encountering Satan for the first time, the concept of supplication emerges in connection with the political and theological questions of hierarchy. As the reader will eventually learn from Raphael's

narrative of the War in Heaven in Book 6, the rebel angels, routed by the Son's military might, hurl themselves headlong into the "spacious gap" that opens "into the wasteful deep" (*PL*, 6.861-2) and fall nine days to the "bottomless pit" of Hell (*PL*, 6.866). With that fall comes a new relationship to heaven. Satan is no longer the leader of a seditious faction, but a defeated insurrectionist, a traitor and an outsider who must find his way back in or remain forever an exile. Satan's view of supplication keeps him on the outside. The defeated leader of the rebel angels believes that by performing the battlefield gesture of bowing the "suppliant knee" to his conqueror and asking for pardon, he will "deify" him. The word "deify" leaps out from the otherwise martial vocabulary of the speech: Satan's resistance to supplication is not simply a matter of Iliadic pride, but a question of major theological importance. In Satan's mind, the "suppliant knee" must be resisted – it is a form of adoration that elevates the object of supplication to the status of divinity.

Satan's belief that God needs worship in order to be God reveals his increasing distance from the unfallen world of heaven, but it also suggests that supplication will become an important strand in the complex story of Satan's fall. As we soon discover, Satan's headstrong refusal to supplicate his conqueror in the aftermath of battle initially takes shape as a much more complicated ideological unease with the political and theological implications of physical gestures of submission. Thus, in Book 5, faced with the revelation of the Son's new status as anointed king, Satan recoils from the physical homage owed to the "vicegerent" ruler of heaven, framing his objection to "knee tribute" in terms of anxiety about image-worship.

Thrones, dominations, princedoms, virtues, powers,
If these magnific titles yet remain
Not merely titular, since by decree
Another now hath to himself engrossed
All power, and us eclipsed under the name
Of king anointed, for whom all this haste,
Of midnight march, and hurried meeting here,
This only to consult how we may best
With what may be devised of honours new
Receive him coming to receive from us
Knee-tribute yet unpaid, prostration vile,
Too much to one, but double how endured,
To one and to his image now proclaimed? (*PL*, 5.772-84)

The speech is a masterpiece of Satanic rhetoric. Having gathered together his partisans under the pretext of discussing "the great reception of their king" (*PL*, 5.769), Satan shifts from the opening deliberative rhetoric of "to consult how we may best" to a passionate argument for resistance to the Son's rule, "too much" to be endured. The turn of thought and rhetorical genre occurs with the word "knee-tribute," which slides provocatively into the appositive phrase "prostration vile" and unleashes Satan's fiery protest on behalf of liberty and equality. As the economic metaphor of "knee-tribute" implies, Satan sees worship of the Son as a financial burden imposed on the angels as if they were conquered nations subject to the rule of a centralized empire. The fact that no

such "tribute" has ever been paid in the past suggests to Satan that God has suddenly turned angels into subject polities who must pay dues in order to remain in the sovereign's favor. For Satan this is evidence of gross political inequality.

But if "knee-tribute" and "prostration vile" should be read as republican buzzwords, "prostration" also introduces a liturgical register into the speech. Patrick Hume, author of the first full set of annotations to *Paradise Lost*, finds the term "prostration" pregnant enough to deserve special etymological comment: "*Prostratio*, Lat. a lying flat on the Ground, of Prosternere, to lie along, to worship by falling flat on the Earth."[251] Hume's identification of prostration as term of worship pulls out precisely the meaning Milton wants us to hear in Satan's speech. Its religious overtones cast a retrospective liturgical light on the repetition of the verb "receive" in the previous line – the idea of receiving God's Son brings us from the court of angels to the Communion table. Thus, when Satan introduces the concept of paying physical homage "To one and to his image," the rhetorical foundations have been laid for a theological reading as well as a political one.

Satan's choice of the word "image" to describe the Son is itself a loaded gesture. The word "image" has a complex system of meanings in *Paradise Lost*; *in bono*, it describes a positive view of the process of replication. An image can be a substantial reality which takes on the properties of the original while retaining its own solid existence. God says to the Son "Let us make now man in our image" (*PL*, 7. 519) and the narrator describes the Son as "the radiant image of [God's] glory" (*PL*, 3.63). *In malo*, however, "image" means a shadowy and fleeting reflection, without an autonomous

[251] Patrick Hume, *Annotations on Milton's Paradise Lost* (London: Printed for Jacob Tonson, 1695), note to v. 782.

reality, entirely dependent on the original for its existence. In Platonic terms, an image is a misleading deception. In his incendiary speech to the assembled angels, Satan develops this sinister side of the word "image," suggesting not only the insubstantiality of the Son, but also the idolatrous nature of all gestures of worship. Satan turns knee-tribute to God's image into one of the outward signs of worship that Milton on another occasion called "the new-vomited Paganisme of sensuall Idolatry."[252]

The intersection of political and theological registers becomes even more pronounced when Satan goes on to ask the angels, "Will ye submit your necks and choose to bend / The supple knee?" (*PL*, 5.787-8). In Milton's Latinate diction, the phrase "supple knee,"[253] becomes a pun on the related Latin term *supplex* or suppliant, so that the "supple knee" implies a propensity both for yielding to political authority and for kneeling in the ceremonies of religious worship. The metaphorics of Satan's original rejection of submission to the Son, therefore, open out into a nexus of political and liturgical ideas barely hinted at in his post-rebellion speech to Beelzebub in Book 1.

In fact, Satan's complaint against paying "knee-tribute" to God's "image," could very well belong to the rhetoric of a theological treatise of the 1630's or 1640's on the unlawfulness of religious kneeling – a debate whose history is so central to Milton's treatment of Satan that it will be worthwhile to sketch it here. Like so many religious controversies of the seventeenth century, the dispute over the orthodoxy of kneeling dates

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[252] Milton, *Of Reformation*, *CPW* 1: 520.

[253] Milton's use of the phrase "supple knee" may be an indication of his engagement with Shakespeare on the issue of gestures of supplication in the dynamics of power. In *Richard II*, King Richard reads Bolingbroke's readiness to kneel to the common people as a sign of rebellion: "Off goes his bonnet to an oysterwench. / A brace of draymen big God speed him well, / And had the tribute of his supple knee / With 'Thanks, my countrymen, my loving friends', / as were our England in reversion his, / And he our subjects' next degree in hope" (2.1.30-35).

back to the origins of the English Reformation. The 1549 Book of Common Prayer permitted kneeling at Communion, but for the second edition of 1552, Edward VI was persuaded by the charismatic Scottish reformer John Knox to add a last minute clause explicitly stating that kneeling at Communion did not imply adoration of the real presence of Christ in the bread, but was simply a gesture of "eucharistic" thanksgiving.[254] This clause, known as the "Black Rubric," defined kneeling as a matter of ceremonial decorum rather than doctrinal necessity.[255] After Mary I's brief Catholic reign, Elizabeth took a more moderate stance toward kneeling at Communion by eradicating the Edwardian "Black Rubric" from her 1559 prayer book, thereby allowing multiple interpretations of "real presence" – a decision which disappointed many of her subjects eager for further reform but reflected the queen's religious conservatism as well as her interest in toleration and uniformity. But despite Elizabeth's lack of specificity on the issue, it was generally believed by English Protestants of the late sixteenth century that kneeling fell into the category of *adiaphora* – "things indifferent" – to God's worship: not intrinsically necessary for proper religious practice, but up to the discretion of the church magistrates, and more importantly, the will of the sovereign.[256]

By the time of the accession of James I in 1603, the mainline Calvinist consensus faced opposition both from ceremonialists who wanted a return to a more sacramental

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[254] See Lori Anne Ferrell, *Government by Polemic: James I, the King's Preachers, and the Rhetorics of Conformity, 1603-1625* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), especially Chapter 5: "Kneeling and the Body Politic," 140-166. The documents relating to the Edwardian liturgy appear in Joseph Ketley, ed., *The Two Liturgies, A. D. 1549, and A. D. 1552: With Other Documents Set Forth by Authority in the Reign of King Edward VI* (Cambridge University Press, 1844).

[255] Ferrell, *Government by Polemic*, 147.

[256] For the religious and political implications of England's Erastian form of ecclesiastical governance, see Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

form of worship and from non-conformists who envisioned a church more thoroughly reformed.[257] As early as 1604, kneeling was an open point of contention between non-conformists and the established Church episcopate. At the 1604 Hampton Court Conference, James was confronted with the dramatic petition of Archbishop Richard Bancroft, who pleaded on his knees for the preservation of a "praying ministry," devoted to the maintenance of physical forms of worship, as opposed to the preaching-centered religion of the Puritans.[258] Bancroft's appeal linked in a powerfully visual way the religious gestures he was seeking to preserve and the potentially seditious implications of rejecting them.[259]

In 1605 a group of non-conformists calling themselves "religious gentlemen" submitted a petition to several bishops, including Bancroft, calling for the condemnation of such Papist practices as making the sign of the cross at baptism and kneeling in the act of receiving Communion. Anticipating that the bishops would declare such practices "indifferent," the petitioners demanded corroboration from Scripture that it was lawful to

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[257] For an account of the variety of religious positions in the early seventeenth century, see the influential work of Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) and his subsequent contributions in *England's Long Reformation, 1500-1800* (London: University College London Press, 1998) and *Aspects of English Protestantism, c. 1530-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001). Tyacke's thesis that the rise of Arminianism fomented the non-conformist opposition, which led in turn to the overthrow of the English monarchy, has been influential but also subsequently revised. See Kenneth Fincham, ed., *The Early Stuart Church: 1603-1642* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), especially the essays by Fincham and Peter Lake. For a more general overview of the religious politics of the period, see John Spurr, *The Post-Reformation: Religion, Politics and Society in Britain, 1603-1714* (Harlow, England: Pearson Longman, 2006).

[258] Ferrell, *Government by Polemic*, 142.

[259] Ibid., 146. Lancelot Andrewes made the same link between Puritan non-conformity and popular rebellion throughout his sermons. See Peter Lake, "Lancelot Andrewes, John Buckeridge, and Avant-Garde Conformity at the Court of James I," in *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court*, ed. Linda Levy Peck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 118-20.

perform acts of worship sanctioned merely by tradition or royal prerogative. If religious kneeling was not theologically necessary for the proper worship of God, why not do away with it altogether? The petitioners claimed to find no evidence in Scripture to support the practice of kneeling at Communion – Christ and the Apostles all sat together at the Last Supper – and they suspected that the people were forced to kneel only for "reverence and conformities sake."[260]

Just as Bancroft would have predicted, the issue of scriptural precedent quickly became a question of political equality and religious freedom. If kneeling was an act of reverence, why shouldn't ministers kneel as well as the congregation? If it was simply a matter of conforming to an "indifferent" custom, why shouldn't the people have the liberty to choose a form of worship that conformed to the promptings of their own hearts rather than the mandates of a contingent religious authority? The petitioners ultimately demanded the freedom to "receyve the communion sitting, standing or kneeling, as everie man's devotion serveth"[261] – precisely the non-conformist attitude which threatened to disrupt the Jacobean consensus and undermine the king's authority to govern the church. Refusal to kneel in church could slip insidiously into refusing to kneel before the king. Thus, the visitation articles issued in 1613 by Lancelot Andrewes, then bishop of Ely, forbade ministers to administer Communion "to any but such as kneele"[262] and

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[260] Richard Bancroft, *Certaine demandes with their grounds, drawne out of holy writ, and propounded in foro conscientiae by some religious gentl. vnto the reverend fathers, Richard archbishop of Canterbury, Richard bishop of London, William bishop of Lincolne, Garvase bishop of Worcester, William bishop of Exeter, & Thomas bishop of Peterbourough* (London, 1605), 43.
[261] *Certaine demandes*, 45.
[262] Church of England. Diocese of Ely, Bishop (1609-1619: Andrewes), *Articles to be inquired of by the church-wardens and sworne-men, in the ordinarie visitation of the*

throughout James' reign, kneeling at the Sacrament continued to be a matter of liturgical and a political controversy.

The increased religious polarization that accompanied the rise of Arminianism in the 1620's and 1630's raised the issue of religious kneeling to a much higher level of theological scrutiny. The sharp division between orthodox Calvinists, now branded as "Puritans," and a newly mobilized group of "Formalists," with William Laud at the helm, produced an explosion of theological and rhetorical acumen devoted to the question of whether kneeling at the Sacrament constituted idolatry. The Laudian emphasis on "the beauty of holiness" championed outward ceremony not only as an appropriate reflection of inner piety and reverence but also as a means of instilling religious sentiments in the souls of the faithful.[263] Rituals such as kneeling at Communion were no longer considered "indifferent," but essential to the worship of God and the development of spiritual habits of mind. As Peter Lake has argued, according to the Laudians "the ceremonies of the Church were visible sermons, ideally suited to teach the laity those feelings of reverence, humility and worship appropriate to the meeting between the individual and the divine presence which occurred each time a Christian believer attended a divine service."[264]

Defenses of kneeling, therefore, feature prominently in sermon literature and religious treatises as early as the 1620's. One particularly interesting case comes from the pen of Thomas Morton, who had gained a reputation as a controversialist in the first

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reuerend father in God, Lancelot Lord Bishop of Elie (Cambridge: Cantrell Legge, 1613), sig A3.

[263] Peter Lake, "The Laudian Style," in *The Early Stuart Church, 1603-1642*, ed. Kenneth Fincham (London: Macmillan, 1993), 164-68.

[264] Ibid., 166.

decade of the century for his attacks on Catholicism, but soon found himself defending quasi-Catholic ceremonial practices against the unbending principles of non-conformists. Morton's *A defense of the innocencie of the three ceremonies of the Church of England* (1619) illustrates the theological divide between mainstream Calvinists and reform-minded Puritans on the issue of kneeling. Engaging in a point-by-point rebuttal of the non-conformist position, Morton devotes the longest section of the work to the objection that kneeling at the Sacrament is a form of idolatry. For Morton, the fundamental argument of the non-conformists was that it was idolatrous to "give to the signe that shew of outward Reverence and Adoration, which is due to the thing signified."[265] Outward reverence directed at the Sacrament displaces the object of worship from the invisible Christ to the visible bread. In response to this objection, Morton argues that the Church of England teaches precisely what the non-conformists believe: that the reverence and adoration shown in the act of kneeling is not directed toward the physical object of the bread, but rather toward Christ, the thing signified. As for the sign, Morton compares it to hearing the Word of Scripture. We kneel at Communion so "that vpon sight of this Sacrament, as a visible Word (even as at the hearing of the audible words of Gods booke) our hearts may be moved to a spirituall contemplation of God, and of Christ, vnto whom we pray."[266] Appealing to the Puritan emphasis on preaching, Morton argues that the outward action of kneeling, like listening to the proclamation of God's word, does not simply mirror but actually facilitates the movement of the heart towards God. Much later in life, when the tide of public feeling had turned against the conformist view, Morton,

[265] Thomas Morton, *A defence of the innocencie of the three ceremonies of the Church of England* (London: W. Barret, 1618), 278.
[266] Ibid., 285.

then occupant of the soon to be abolished episcopal see of Durham, lamented the disappearance of kneeling from worship, declaring: "this I know, that take away the outward forme of Devotion, the inward will sooner coole."[267]

As the Jacobean consensus began to unravel, and Charles I's ecclesiastical policy became more uniformly anti-Calvinist, the Laudian position on kneeling increasingly served as a focal point of high-tempered political as well as religious debate. Following Charles' attempt to impose the Laudian prayer book on the Church of Scotland, religious kneeling was taken up by the Scottish Covenanters as an essential part of their argument against royal interference in the ecclesiastical and civil government of Scotland. In two of the most important non-conformist theological manifestoes of the mid-seventeenth century, both written by Scottish Presbyterians whom Milton would have known in London in the 1640's during his involvement in the episcopal controversy, the Laudian stance on religious kneeling is treated to a thorough-going theological dismantling with stakes for political as well as religious freedom.

George Gillespie's *A dispute against the English popish ceremonies* (1637), published shortly after the Jenny Geddes riots in Edinburgh, was so incendiary that the Privy Council ordered all copies to be collected and burned. For Gillespie the external gesture of kneeling at Communion, regardless of inner intention, necessarily violated the second commandment: "the outward adoration of kneelling downe upon our knees can be no more occasioned by the blessed Sacrament, in the act of receiving it, then by a graven

[267]Thomas Morton, *The Presentment of a Schismaticke* (London: T. Badger for R. Whitaker and S. Brown, 1642), 19.

Image in the act of beholding it."[268] Kneeling before a sign – whether it be a crucifix or the bread of Communion – constitutes idolatry if that sign is offered purposely as an object of adoration. When a man kneels before his bed, the bed is not put in front of him purposefully for worship, whereas in Church of England custom, the host is presented so that "both our mindes and our externall sences may be fastened upon it."[269] In any physical act of adoration before a sign some adoration accrues to the sign even if the heart of the worshipper is directed to Christ. Thus, Gillespie concludes that the godly must "neither submit our mindes, nor humble our bodies to the Sacrament" even if "we render to it Veneration."[270]

This sweeping rejection of all religious kneeling as idolatry found an even more sophisticated theological justification in the work of Samuel Rutherford, who, like Gillespie, was a Covenanter and one of the Scottish ministers selected to attend the Westminster Assembly which met to discuss the abolition of the episcopacy. During his time in London from 1643 to 1647 as a member of the Assembly, Rutherford not only became one of the most influential theorists of the abolition of monarchy on the basis of a violated covenant, but also acted as a powerful force for bringing about Presbyterian reform in England. In *The Divine Right of Church-Government and Excommunication* (1646), Rutherford takes up the question of kneeling and argues, at even more length than Gillespie, that the outward gesture of kneeling, in and of itself, constitutes an act of idolatry. The external act of kneeling in a religious context is *latreia* or adoration, and it

[268]George Gillespie, *A dispute against the English-popish ceremonies* (Leiden: W. Christiaens, 1637), 57.
[269] Ibid., 73.
[270] Ibid., 62.

is impossible to perform a physical act of adoration without violating the second commandment.

Rutherford countered the Laudian position – which claimed that the outward gesture reflects and encourages the inner intention to adore God – by arguing that the inward / outward distinction was irrelevant: "all the time that the Adorer boweth his knee to the Idol, though he have no inward purpose of heart to Adore, the external bowing must be a natural expression of actual submission to the thing before which we bow."[271] Using the story of the three Hebrew children in the Book of Daniel, Rutherford maintained that kneeling itself signified worship. If God had intended kneeling to have some other significance, the three children could have outwardly kneeled to Nebuchadnezzar's image, but inwardly directed their worship to the true God. In a striking passage, which appears to go against all typical Protestant emphasis on inwardness, Rutherford insists that "if ye bow your knee Religiously to a stock, it is not in your power or free choice, to stay the flux and motion of Religious honour off, or from the stock, but because religious bowing dowth not convey honour to the thing before which ye bow by your free will, but by God and natures institution."[272] This conclusion leads Rutherford to reject all kneeling in religious contexts, both as a form of idolatry and as an unwarranted act of submission, "for while the world standeth, kneeling shall never be a signe of Table fellowship."[273]

As a fellow polemicist in the anti-episcopal cause, Milton was certainly familiar with Rutherford's work. In Sonnet 72, composed either in late 1646 or early 1647,

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[271]Samuel Rutherford, *The Divine Right of Church-Government and Excommunication* (London: John Field for Christopher Meredith, 1646), 146.
[272] Ibid., 147.
[273] Ibid., 199.

Milton speaks of Rutherford in glowing personal terms. He is a man "whose life, learning, faith and pure intent / Would have been held in high esteem with Paul" (9-10). Rutherford comes off especially well in comparison with his countryman Robert Baillie, who, according to John Carey, is the most likely candidate for the person Milton refers to dismissively as "Scotch What-d'ye-call."[274] But despite Milton's evident appreciation for Rutherford's character and righteousness – he twice associates him with purity: "mere" (8); "pure intent" (9) – the Scottish theologian is also implicated in the Presbyterian "classic hierarchy" (7) for which the divines of the Westminister Assembly are chastised in the sonnet. While Milton was sympathetic with the decision to abolish the episcopacy, he was deeply suspicious of the attempts of the Assembly to mandate a uniformly Presbyterian form of church government and "To force our consciences that Christ set free" (6).[275]

Milton may have parted company with Rutherford and the Presbyterians over the imposition of a uniform Presbyterian structure of church government, but there is little evidence to suggest that he radically disagreed with Rutherford's view regarding the liturgical practice of kneeling. *Paradise Lost* pointedly describes Adam and Eve saying their evening prayer "unanimous" but "other Rites / Observing none" (*PL*, 4. 736-7), and

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[274] See John Milton, *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey (Harlow, England: Pearson Longman, 2007), 299. Stella P. Revard corroborates the attribution in John Milton, *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. Stella P. Revard (Chichester, U.K: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 314.

[275] Rutherford advocated precisely this new model of conformity. The final years of the decade find him arguing for religious coercion to a Presbyterian dispensation – his *A Free Disputation against Pretended Liberty of Conscience* (1649) has been called "the ablest defence of religious persecution written in the seventeenth century" – and he grew increasingly skeptical of independents and tolerationists, who, like Milton, demanded above all that the individual conscience be free. See John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

the poem depicts them praying in various postures. In *De Doctrina Christiana* Milton considers the question important enough to assert again that kneeling is not a necessary form of worship, and that Scripture itself requires no particular style of prayer. Even when the Hebrews lived under the rules of the law, "the positioning of the body during prayer was not strictly prescribed."[276]

Milton's most complex response to the debate over religious kneeling, however, is Satan. In his speech to the soon-to-be rebel angels in Book 5, Satan operates effortlessly in the idiom of Gillespie and Rutherford, marshalling similar language against kneeling for his own rhetorical and ideological purposes. The stance he takes on giving "knee-tribute" to the Son corresponds more generally to the anti-ceremonialist rejection of physical gestures of adoration, but his *in malo* interpretation of the Son as God's "image" draws on precisely the iconoclastic spirit of the Scottish divines. For Satan, as for Gillespie and Rutherford, kneeling to any image presented for worship necessarily bestows upon the image a residue of adoration, and such adoration has the effect of deifying a mere sign. Milton's early readers would have recognized in the logic and language of Satan's speech an objection to kneeling to the image of God that was part of the rhetoric of religious dissent.

Satan's argument against kneeling to the Son, of course, has one serious flaw. Satan may present himself as a conscientious Puritan in denying worship to an image, but the "image" he refuses to kneel to is not a sign, but the thing signified. Whereas Gillespie and Rutherford objected to kneeling because it deifies an object that is not divine, the "image" Satan rejects is, in fact, the Son of God. By objecting to kneeling to

[276] John Milton, *De Doctrina Christiana* 2.4; *CPW* 6:672.

the Son because he is an "image," Satan turns Christ himself into the equivalent of a merely symbolic piece of bread presented at Communion. In a characteristic Satanic misreading, he mistakes the reality for an image. Milton is able to voice the reformer's argument against kneeling, while at the same time preserving his own views from diabolic taint. By giving Satan access to the rhetoric of anti-ceremonialism, but revealing Satan's mistaken understanding of the crucial distinction between sign and signified, Milton encourages a more nuanced understanding of religious kneeling. It may belong to the category of "things indifferent," but the worst kind of trap is to cling too closely to the doctrinal position of one inevitably fallible sect.

By now it should be apparent that Satan's use of the language of supplication taps into the rhetoric of anti-ceremonialist theology, and that the representation of supplication, like the representation of Satan himself, develops in complexity as the poem moves forward – or rather, backward – into the primal moments of the angelic rebellion. Satan's resistance in Book 1 to the "suppliant knee" might initially appear to be part of conventional epic machinery; the hero, aware of his defeat, considers whether to petition for his life – like Lycaon before Achilles – or to refuse the humiliation of accepting the conqueror's clemency – like Lucan's Domitius before Caesar. Supplication, however, turns out not to be only a matter for the battlefield. What appears at first to be a concept restricted to a martial context is implicated in the ideological rationale for the battle itself. The "supple knee" stands in for a complex of concerns about physical subordination to any being, even subordination to God. For the reader, supplication gains in explanatory power as the poem reaches forward and backward in chronological time, while for Satan,

the space for gestures of petition shrinks as he moves from rebel leader to defeated general to solitary apostate.

I conclude this section by looking at one final scene of Satanic non-supplication which speaks to Satan's increasing constraint and distance from heaven. At the beginning of Book 4, Milton gives Satan the experience of imagining what it would be like to make a petition for pity. As he contemplates his happy, innocent victims in Eden, who know nothing of their future, Satan comes close to adopting the position of suppliant to God. Realizing that he cannot escape hell, but instead carries it with him wherever he goes, Satan brings himself to the point of despair from which repentance might be born:

> Oh then at last relent: is there no place
> Left for repentance, none for pardon left?
> None left but by submission; and that word
> Disdain forbids me, and my dread of shame. (*PL*, 4.79-82)

The question is no sooner opened than it is closed. The suppliant role which Satan has consistently rejected presents itself again for a flickering instant and then recedes back into impossibility. Submission, at first a point of debate and instigation to rebellion, then a possible, though rejected, means of regaining God's favor after defeat, is here a word forbidden by Satan's fallen psychology. Supplication is no longer a political policy up for discussion and dissent; it is Satan's only means of accessing an increasingly distant God; and yet, he can only imagine a "feigned submission":

But say I could repent and could obtain

By act of grace my former state; how soon

Would height recall high thoughts, how soon unsay

What feigned submission swore: ease would recant

Vows made in pain, as violent and void.

…

This knows my punisher; therefore as far

From granting he, as I from begging peace. (*PL*, 4.93-7; 103-4)

Satan's belief that the only kind of submission he could show would be false leads to the conviction that he can neither truly repent, nor can God truly pardon. This belief leads him to the point of no return where he can say "Evil be thou my good" (*PL*, 4.110). By setting up a dichotomy between outward behavior and inner feeling, he imprisons himself in the conviction that repentance is only an outward gesture, and that supplication is a mere sign, without any inner reality for the suppliant. Satan's inability to conceive of his own repentance or God's mercy leads him to reject the possibility of sparing Adam and Eve.

Happy but for so happy ill secured

Long to continue, and this high seat your heaven

Ill fenced for heaven to keep out such a foe

As now is entered: yet no purposed foe

To you whom I could pity thus forlorn

Though I unpitied. (*PL*, 4.370-75)

The innocent happiness Adam and Eve enjoy in the garden leads Satan to consider an act of pre-emptive pity. He imagines the human pair proleptically as "forlorn," seeking his mercy after he has destroyed their paradise, and he contrasts their situation, if he should decide to pity them, with his own unpitied isolation. He has the choice of Aeneas, to kill Turnus or to spare him, and like Aeneas, he hesitates, considering the claims of his hypothetical suppliants. Unlike Vergil's hero, however, Satan is trapped not by two conflicting moral duties, but by his own sense of victimization. He casts himself in the role of a rejected supplicant, even though he has explicitly refused to petition God for pardon. As Satan has gone "unpitied," so Adam and Eve must be. It is not, as some critics have argued, that Satan is incapable of pity or unable to feel sympathy for his future victims, but that he hopes for a perverse kind of connection with them.[277] If Satan pities Adam and Eve and spares them, he will continue to be alone; by refusing to give them his pity, he will make them companions of his victimhood. The mental image of an imagined supplication shows him the way to create the affective bond he desires. Adam and Eve will become like him by sharing in his unpitiedness. This link between them, paradoxical thought it is, will form the basis of the "mutual amity" (*PL*, 4.376) he seeks. Thus, supplication not only provides a motive for Satan's original rebellion; now it gives a purpose to his previously purposeless

[277] Blessington "*Paradise Lost* and the Apotheosis of the Suppliant," *Arion* 6, no. 2 (1998): 92, argues that "Satan's attack on Edenic love points to Satan's insensibility to pity." For the view that Satan's envy of Adam and Eve is actually a manifestation of his desire for sympathy, see Colin Burrow, *Epic Romance: Homer to Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 271.

wanderings. Having chosen the role of rejected suppliant, Satan pursues a relationship of likeness and equality with his victims. And as we will see in the next two sections, the relationship of suppliant and supplicated becomes central to the slow, painful process of reconciliation both on earth and in heaven.

Eve's Homeric Supplication

The preoccupation with physical self-abasement that informs Satan's anti-ceremonialist rhetoric and shapes his rejection of kneeling anticipates in diabolic form the cluster of scenes involving the supplication gestures of Adam, Eve, and the Son. Turning from a historicist reading of the poem, I now want to consider supplication as the key to understanding Milton's narrative strategy for representing the process of reconciliation. I begin with the post-lapsarian relationship between Adam and Eve at the end of Book 10. In recent years, Milton critics have focused increasing attention on Eve's role in the reconciliation scene that restores the first couple to mutual sympathy. William Shullenberger puts the case most strongly when he argues that after the Fall, "Eve breaks the grip of self-hatred and mutual accusation by subordinating herself, by pleading for Adam's forgiveness, and by offering her own life as a sacrifice out of her love for Adam."[278] Similarly, Barbara Lewalski, in her sensitive analysis of the generic register

[278] William Shullenberger, "Wrestling with the Angel: *Paradise Lost* and Feminist Criticism," *Milton Quarterly* 20 (1986): 76. For a similarly sympathetic view of Eve, see Kevis Goodman, "'Wasted Labor'? Milton's Eve, the Poet's Work, and the Challenge of Sympathy," *English Literary History* 64, no. 2 (1997): 415-446. Shullenberger and several other critics cite as evidence for Eve's redemptive role the verbal similarity between Eve's offer to take on the blame for sin ["On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe / Me me only just object of his ire (*PL*, 10.935-6)] and the Son's offer of his life to expiate man's sin ["Behold me then, me for him, life for life / I offer, on me let thine anger fall" (*PL*, 3.236-7)]. On this gesture as a Vergilian imitation, see Leah Whittington,

of Eve's petition, adds: "[Eve's] eloquent psalmic prayer begging forgiveness of Adam begins her redemptive role as type of the Second Eve whose Seed is the Messiah."[279] John C. Ulreich goes as far as to suggest that Eve's embodiment of the bard's celebration of "the better fortitude / Of patience and heroic martyrdom" (*PL*, 9.31-2) earns her the elusive status of the poem's true hero.[280] But if scholars have pinpointed the pivotal role Eve plays in transforming discord into dialogue in the Book 10 reconciliation scene, less attention has been devoted to exploring the narrative mechanisms by which that transformation unfolds.[281] I will argue here that Milton models the narrative form of Eve's petition and Adam's response to her plea on the ritual structure of a Homeric supplication scene. Eve emerges as a suppliant, performing the physical gesture of touching the knees, while Adam takes on the role of the person supplicated who evaluates her petition and makes a judgment whether or not to accept it. The paradigm of Homeric supplication – with its emphasis on dynamic interaction, process, and contingency – provides Milton with the narrative framework to create a credible account of the steps that lead to reconciliation. As a narrative strategy, the supplication scene offers both a formal ritual structure and a dramatic fluidity that allows Milton to explore relationships

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"Vergil's Nisus and the Language of Self-Sacrifice in *Paradise Lost*," *Modern Philology* 107, no. 4 (2010): 588-606.

[279] Barbara Lewalski, *Paradise Lost and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 250.

[280] John C. Ulreich, "Argument Not Less But More Heroic: Eve as the Hero of *Paradise Lost*," in *All in All: Unity, Diversity, and the Miltonic Perspective*, ed. Charles W. Durham and Kristin A. Pruitt (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1999), 67-82.

[281] An exception is Jun Harada, "The Mechanism of Human Reconciliation in *Paradise Lost*," *Philological Quarterly* 50 (1971): 543-52, who approaches the reconciliation scene from a psychoanalytic perspective, identifying the mechanism of restoration as a form of mirroring. In seeing Eve re-perform his own attempt to take on the blame for their sin, Adam is able to view himself in the mirror of her actions and move beyond his despair.

of hierarchy and equality, and ultimately, to lend poetic power to the poem's paradoxical representation of humiliation as exaltation.

At the spiritual nadir of the poem, reconciliation seems entirely out of reach both psychologically and poetically. Adam and Eve, judged guilty by the Son and given a foretaste of their punishment, spiral downward into an abyss of mutual accusation and resentment. Their drama reaches its lowest point in Adam's bitter lament (*PL*, 10.720-844), as he lies alone outstretched on the cold ground "in a troubled sea of passion tossed" (*PL*, 10.718), vacillating between contrition and despair. In an effort to purge himself of self-loathing, Adam tries to take all the blame for his sin and spare his descendants the effects of God's curse: "On me, me only, as the source and spring / Of all corruption, all the blame lights due; / So might the wrath" (*PL*, 10. 832-34). But rather than extricating him from egocentrism, his "fond wish" (*PL*, 10.834) plunges him deeper into the "abyss of fears / And horrors" (*PL*, 10.842-3) and further isolates him in his misery.[282] When Eve tries to console him, he responds with an outpouring of misogynistic anger: "Out of my sight, thou Serpent, that name best / Befits thee with him leagued, thyself as false / And hateful" (*PL*, 10.867-9).

Instead of responding in kind, Eve breaks through the psychological impasse by acknowledging her guilt and begging Adam's forgiveness. In the preface to her speech, the narrator signals that her action should be viewed as a supplication:

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[282] John B. Broadbent, *Some Graver Subject: An Essay on Paradise Lost* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), 151, argues that the verbal connection between Adam's speech and the Son's offer of self-sacrifice functions as the first step toward Adam's regeneration. For Broadbent the Son's speech is "the spring of self-sacrifice which Adam and Eve draw on after the fall to recover sanity and love." I agree that verbal echoes of the Son's speech do appear in Adam's lament, but I would argue that they signal his distance from rather than his closeness to the Son's self-denying love. For a similar view, see Ulreich, "Argument Not Less But More Heroic: Eve as the Hero of *Paradise Lost*," 79 n7.

but Eve

Not so repulsed, with tears that ceased not flowing,

And tresses all disordered, at his feet

Fell humble, and embracing them, besought

His peace, and thus proceeded in her plaint. (*PL*, 10. 909-13)

In his commentary on these lines, Alastair Fowler cites the "great contemporary icon" of the penitent Magdalene as an analogue for the narrator's description of Eve's tears and disordered tresses, linking Eve with the specific iconographic tradition of Titian's *St. Mary Magdalene*.[283] But in offering Titian's painting as a point of comparison – a biblical portrait that depicts distress in Mary's tearful expression – Fowler misses the more important gesture of physical submission symbolized in the embracing of Adam's feet. The narrator represents Eve not just as Mary Magdalene – who in the more relevant iconographic tradition of the *Noli me tangere* scene appears kneeling before Christ's feet – but as a classical heroine, using the traditional gestures of supplication to make her plea. She falls before Adam and embraces his feet. The physical gestures of the ritual take on further significance when Eve, picking up on the narrator's suggestion, casts herself in the role of a suppliant:

Forsake me not thus, Adam, witness heaven

[283] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (Harlow, England: Pearson/Longman, 2007), note to vv. 910-12.

What love sincere, and reverence in my heart

I bear thee, and unweeting have offended,

Unhappily deceived; thy suppliant

I beg, and clasp thy knees. (*PL*, 10. 914-18)

Following the formulaic language of classical supplication, Eve first identifies herself verbally as a suppliant, and then performs the ritual gesture of touching the knees. As we have seen, the knee-clasp was a posture common to suppliants across classical literature,[284] but Milton seems to have in mind a specifically Homeric version of the ritual. The phrase "clasp thy knees," appears only three times in seventeenth-century literature, two of which come from Chapman's *The Whole Works of Homer; in his Iliads and Odysses* (1616).[285] As if to suggest the outcome of Eve's plea, both instances of the phrase in Chapman occur in situations of successful supplication. In Book 9 of the *Iliad*, Phoenix's mother repeatedly clasps his knees in order to persuade him to take vengeance on his father – which he ultimately does; and in Book 22 of the *Odyssey*, the bard Phemius successfully petitions Odysseus to exempt him from the slaughter of the suitors. Further pointing up the classical frame of reference for Eve's gesture, Patrick Hume cites

[284] See above, "Introduction," 4-5, and Naiden, *Ancient Supplication*, 44-62.

[285] This claim is based on searches in several comprehensive databases of Early Modern English literature, including Early English Books Online and LION. Sophonisba successfully supplicates Massinissa in John Marston's *The Wonder of Women Or The Tragedie of Sophonisba* (1606), Act 5, Scene 3, lines 20-23: "Therefore with teares that wash thy feet, with hands / Vnusde to beg I claspe thy manlie knees, / O saue me from their fetters and contempt, / Their proud insultes, and more then insolence." The origin of the speech is, of course, Livy, as discussed in Chapter 2, 97-102.

Pliny and Vergil as sources for the religious significance attached to the knee-clasp in antiquity.[286]

At the outset, however, the allusion to the formal structure of Homeric supplication primarily functions as a way of opening up a rhetorical space for Eve's petition. As she clasps Adam's knees, Eve delivers a speech that complements her gesture in power and passion. She begins by begging him not to abandon her, casting her petition in terms her need and dependency: "bereave me not, / Whereon I live, thy gentle looks, thy aid, / Thy counsel in this uttermost distress, / My only strength and stay" (*PL*, 10. 918-21). Her life, she argues, depends on Adam's presence: "forlorn of thee / Whither shall I betake me, where subsist?" (*PL*, 10.921-22). To persuade him further, like a Homeric suppliant, she offers a ransom: in exchange for Adam's forgiveness, she will ask God to transfer the blame for their transgression onto her alone so that she might be able to pay the debt she owes to regain Adam's favor.

> both have sinned, but thou
> Against God only, I against God and thee,
> And to the place of judgment will return,
> There with my cries importune heaven, that all

[286] Patrick Hume, *Annotations on Milton's Paradise Lost* (London, 1695). See the note to v. 918: *And clasp thy Knees*: And humbly embrace thy Knees, an Universal Custom among all Nations: *Homini genibus quaedam religio inest observatione gentium. Haec supplices attingunt, ad haec manus tendus, haec ut aras adorant*. Plin. 1.11.c.45. The *Knees* were *Sacred* to *Pity* and *Compassion*, as the *Forehead* to the *Genius*, and the *Right Hand* to Fidelity.

> ---- Genua amplexus, genibusque volutans
> Haerebat ---- Aen. 3

> The sentence from thy head removed may light
> On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe,
> Me, me only just object of his ire. (*PL*, 10. 930-36)

In this remarkable passage, the ideological content of Eve's supplication speech, though rhetorically similar to its Homeric antecedents, takes a dramatic turn. The ransom she proposes is not a gift of gold or silver, as in Homer, or the debt of "knee-tribute" that unleashed Satan's rebellion, but her very life. Eve proposes to take unilateral responsibility for a mutual act of disobedience, allowing Adam to escape the consequences of sin and remain alive, while accepting the punishment of death herself. Eve's supplication for forgiveness is based on an offer of voluntary self-sacrifice. She asks to live again in Adam's favor by offering to give up her life.

Just as the structural elements of a supplication scene give Eve the poetic space to make her plea, so the supplication ritual provides Adam with a formal mechanism to respond. In borrowing the vocabulary of successful scenes of supplication from Homer *via* Chapman, Milton uses the structure of supplication to open possibilities rather than to foreclose them. The supplicatory tableaux produces a narrative suspension that gives Adam room to process the full power of Eve's appeal. As we have seen, the response of the person supplicanted has a vexed history in the epic tradition, especially when the suppliant pleads for life and offers a ransom.[287] But unlike in classical epic, Eve's supplication, despite its formal relationship to Hector's supplication of Achilles or Turnus' supplication of Aeneas, leaps away from former precedents in her offer of self-

[287] See above Chapter 1, 52-57.

sacrifice, and allows Adam to escape the implacability prescribed by earlier supplication scenes that fail. In the domestic context of post-lapsarian Eden, the structure of supplication facilitates the hesitant process of resolution rather than the heightening of conflict.

Adam's response is "commiseration" (*PL*, 10.940). Eve's supplication succeeds. Her physical gesture of self-humiliation arouses in him a feeling of compassion that re-awakens Adam's reason and inspires him to action. In rehabilitating a positive form of pity, as Christopher Tilmouth argues in his recent study of the passions in Early Modern thought and literature, Milton follows a number of seventeenth-century theorists of the emotions in seeking to replace the dualistic model of an inner battle between reason and passion with an Aristotelian view of the passions in the service of reasoned action.[288] Adam's "commiseration," rather than blinding him with passion, allows him to see his course of action more clearly. When confronted with Eve's argument for self-sacrifice, Adam recognizes the flaws in his own similar attempt to take on all the blame, and in describing Eve's unilateral offer as "unwary, and too desirous" (*PL*, 10.947), he

[288] According to Tilmouth, *Passion's Triumph Over Reason: A History of the Moral Imagination from Spenser to Rochester* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 209, Milton "responds vigorously to Spenserian and Shakespearean interests in the anatomy of sin and self-delusion, but also answers broader turn-of-the-century challenges to the psychomachic tradition which hoped to eliminate the passions. Milton adumbrates instead a new ethic which would deliberately cultivate the affections under the twin banners of Pauline charity and Aristotelian moderation." Other scholars have also argued that the passions, especially pity, were increasingly accepted in Early Modern ethics as catalysts for virtue that should be encouraged and governed rather than extirpated. See especially the essays in Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson, eds., *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). For an alternative view, which focuses on Early Modern rationalism, see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Sovereignty of Reason: The Defense of Rationality in the Early English Enlightenment* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

implicitly rejects his own "fond wish" to expiate their sin alone.[289] He tells Eve to rise – the physical sign of an accepted supplication – and then follows the physical gesture with a rhetorical turn away from the isolationist language of individual self-sacrifice toward a vocabulary of mutuality and restored dialogue:

> But rise, let us no more contend, nor blame
> Each other, blamed enough elsewhere, but strive
> In offices of love, how we may light'n
> Each other's burden in our share of woe. (*PL*, 10. 958-61)

Adam accepts Eve's request for forgiveness but refuses the terms on which she offered it. He rejects once and for all the notion of unilateral self-sacrifice as a model for human interaction. By putting aside the language of "I" and returning to "we," Adam erases their separate attempts to shoulder the burden of sin alone, and insists on a mutual relationship of help and comfort. The contingency inherent in the ritual structure of supplication allows Adam the rhetorical space to be moved and to move himself and Eve into new psychological terrain.

By the same token, Adam's response attempts to move out of the implicit hierarchy of relationship in supplication. He asserts the superior power of the person supplicated in accepting Eve's petition but then immediately relinquishes it, telling her to

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[289] Harada, "The Mechanism of Human Reconciliation in *Paradise Lost*," 548, observes that "the faults for which he blames her are nothing but what he himself has been and had done. When he admonishes her to "bear thine own first, ill able to sustain / His full wrath (950-51), he is correcting his own "me, me" attitude, and when he makes clear to her that death will not be sudden but requires a "long day's dying to augment our pain" (964), he sets out to enlighten his previous confused notion of mortalism."

rise and acknowledging the inadequacy of both of their attempts to take on all the blame themselves. Instead, they both return to the place of judgment to offer their supplications – not to each other, but to God – and acquire perhaps the greatest degree of equality that they have had as of yet in the poem.[290] In sharing the burden of sin, they arrive at a radical equality before each other and before God, which is mirrored in the collective language used to describe their prayers at the end of Book 10: "both confessed / Humbly their faults, and pardon begged" (*PL*, 10.1100-1).

Eve's voluntary self-abasement in the form of supplication, therefore, initiates the psychological and poetic process by which the first couple moves out of contention and misery to a place of shared contrition and mutual subordination before God. The key concept in this move from hierarchy to equality, from despair to regeneration, is *process*. In the first human scene of reconciliation, Adam and Eve do not follow a ritual script, but rather invent the steps of future ritualized actions. From the external perspective of the reader, it is easy to identify the ceremonialized aspects of their interaction, but from the inside, their reconciliation is a precarious process, every stage of which is uncertain. Eve begs for pardon for the first time, not knowing what the outcome will be, and Adam forgives her for the first time, still unsure of where his love for her will lead him this time. Paradoxically, the structure of supplication emerges as a poetic device for expressing the unstable dynamics of the originary process of reconciliation. What is most

[290] Strier, "Milton Against Humility," 273, argues that in this scene Adam reasserts the "intellectual clarity and leadership" which he failed to exercise in Book 9 and thus reassumes his divinely ordained superiority over Eve. Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, 489, similarly suggests that after the Fall "the limits between masculine and feminine spheres become firmer" (489). This is certainly suggested by the Son's judgment of the pair at the beginning of Book 10, but is significantly altered by the outcome of the reconciliation scene.

remarkable is that Milton saw in the classical, and especially Homeric, ritual of supplication, the poetic potential for the articulating the radical contingency of the first human act of begging for pardon.

The instability of the process is felt nowhere more strongly than in Adam and Eve's petition to God at the end of Book 10. In the course of their own reconciliation, they have come to recognize the transformative power of humble contrition, but they have no idea what will happen if they initiate the same sequence of gestures with God. In the immediate aftermath of the Fall, with their future fate entirely unknown, they begin to understand only gradually what that ominous word "death" might mean. Adam has an inkling that beseeching God's pardon might have a positive outcome when he remembers "with what mild / And gracious temper" (*PL*, 10.1046-7) God sentenced the guilty pair. Instead of the expected "immediate dissolution" (*PL*, 10. 1049), Adam recalls that Eve is sentenced to "pains only in child-bearing" (*PL*, 10.1051); instead of sustaining themselves on the self-generating cornucopia of Eden, Adam must earn his bread with labor (*PL*, 10.1054-6). The mitigation of punishment – which they both expected to be instant death – gives Adam hope that God will hear their petition. But even so, the determination to seek God's pardon by returning to the place of judgment is a leap of faith. Milton hints at the future ritualization of their supplication by repeating verbatim, in Homeric fashion, the words of Adam's speech in the description of their petition to God.[291] But in Book 10 supplication is a process, not yet fossilized, the outcome of

[291] Adam says to Eve: "Repairing where he judged us, prostrate fall / Before him reverent, and there confess / Humbly our faults, and pardon beg, with tears / Watering the ground, and with our sighs the air / Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign / Of sorrow unfeigned, and humiliation meek" (*PL*, 10. 1087-1092). The passage is repeated by the narrator in the third person just 6 lines later: "Repairing where he judged them prostrate

which is unpredictable and unknown. The contingency of the process – its vulnerability to the whims of emotion and the unknowable will of God – gives Milton's narrative of reconciliation the believability that readers demand. Thus in Adam and Eve's story of restored relation, Milton cultivates a reciprocal relationship with the antecedent epic tradition; he takes from Homer, but gives back as well. From the vantage point of Milton's poem, situated at the chronological origins of human time and civilization, Homer might have learned how to use supplication as a narrative structure from *Paradise Lost*.

Supplication and the Metaphysics of *Paradise Lost*

If the Book 10 reconciliation scene were a unique example of Milton using the ritual relationship of suppliant and supplicated to describe poetically the resolution of conflict and the attainment of some degree of equality, we could simply appreciate the creative use to which he puts the ritual of classical supplication, remark on his indebtedness to the classical tradition even as he articulates his version of Christian ethics, and move on to other literary pastures. But the patterning of Adam and Eve's interaction in Book 10 – descent, ascent, and finally the discovery of a shared equality before God – recapitulates in human and domestic terms the highly idiosyncratic metaphysics that underlies the theological core of *Paradise Lost*. In this section I will show that in the parallel world of heaven, the Son's self-abasement on behalf of mankind

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fell / Before him reverent, and both confessed / Humbly their faults, and pardon begged, with tears / Watering the ground, and with their sighs the air / Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign / Of sorrow unfeigned, and humiliation meek" (*PL*, 10.1099-1104). This device is typical of Homeric narrative and is echoed by Vergil, most notably in Georgics 4, where Aristeus' instructions on how to expiate his sin are followed by the narration of his sacrifices in precisely the language they were prescribed.

becomes the cause of his subsequent exaltation and begins the process by which God intends to bring all creation to a state where "God shall be all in all" (*PL*, 3.341). In the heavenly narrative, Milton transposes the structures of supplication into a new configuration, crucially collapsing the distinction between suppliant and supplicated so that the Son takes on both roles to effect another reconciliation, this time between creator and creation.

This story begins in the heavenly assembly in Book 3, when God announces to the angelic host Satan's imminent arrival on earth and the corruption of man soon to follow. Man will fall and be doomed to death unless he finds a redeemer in heaven willing to take on the burden of sin and die in "rigid satisfaction" (*PL*, 3.212) for his transgression. Faced with God's pronouncement of man's future fate, the Son, anticipating both structurally and verbally Eve's supplication in Book 10, voluntarily offers to become human and pay the debt of death for man to live.

> Behold me then, me for him, life for life
> I offer, on me let thine anger fall;
> Account me man; I for his sake will leave
> Thy bosom, and this glory next to thee
> Freely put off, and for him lastly die
> Well pleased, on me let Death wreak all his rage. (*PL*, 3.236-41)

The Son's offer to exchange his life for man's is presented not as an inevitable event, but like Eve's physical humiliation, it emerges as an inspired transformative moment that

breaks through an impasse. His petition on man's behalf generates the poetic energy to move forward out of an apparent crisis, when the heavenly assembly stands silent and the fate of humanity hangs in the balance. Supplication initiates a poetic and theological process.

At first it seems as though the Son intends to engage in a straightforward exchange; the grammatically parallel phrases "me for him" and "life for life" play out in formal terms the idea of an equal economic transaction: the Son's life for man's. As the passage goes on, however, it becomes clear that the Son's sacrifice is anything but a comparable exchange. In order to make the two sides of the equation "life for life" equivalent, the Son must become human, give up his seat of glory next to God, and abandon his divinity for humanity. The full extent of the implications of the Son's voluntary self-humiliation rests on what precisely Milton means by the phrase "account me man" – and the meaning of that phrase cannot be understood without reference to Milton's materialist view of creation.

Sometime in the late 1640's and early 1650's, Milton famously developed a monist – and deeply un-orthodox – belief that creation occurred not *ex nihilo*, but *ex Deo*.[292] God created primary matter out of himself. Thus, all created beings are part of a material continuum, formed from the same substance which ultimately derives from God. This form of animist materialism makes no qualitative distinction between the spiritual and the corporeal. Spirit and matter are not two ontologically separate essences, but simply different degrees of the same material substance. As Stephen Fallon explains,

[292] For the development of Milton's materialist metaphysics and his relationship to contemporary materialist thinkers, see Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

"spirit is rarefied matter, and matter is dense spirit."[293] The universe consists of one material substance, which manifests itself in different degrees of rarefaction. Spirit is not morally superior to matter; what is important, as Raphael explains in his discourse to Adam on the metaphysical continuum between men and angels, is the direction of movement. Beings can ascend and descend along the continuum by becoming more or less corporeal, and so it is possible for human beings to ascend, just as angels can descend along the chain of being.[294]

In fact, there are passages in *De Doctrina Christiana* which push the implications of *ex Deo* creation even farther than Raphael's speech "O Adam, one almighty is, from whom / All things proceed" (*PL*, 5.469-70). At least during the writing of the treatise, Milton seems to have entertained the notion that the universe and all it contains *is* God. *De Doctrina Christiana*, therefore, insists on the goodness of original matter:

> It is, I say, a demonstration of God's supreme power and goodness that he should not shut up this heterogeneous and substantial virtue within himself, but should disperse, propagate and extend it as far as, and in whatever way, he wills. For this original matter was not an evil thing, nor to be thought of as worthless: it was good, and it contained the seeds of all subsequent good. It was a substance, and could only have been derived from the sources of all substance. It was in a

[293] Ibid., 80.
[294] See *Paradise Lost,* 5.469-90. Fallon clarifies: "The inferiority of matter is neither moral nor dependent on an ontological gulf separating it from spirit; matter is merely more gross and less vital spirit" (102).

confused and disordered state at first, but afterwards God made it ordered and beautiful.[295]

The view of Milton's materialism advanced by Fallon – which includes the argument that by the time of writing *De Doctrina Christiana* and *Paradise Lost*, Milton had abandoned the earlier dualism of his youthful poetry in favor of pure monism – has been subject to important qualification in recent scholarship. John Rogers has argued that Raphael's description of the process of creation in Book 7 is not entirely consistent with the poem's overall vision of a monist universe.[296] God's purging of "The black tartareous cold infernal dregs" (*PL*, 7.237) of primal matter suggests that not all of the original substance of the universe came, as Milton insists in *De Doctrina Christiana*, "from God in an incorruptible state."[297] For Rogers, "the appearance in Milton's science of this lifeless, spiritless waste violently interrupts the gradualist monist continuum of matter and spirit. The tartareous dregs of creation introduce into the otherwise monistic world of the poem a residual trace of dualism."[298] More recently, Noel Sugimura has argued that from a literary perspective the effort to pin down a poem like *Paradise Lost* to a conceptually consistent philosophy mistakes Milton's poetic purpose. If poetry is a mode of thinking, the metaphorical representation of philosophical concepts is as important as the philosophy itself. Thus, for Sugimura, the metaphorics of Milton's articulation of ontology "cannot be adequately underpinned by the single vision of monist

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[295] *CPW*, 6:308.
[296] See John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), especially Chapter 4: "Chaos, Creation, and the Political Science of *Paradise Lost*," 103-143.
[297] John Milton, *De Doctrina Christiana* 1.7: *CPW*, 6:303.
[298] Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution*, 134.

materialism."[299] From this perspective, the concept of substance in *Paradise Lost* is deliberately eclectic, encompassing dualist and monist, materialist and non-materialist points of view.

Rogers and Sugimura are right to suggest that *Paradise Lost* contains residual anxieties about the sliding scale of being, but in the case of the incarnation, the philosophical lens of animist materialism has tremendous interpretive power.[300] The Son's offer to become man is neither a metaphor nor an ineffable mystery, but a material reality. The incarnation involves a voluntary descent down the monist continuum. Just as Raphael tells Adam that "Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit /... / If ye be found obedient" (*PL*, 5.496, 501), the Son's promise to take on flesh means that he will adopt a denser form of material substance. Like Eve's self-abasing gesture of kneeling at Adam's feet and clasping his knees, the Son physically reduces himself, taking on a degree of corporeal being that is below his own. Only as a result of this descent can the exchange he envisions in "me for him" take place. Thus, the Son, like Eve, is a suppliant in a highly unique position: he is a petitioner whose petition is an offer of self-humiliation. But unlike Eve, he appeals not for his own life, but for man's, offering his own humiliated being in exchange.

Anticipating the structure of the Book 10 reconciliation scene, the Son's offer of physical self-humiliation – etymologically, a taking on of the *humus* from which Adam was fashioned – is accepted by God. But the manner in which God accepts the Son's

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[299] N. K. Sugimura, "*Matter of Glorious Trial": Spiritual and Material Substance in* Paradise Lost (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 40. See also Gordon Teskey, *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

[300] It also presents problematic associations: by the logic of monism, Satan's metamorphosis into a serpent (*PL*, 10.504-45) exactly parallels the Son's incarnation.

offer begins to suggest the fundamental difference between supplication on the human level and on the divine. As we have seen, in a paradigmatic scene of supplication, the suppliant attempts to move the person supplicated to pity; the recipient of the suppliant's plea is either moved or not, either acts on his emotion or not. In the case of the Son's supplication, however, God accepts the Son's petition without showing any emotional response at all; he does not pity the suppliant Son. Rather, it is the Son who pities man and persuades God to incline towards mercy. The pity that is part of every accepted supplication is transferred from supplicated to suppliant. It is the Son who pities, and who also attempts to arouse pity. The angel's hymn to the Father and Son later in Book 3 points to this slippage:

> No sooner did thy dear and only Son
> Perceive thee purposed not to doom frail man
> So strictly, but much more to pity inclined,
> He to appease thy wrath, and end the strife
> Of mercy and justice in thy face discerned,
> ...
> offered himself to die
> For man's offence. (*PL*, 3. 403-7, 409-10)

The angels retrospectively describe the Son as "to pity inclined," a role which is usually the prerogative of the supplicated. Instead, the Son takes on both roles, and we are led to believe that it is precisely the Son's pity and his willingness to become the

object of pity that ensure God's acceptance of his petition. For Milton, merit is determined by the willingness to fall. Thus, the Son becomes the Messiah not by birthright as God's offspring but because he lowers himself ontologically on man's behalf and accepts the punishment for a transgression not his own. As God declares:

> Because thou hast, though throned in highest bliss
> Equal to God, and equally enjoying
> Godlike fruition, quitted all to save
> A world from utter loss, and hast been found
> By merit more than birthright Son of God
> …
> Therefore thy humiliation shall exalt
> With thee thy manhood also to this throne;
> Here shalt thou sit incarnate, here shalt reign
> Both God and man, Son of both God and man,
> Anointed universal king. (*PL*, 3.305-9, 313-17)

God's promise that "humiliation shall exalt" (*PL*, 3.313) turns out to be a preface to his larger eschatological vision in which hierarchical distinctions like the Son's kingship become finally irrelevant.[301] Indeed, this erasure of hierarchy seems to be

[301] For this key aspect of Milton's political theology, see William Empson, *Milton's God*, rev. ed. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), 130-39; Mary Ann Radzinowicz, "The Politics of *Paradise Lost*," in *Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven Zwicker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 224-26; David Loewenstein, *Representing*

God's intention from the beginning. When he first presents the newly begotten Son to the heavenly assembly in Book 5, God's motivation in elevating the Son to "vicegerent reign" – a move which Satan interprets as a tyrannical power-grab and forced submission to an apparent equal – appears to be the elimination of the very hierarchy and difference he seems to be imposing. He explains to the angels:

> This day I have begot whom I declare
> My only Son, and on this holy hill
> Him have anointed, whom ye now behold
> At my right hand; your head I him appoint;
> And by myself have sworn to him shall bow
> All knees in heaven, and shall confess him Lord:
> Under his great vicegerent reign abide
> United as one individual soul
> Forever happy: him who disobeys
> Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day
> Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls
> Into utter darkness, deep engulfed, his place
> Ordained without redemption, without end. (*PL*, 5. 603-15)

Amid the blitz of imperatives, assertions of autonomous action, and threats of punishment, Satan might perhaps be forgiven for missing God's altruistic goal for the

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Revolution in Milton and His Contemporaries: Religion, Politics, and Polemics in Radical Puritanism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 227-31.

angels to "abide / United as one individual soul / Forever happy" (*PL*, 5.610-11). The problem lies in the obscurity of God's phrase "one individual soul."[302] Its meaning is later unpacked by Abdiel, who responds to Satan's rebellious demagoguery with a more generous view of God's intention. Abdiel looks through God's imperialistic rhetoric and see the hidden desire for unity beneath it.[303] He intuits that the Son's apparent elevation is, like his subsequent promise to become man, a form of ontological reduction. The angels, therefore, are not

> by his reign obscured
> But more illustrious made, since he the head
> One of our number thus reduced becomes,
> His laws our laws, all honour to him done

[302] Marshall Grossman, *Authors to Themselves: Milton and the Revelation of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 22, argues that God's vision for unity entails homogeneity: "The ultimate resolution of the historical process is understood as the abolition of all difference … When the process of internalization is complete, rhetorically projected relationships, indeed, language itself, will collapse as the will of God establishes a homogeneous community of the Godly." Stanley Fish, "Wanting a supplement: the question of interpretation in Milton's early prose," in *Politics, Poetics, and Hermeneutics in Milton's Prose*, ed. David Loewenstein and James Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 67, puts the point even more forcefully when he claims that God's design represents "the horror of a uni-verse in which all distinctions will have been effaced and the landscape will be reduced to a "universal blanc" (III.48)." For a balanced discussion that considers all the possible meanings of "one individual soul" and argues for Milton's commitment to plurality in unity, see Diane Kelsey McColley, "All in All: The Individuality of Creatures in *Paradise Lost*," in *All in All: Unity, Diversity, and the Miltonic Perspective*, ed. Charles W. Durham and Kristin A. Pruitt (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1999), 21-38.

[303] See Radzinowicz, "The Politics of *Paradise Lost*," 224, who argues that Abdiel "uncovers or discovers God's political design in exalting the Son: to create not a static meritocracy in Heaven with fixed status for its members under unvarying law but an evolving, organic, unified totality." Empson, *Milton's God*, 136, adds: "When the unity is complete, neither the loyal angels nor the blessed among mankind will require even the vicegerency of the Son, still less the rule of the Father."

Returns our own. (*PL*, 5.841-45)

By becoming head of the angels, Messiah is actually lowered from his position as God's Son, and the angels in turn are raised by his sharing of their nature. The ultimate purpose of this paradoxical humiliation as exaltation is articulated in two parallel passages, which gloss God's original proclamation that the angels be "United as one individual soul" (*PL*, 5.610). On his way to do battle with the rebel angels, the Son hints at the *telos* of his action:

> Sceptre and power, thy giving, I assume,
> And gladlier shall resign, when in the end
> Thou shalt be all in all, and I in thee
> For ever, and in me all whom though lov'st. (*PL*, 5.730-33)

The Son proleptically refers to the moment the reader has already experienced when God prophesies the coming of a "new heaven and earth":

> thou thy regal sceptre shalt lay by
> For regal scepter then no more shall need,
> God shall be all in all. (*PL*, 3.339-41)

In eschatological terms, the humiliation of the Son aims to abolish all hierarchical distinction between levels of being.[304] In structural terms, God's vision of a universe in which creator and creation are ultimately brought together in a relationship of radical equality mirrors the resolution of the reconciliation scene, when Eve's self-humiliation and Adam's assertion of temporary authority result in the undoing of the hierarchical relationship they just enacted. The goal of all of God's actions appears to be to bring other beings closer to him. He ultimately aims to offer a kind of divine mercy that is not negatively implicated in the power structure of a superior offering pardon to an inferior. God uses hierarchical forms primarily in the interest of abandoning them.[305]

Lest this seem an overly generous reading of Milton's notoriously unsympathetic God, we must consider that God's eschatological plan for ultimate equality is to be accomplished through the dual nature of the Son, as suppliant and supplicated, pitier and pitied, man and God. In both theological and rhetorical terms, the most powerful way for Milton to articulate this union of God and man would be a representation of the crucifixion. As Colin Burrow has observed, "the crucifixion is the ultimate moment on which to center a transvaluation of pity into divinely incarnate sympathy: it manifests both an extreme of active pity, since it represents God pitying man enough to die for him,

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[304] David Loewenstein, *Representing Revolution in Milton and His Contemporaries: Religion, Politics, and Polemics in Radical Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 231, nicely evokes in political terms the paradox Milton creates: "while the poem encourages its readers to discriminate between the politics of earthly and heavenly kingship, it also in eschatological terms, envisions a time when its newly appointed king, the Son, will no longer rule by means of a regal scepter. Milton invites readers to envision a future time when the metaphor of kingship and its potent symbols will not only be reformed but ultimately abandoned."

[305] Colin Burrow, *Epic Romance: Homer to Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), especially 254-70.

and an unsurpassable form of passive pity, as God himself becomes the object of pity."[306] Indeed, the Laudian style of worship encouraged contemplation of Christ on the cross, and preachers like Lancelot Andrewes reveled in painting verbal images of the physical suffering of the Messiah's passion. But unlike Andrewes and previous writers of biblical epic, Milton notoriously shies away from an aesthetic representation of the crucifixion, both in his early poetry and in *Paradise Lost*.[307] Instead, the means by which Milton expresses the fulfillment of the Son's role in effecting a reconciliation between God and man is yet another transposition of a supplication scene.

At the beginning of Book 11, Adam and Eve continue their humble prayers, which fly up to heaven (*PL*, 11.15) and find their way to God's throne. However, instead of being directly received by God, the prayers are presented to God by the Son:

> See Father, what first fruits on earth are sprung
> From thy implanted grace in man, these sighs
> And prayers, which in this golden censer, mixed
> With incense, I thy priest before thee bring,
> ...
> Now therefore bend thine ear
> To supplication, hear his sighs though mute;
> Unskilful with what words to pray, let me
> Interpret for him, me his advocate

[306] Ibid., 275.
[307] His youthful poem "The Passion" breaks off with the note: "This Subject the Author finding to be above the yeers he had, when he wrote it, and nothing satisfi'd with what was begun, left it unfinisht." See Milton, *Complete Shorter Poems*, 34.

And propitiation, all his works on me

Good or not good, my merit those

Shall perfect, and for these my death shall pay. (*PL*, 11.22-25, 30-36)

As John Rogers has pointed out, this scene is a heterodox Miltonic invention: the Son fulfills his role as Messiah in the poem not in a representation of the crucifixion, but even before the incarnation.[308] Milton situates the full articulation of the Son's action of atonement ("for these my death shall pay") in a scene that involves a mediated supplication. Just as puzzling for Milton's first readers would be the sensual feast of ceremonialist language Milton uses to describe the Son's role as intercessor between God and man. In a metaphorical register that would have delighted the most devout Laudian, the Son becomes the priest who both receives Adam and Eve's prayers "in this golden censer, mixed / With incense" and performs the role of an intermediary petitioning for their acceptance. Ceremonialist rhetoric, as it turns out, is not only a Satanic preoccupation; Milton unsettles any expectations of Puritan exclusivity by describing the Son's fulfillment of his role as Messiah in the vocabulary of Laudian priesthood.

More importantly, the representation of the Son as the intercessor for Adam and Eve's supplication adds a new element to the narrative structure of the supplication scene. The intercessor that functions as both suppliant and supplicated breaks through the structural opposition between the two roles so that the burden of humiliation for the suppliant is not quite so heavy and the responsibility to choose does not weigh so greatly

[308] John Rogers, "Milton and the Heretical Priesthood of Christ," in *Heresy, Literature, and Politics in Early Modern English Culture*, ed. David Loewenstein and John Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 203-20.

on the shoulders of the supplicated. The Son's role as intercessor diminishes the emotional burdens of both sides of the supplicatory interaction. The Son lifts up the prayers of Adam and Eve and asks God to "bend thine ear," a movement downwards along the same path of physical descent as the Son. By embodying both sides of the interaction, the Son is able to effect a reconciliation between God and man not in the form of a crucifixion scene, but in an interaction of successful supplication.

Milton's unusual narrative representation of the atonement reveals his poetic interest in the flexible narrative capacities of supplication. The power of a successful supplication to bring narrative closure to a poem would be fully available to him in the form of the Priam–Achilles scene at the end of the *Iliad*; the disruptive energy created by an unsuccessful supplication in the final moments of an epic would be well known to him from the Turnus' rejected appeal at the end of the *Aeneid*. Similarly, the many moments in which suppliants are pitied or scorned in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* might have provided Milton with a sense of how scenes of supplication propel or retard the forward motion of a poem. By choosing to locate the Son's successful intercession in Book 11 – almost at the end of the poem but not quite – Milton activates a gesture of positive resolution before turning to the more sober revelation of the history of Adam's descendants in the remainder of Book 11 and Book 12. The precise placement of the Son's fusion of the roles of suppliant and supplicated enables Milton both to have a happy ending, but show its indefinite postponement.

Milton's decision to replace the passion with an intercessory supplication points precisely to the entanglement of theological politics and poetics that we have been tracing from the beginning of this chapter, starting with the quotation of Euripides on the

Areopagitica titlepage. Supplication, as it turns out, does not tiptoe across the pages of *Paradise Lost*, but instead becomes the vehicle for Milton's demonstration of how the structures of hierarchy might be transformed into relationships of equality.

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