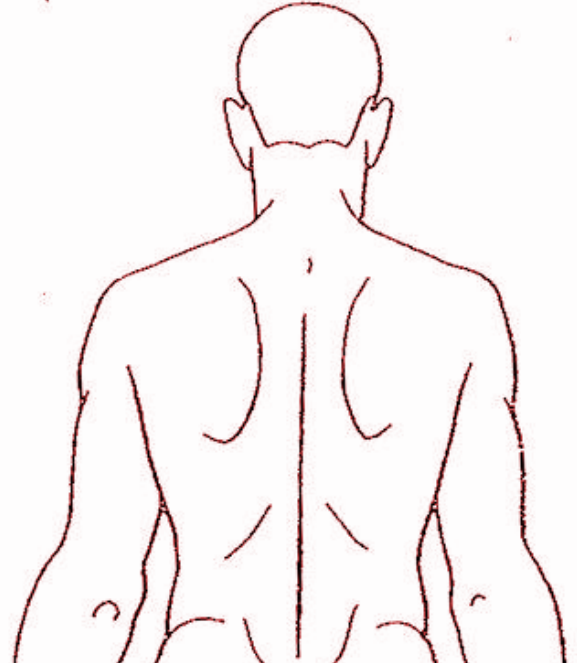
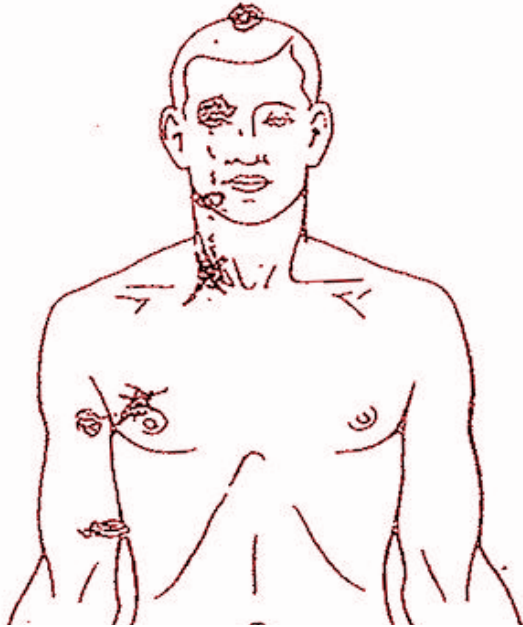


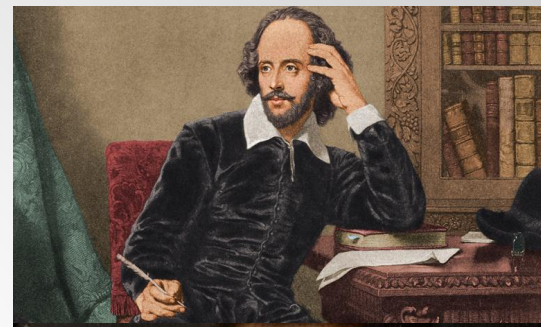
Entry, re-entry and exit perforations,
Preliminary autopsy report



Martyrs in American Culture: Source Texts

This summer, we focused on three identities that are often linked in Shakespeares plays: the soldier, the martyr, and the traitor.

In these plays, soldiers who die exceptionally brutal deaths as a result of political unrest are transformed into either martyrs or traitors but Shakespeare deliberately makes it difficult to which label best fits the character.



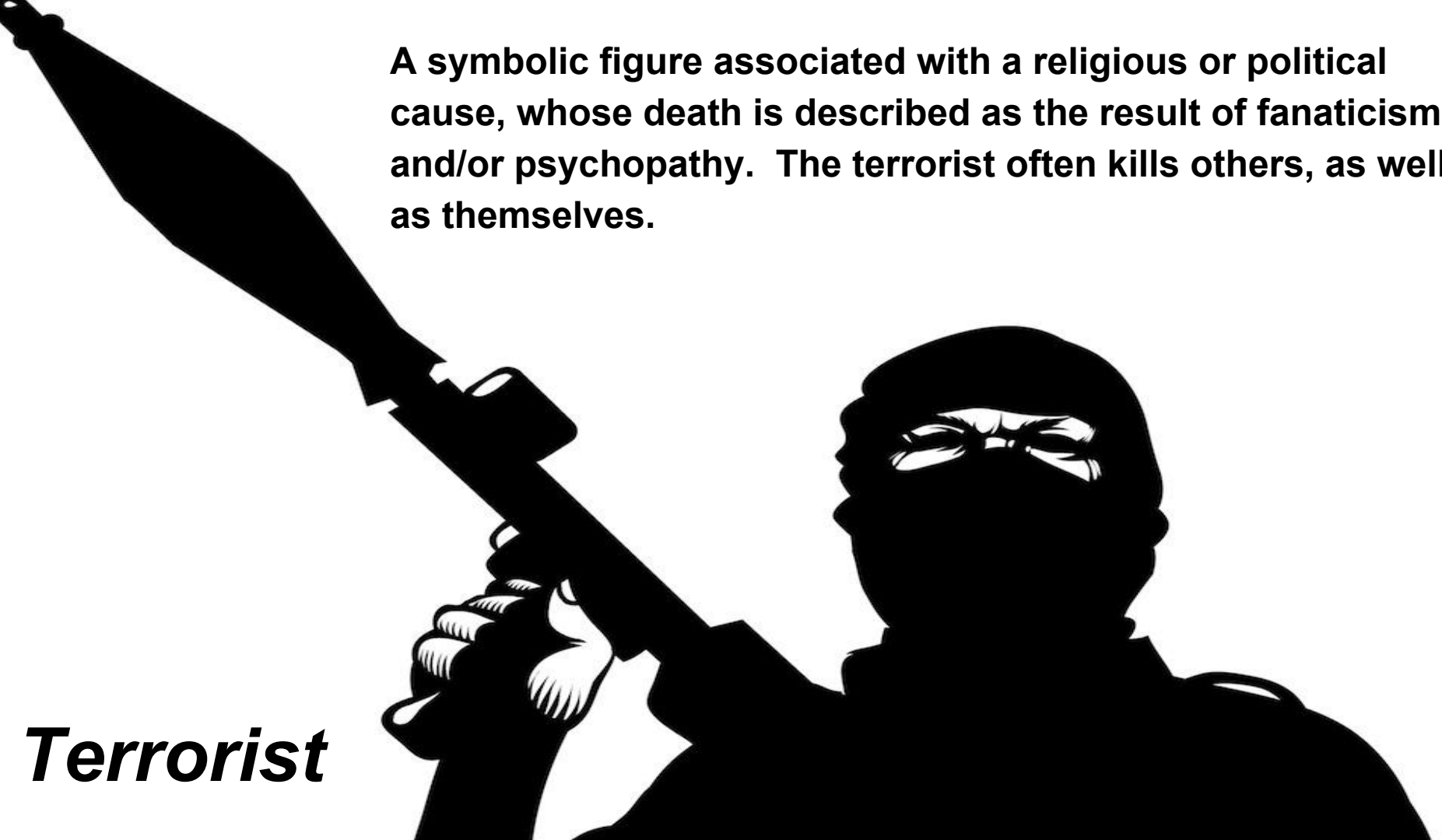


The plays demonstrate that the terms “martyr” and “traitor” are highly relative and mutually constitutive; you cannot have one without the other.

They also make it clear that soldiers are often transformed into martyrs or traitors through discourses of othering, specifically through tropes of race or gender.

In 21st-century America, the martyr is linked in similar ways to the figure of the terrorist.

A symbolic figure associated with a religious or political cause, whose death is described as the result of fanaticism and/or psychopathy. The terrorist often kills others, as well as themselves.

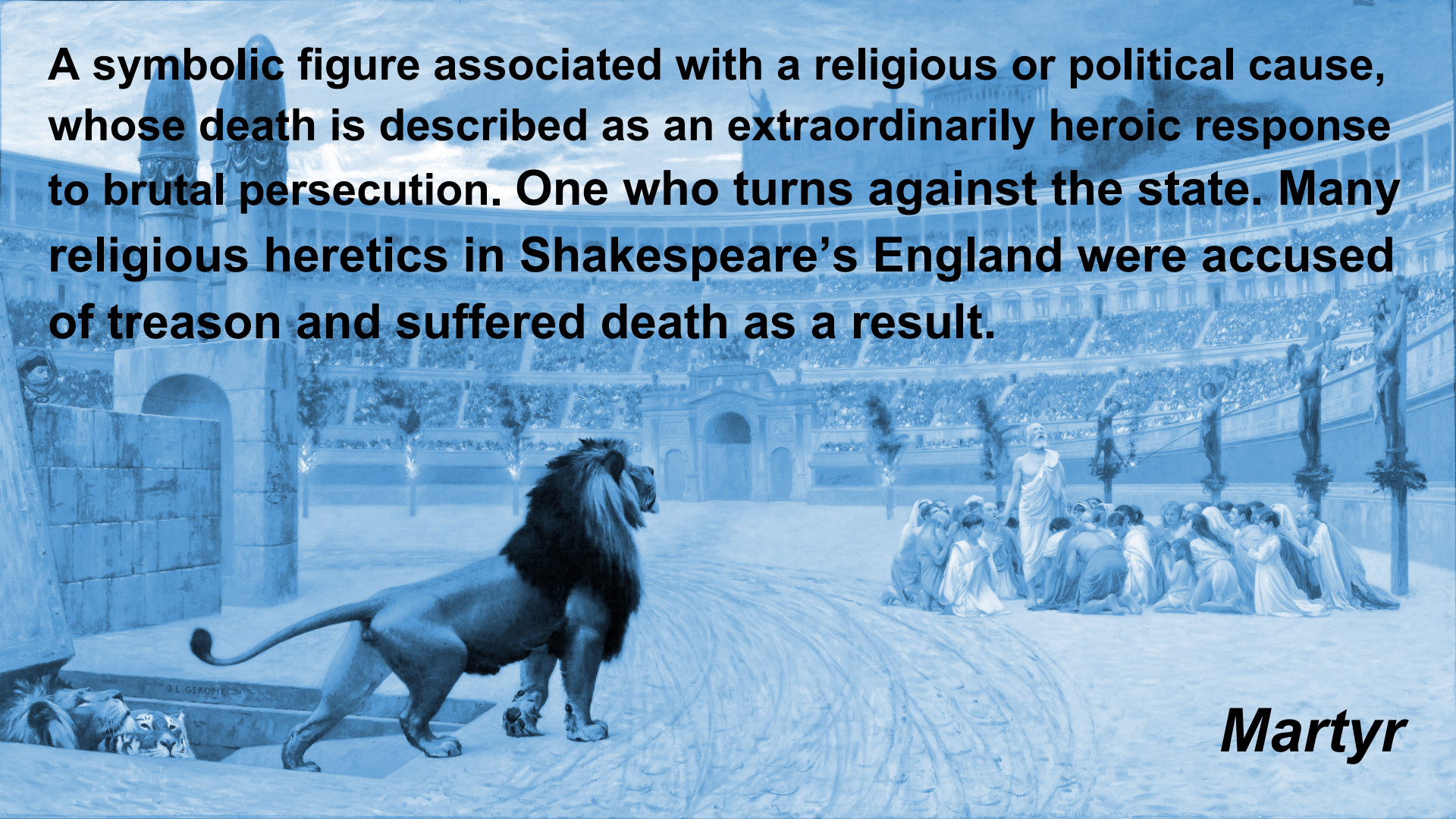


Terrorist

Soldier

A professional fighter whose function is to kill, and to survive to kill again another day. The soldier is anonymous, and can only succeed by working in lock step with other soldiers.

A symbolic figure associated with a religious or political cause, whose death is described as an extraordinarily heroic response to brutal persecution. One who turns against the state. Many religious heretics in Shakespeare's England were accused of treason and suffered death as a result.



Martyr



Traitor

One who turns against the state. Many religious heretics in Shakespeare's England were accused of treason and suffered death as a result. The term functioned the same way in 16th century England as “terrorist” does in contemporary America, though terrorist is racialized in ways that the early modern traitor was not.

Why Study Literature?

Because literary history reveals the origins of our modern way of life. To borrow a phrase from June Jordan, we study literature to find out “who the hell set things up this way.” To put it another way: literature is a culture product; therefore, the works we studied this summer (Shakespeare’s plays and their modern film adaptations) reflect the cultures that created them.



Political Landscapes of 16th-c England

In order to successfully engage with Shakespeare, we needed to orient ourselves with the culture from which he wrote.

The soldier, the martyr, and the traitor all served as part of Elizabeth's political agenda. English soldiers were paid to fight Irish rebels. Catholic traitors served to demonstrate the threat to the regime, and thus justified its increasing militarization. At the same time, Elizabeth's supporters recalled the many Protestant martyrs executed by her predecessor, Queen Mary, and compared them to the Catholic heretics who, in the eyes of Elizabeth's state, were false martyrs.



Such comparisons delegitimated Elizabeth's enemies while exalting her Protestant agenda. Thus, soldiers, traitors, and martyrs all served as a foundation for Elizabeth's political regime.



But as Shakespeare's plays reveal, the close links between these three figures also undermined the regime's agenda: how, after all, could you really distinguish the false traitor from the godly heretic? Shakespeare's plays complicate the lines between the figures, exposing cracks in the state's ideology.

Why Does Our Analysis Matter *Today*?

Our goal has been to create a theoretical vocabulary that can be used to illuminate the social world we currently inhabit. Studying Shakespearean literature shows that the phenomena we now call racism, colonization, and militarization were present in a nascent form in the sixteenth century.

The process of figuring out “who the hell set things up this way,” helps lay the groundwork for dismantling long-standing structures that oppress those living under varying forms of state power.



By tracking how state powers replicate martyr-making processes to control and mobilize populations, we can begin to interrupt long-standing narratives that people internalize regarding their roles in society.



The Texts

- Kapur, *Elizabeth* (1998)
- Shakespeare, *Tragedy of Coriolanus*
- Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*
- Fiennes, *Coriolanus* (2011)
- Taymour, *Titus* (1998)



Kapur's *Elizabeth* clearly illustrates how political powers co-opt martyrological narratives in service of their agendas.

Based loosely on the early years of Queen Elizabeth's reign, this is one of few contemporary films that contains a realistic portrayal of sixteenth-century martyrs and how martyr making fuels climates of fear.

Elizabeth dramatizes the process whereby religious martyrs were used to control and mobilize people in the pre-modern periods. Elizabeth sought to create a unified English state by encouraging religious conformity after decades of warfare between Catholics and Protestants, but in so doing she applied the same mechanisms that her predecessors had used to tyrannize the English people.



Elizabeth: film



COR**I**OLANUS

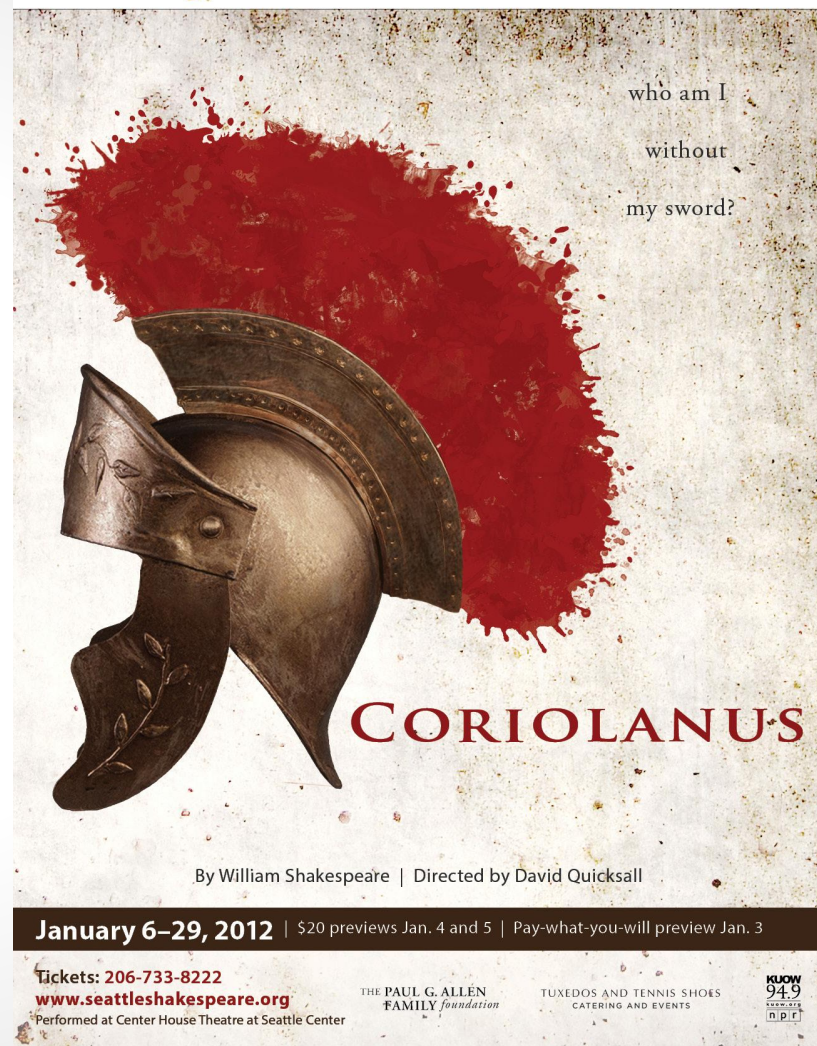
BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

DIRECTED BY **JOSIE ROURKE**

Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* is a decorated war veteran whose supporters urge him to run for political office. As part of the election process, he is expected to show his battle scars as proof of his dedication to Rome, but he refuses, rejecting the authority of the people. The people consider this act treasonous and exile him.

While in exile, Coriolanus seeks help from his sworn enemy, the Volscian leader Aufidius. Together, the two besiege Rome, but Coriolanus calls off the attack when his mother begs him to spare the city. Once again, Coriolanus is declared a traitor, and killed by Aufidius. Ultimately, Coriolanus' death as a traitor-martyr is politically valuable to both the Roman leaders and to Aufidius, who literally stands on Coriolanus' body as he declares himself the undisputed ruler of the Volscies.

While Coriolanus appears to illustrate the martyr-making process quite simply, Shakespeare complicates the matter. Throughout the play Coriolanus is given different labels by different people at different times; thus he literally embodies the connection between the soldier, martyr, and traitor.



William Shakespeare **TITUS ANDRONICUS** Teatr im. S. Jaracza w Łodzi



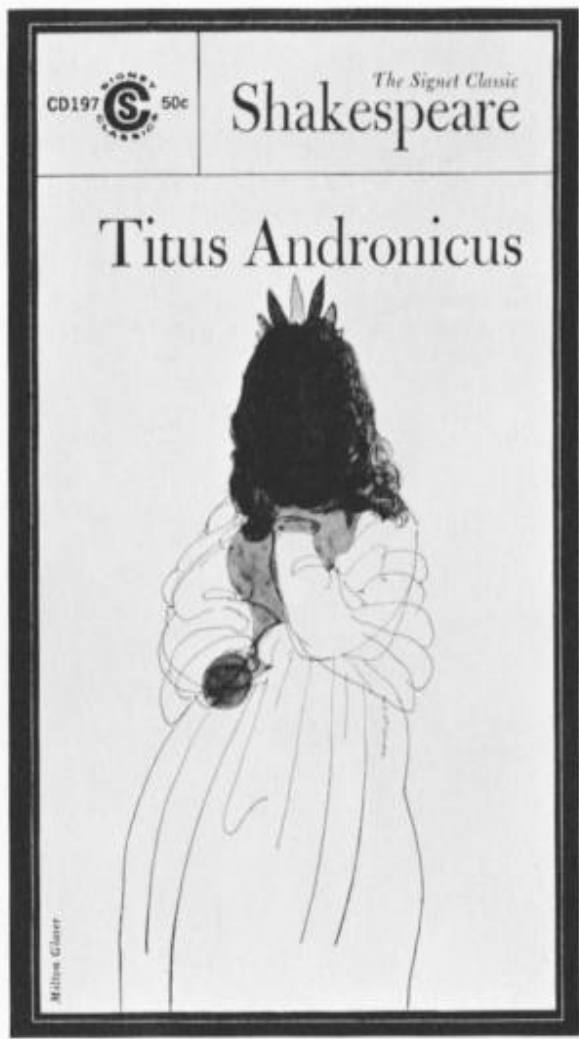
The Roman general Titus Andronicus has sacrificed many of his sons to the wars against the Goths. His loyalty to the state is absolute, even when the corrupt emperor chooses Tamora, the Goth queen, as his wife. With the help of Aaron, her Moorish lover, Tamora launches an elaborate campaign of revenge against Titus for murdering her first-born son. Eventually Aaron and Tamora kill two of Titus' sons, ravish and dismember his daughter, and banish his remaining son.

Titus, in turn, enacts his retribution by murdering Tamora's surviving sons and baking them into a pie, which he serves to the empress. This scene leaves Tamora, Titus, and the emperor all dead, leaving Titus' son Lucius to re-build the Roman state. He does so in part by declaring his father and sister to be martyrs, and declaring Aaron and Tamora to be barbarous traitors. Tamora's body is left unburied, to be devoured by birds of prey, and Aaron is starved to death in the public square.

While Aaron is the play's most readily identifiable villain, the cycle of violence originates and ends with the Andronici, who commit atrocity after atrocity under the banner of reclaiming Rome from the barbarians.

Titus Andronicus has been the subject of several post-colonial readings that unpack the apparent connection between Aaron's deeds and western stereotypes about Muslim "terrorists."

However, if one reads Aaron as a terrorist surely they must find his equal in the play's white protagonist, Titus, whose actions resemble terror tactics used by English generals during their campaigns in Ireland. The final scenes show the Andronici proposing to re-build the Roman state atop a pile of carefully differentiated bodies: Roman martyrs and barbarian traitors.





Coriolanus: film

In his adaptation of *Coriolanus*, director Ralph Fiennes situates the play in a contemporary socio-political landscape, proving that processes of martyr-marking are still relevant to current political conflicts. In particular, Fiennes emphasizes the way that television news reports play a role in shaping the reputation of the soldier turned martyr/traitor.

Fiennes film adaptation begs contemporary audiences to take a close look at how news media and politicians, both ideological state apparatuses, influence the “common people.”

In the adaptation, Fiennes accentuates the tactics that politicians use to shatter threats to the status quo.





Titus: film

Julie Taymor's 1998 film adaptation of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* stays close to the original play except for two details--the film's opening and closing.

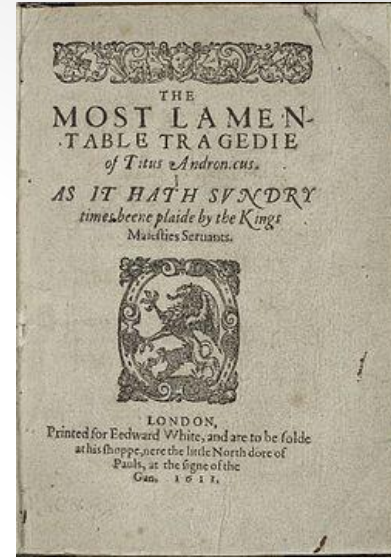
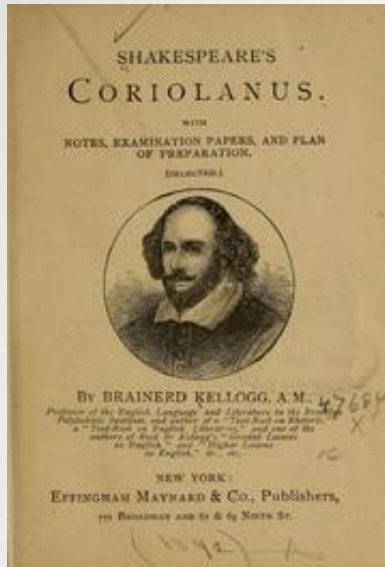
Taymor's adaptation of *Titus* opens with a modern-day frame narrative, in which a young boy, who had been playing with toy soldiers in his kitchen, is plunged into the bloody world of Shakespeare's Rome. Once dropped into the play, he takes on the role of Titus' grandson, young Lucius.



At the end of Shakespeare's *Titus*, it is unclear whether Lucius will keep his promise to raise and care for Aaron's infant son.

Taymor's stage production ends with the deaths of both young Lucius and the baby, who appear together in a pair of coffins. At the end of the film, however, young Lucius literally carries the baby off stage, into a beautiful sunset.

Both adaptations allude to the way race plays a role in contemporary cycles of American violence, and attempt to provide a resolution by linking the two characters. The film's ending is deliberately more hopeful, but also less believable given everything else that the audience has witnessed.



Both *Coriolanus* and *Titus Andronicus* center around soldiers who turn against the state they once served, are condemned as traitors, and are ultimately martyred. Thus the martyr-making process continually recycles and re-uses its own products. Shakespeare's plays reveal how state powers use these "products"—the bodies of martyr/traitors—as the foundation for their political platforms.

The martyr-making process illustrated in *Titus* and *Coriolanus* plays out in present-day through such figures as Christopher Dorner, Bowe Bergdhal, Michael Brown, and Edward Snowden--citizens turned terrorist and eventually claimed as heros for a political cause.

