

‘O, what a sympathy of woe is this’: Passionate Sympathy in *Titus Andronicus*

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In 3.2 of *Titus Andronicus*, Titus describes to Marcus the difficulties that he and Lavinia face in expressing their sorrows: ‘Thy niece and I, poor creatures, want our hands / And cannot passionate our tenfold grief / With folded arms’ (3.2.5-7). This moment addresses some of the central concerns of the play: how do you communicate extreme grief, and make others understand or feel your pain? What is the relationship between the experience of emotions (Titus’s ‘tenfold grief’) and the words and gestures (‘folded arms’) that might be used to express them?¹ Shakespeare’s use of the word *passionate* also raises some larger methodological questions for critics interested in the history of emotion. The primary meaning of the word in this period was ‘susceptible to or readily swayed by passions or emotions; easily moved to strong feeling; of changeable mood, volatile’ (*OED*, 1; first cited usage 1425). Shakespeare uses the word in a narrower sense to describe characters affected by anger (‘I am amazed at your passionate words’ (*Dream* 3.2.221)), sadness (‘She is sad and passionate at your highness’ tent’ (*King John* 2.1.545)), and love (‘Warble, child; make passionate my sense of hearing’ (*Love’s Labour’s Lost* 3.1.1)). By the 1580s the word could also mean ‘Inclined to pity, compassionate’ (*OED*, 5c). This latter usage occurs in *Richard III*, when one of Clarence’s murderers has second thoughts about his grim assignment: ‘Nay,

An earlier version of this essay was prepared for Katharine A. Craik’s seminar on ‘Passionate Shakespeare’ at the International Shakespeare Conference at Stratford-upon-Avon in 2012. I am grateful to Katharine Craik and the participants in the seminar for their comments and encouragement. Thanks also to Erin Sullivan and, as ever, Jane Rickard for their comments on earlier drafts.

¹ Quotations from *Titus Andronicus* are taken from Jonathan Bate’s Arden 3 edition (London, 1995). On folded arms as a signifier of sad or melancholy thought see, for example, William Carroll’s Arden 3 edition of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (London, 2004), note to 2.1.18.

I pray thee. Stay a little. I hope this passionate humour of mine will change' (1.4.114-15).

Several of these examples might seem to confirm the notion that passions were things that happened *to* people in the Renaissance; the Second Murderer's passionate mood in particular is described as something bodily, unstable, and outside his control. But in the passage from *Titus* quoted above *passionate* is used in an innovative way as a verb ('To express or perform with passion' (*OED*, v., 2; first cited usage 1567)). Titus uses the word to describe his attempts to *perform* his grief, suggesting that passions can be things that individuals do, as well as being forces that act upon them.

Several recent critics have argued that the primary contextual and critical framework for understanding the passionate expressions of Shakespeare's characters is Galenic humoral theory. In *Humoring the Body* (2004), Gail Kern Paster argues that early modern texts point to a 'psychophysiological reciprocity between the experiencing subject and his or her relation to the world'. She writes that the humoral body is 'characterized not only by its physical openness but also by its emotional instability and volatility, by an internal microclimate knowable, like climates in the outer world, more for changeability than for stasis'.² Paster's conception of emotion in the Renaissance thus resembles that of the Second Murderer in *Richard III*: feeling was something that happened to the body of the passive, receptive subject, who either gave way to these bodily impulses or attempted to resist them through stoical self-control. But while the Second Murderer's passionate humour might be usefully

² Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago and London, 2004), p. 19. See also Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge, 1999), and Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson, eds., *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Philadelphia, 2004). Other critics influenced by the humoral model include Matthew Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping in Early Modern Theatres* (Aldershot, 2007), and David Houston Wood, *Time, Narrative, and Emotion in Early Modern England* (Farnham, 2009).

diagnosed via Galenic medicine, Titus's comments about his attempts to 'passionate' his grief are less easily accommodated within this framework. Indeed some critics have begun to question the medical-humoral model as a way of exploring – or 'explaining' – Shakespeare's representations of emotion. Richard Strier has suggested that 'the problem of what is literal and what is metaphoric in early modern humors discourse is extremely tricky'. He continues: 'To think that people, then or now, directly experience (or experienced) their emotions in terms of scientific theories about the physiological bases of emotions seems to me a category mistake of a rather major kind'.³ And, more recently, Lynn Enterline has argued that critics should broaden their attention to include other cultural influences, such as Shakespeare's rhetorical training at the grammar school, and the ways in which 'his reflections on the passions involve meta-theatrical or meta-rhetorical reflections on classical figures, texts, and traditions'.⁴

The present article is a contribution to these recent attempts to complicate (rather than replace) the humoral or bodily conception of early modern emotions. It explores the representation of sympathy in *Titus Andronicus*, and the various terms that Shakespeare uses to describe emotional correspondence: not only *passion* and *passionate* but also *compassion*, *commiseration*, *pity*, *mercy*, *rue*, and *sympathy* itself.⁵ As we shall see, the play employs the

³ Richard Strier and Carla Mazzio, 'Two Responses to "Shakespeare and Embodiment: An E-Conversation"', *Literature Compass*, 3 (2006), 15-31 (pp. 16-17). In *The Unrepentant Renaissance: From Petrarch to Shakespeare to Milton* (Chicago, 2011), Strier has argued that the 'new humorists' are akin to the new historicists in their questioning of individual agency, and that humoral theory is one of several tools used by scholars to characterize the period 'in dark and dour terms'. He writes that the focus of the new humorists 'might be said to be on selves in the period as physiocultural rather than sociocultural formations' (p. 17).

⁴ Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia, 2012), pp. 26-7.

⁵ For a valuable essay that explore some of these concepts in Shakespeare's works from a Virgilian perspective see Heather James, 'Dido's Ear: Tragedy and the Politics of Response', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 52 (2001), 360-

word *sympathy* in an innovative way that associates it with ideas of cognition, projection, and imagination, and thus points the word in the direction of our own understanding. This important act of redefining sympathy as an imaginative activity, rather than an occult phenomenon, corresponds with the play's interest in turning emotion words – such as *passionate* – into verbs. Michael Schoenfeldt has argued that the Renaissance was a period 'when the "scientific" language of analysis had not yet been separated from the sensory language of experience'.⁶ And yet *Titus*'s exploration of the unstable relationship between literal and figurative language complicates the attempts of 'new humoralist' critics to interpret Shakespeare's descriptions of bodily passions literally.⁷ Certainly we can detect the influence of humoral theory and quasi-scientific conceptions of affinity and correspondence in *Titus*; however, such paradigms are self-consciously evoked in ways that metaphorize certain aspects of emotional experience. In this way, Shakespeare implicitly questions the authority of medical-humoral theory as the sole framework for understanding the early modern passions. The characters in *Titus Andronicus* are not simply presented as passive bodies, affected by external climates or analogical forces, but rather as thinking and feeling human beings, capable of putting themselves imaginatively into the positions of others.

382. R. S. White offers a wide-ranging discussion of Shakespeare's use of the term *passion* in "False Friends": Affective Semantics in Shakespeare', *Shakespeare*, 8/3 (2012), 286-99.

⁶ Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, p. 8.

⁷ For two important discussions of language and metaphor in the play see Albert H. Tricomi, 'The Aesthetics of Mutilation in *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare Survey* 27 (Cambridge, 1974), 11-19, and Gillian Murray Kendall, "'Lend me thy hand': Metaphor and Mayhem in *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 40 (1989), 299-316. Such critics tend to focus on the ways in which the play literalizes its metaphors; in contrast, the present article explores the ways in which descriptions of physical and physiological phenomena are self-consciously metaphorized in the play.

The term *sympathy* is particularly suggestive, not least because it had multiple and shifting meanings during Shakespeare's lifetime. In the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, the word was primarily understood to mean a kind of correspondence or harmony between different objects in the cosmos, people, or even musical vibrations. In this pre-social conception of sympathy, which appears in the works of classical writers such as Aristotle, Pliny, and Plutarch, one is moved not so much by fellow-feeling for others as by physical and physiological processes.⁸ In Philemon Holland's 1603 translation of *Plutarch's Morals*, for example, *sympathy* is included in the list of 'certeine obscure words' that are helpfully glossed at the back of the volume: '*Sympathie*, that is to say, A fellow feeling, as is betweene the head and stomacke in our bodies: also the agreement and naturall amitie in divers senslesse things, as between iron and the load-stone'.⁹ As this definition suggests, objects in the natural world were believed to have magical affinities that made them respond to each other.

In *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (1604), Thomas Wright refers to the passions in this context, and likens the process of moving others to notions of physical

⁸ Neil Rhodes discusses the earlier physiological theory of sympathy in 'The Science of the Heart: Shakespeare, Kames and the Eighteenth-Century Invention of the Human', in *Posthumanist Shakespeares*, ed. Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus (Basingstoke, 2012), pp. 23-40 (esp. pp. 26-7). See also Michel Foucault's description of sympathy in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1970; rpt. London, 2002): 'Sympathy is an instance of the *Same* so strong and so insistent that it will not rest content to be merely one of the forms of likeness; it has the dangerous power of *assimilating*, of rendering things identical to one another, of mingling them, of causing their individuality to disappear' (p. 26).

⁹ Plutarch, *The Philosophie, Commonlie Called the Morals*, trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1603), sig. Aaaaaa1v.

transference and induction: ‘If my hand be hot for the fire, the fire must bee more hot it selfe: if my chamber be lightsome for the beames of the sunne, the sunne it selfe must be more lightsome: If I must bee moved by thy perswasions, first thou must shew me by passion, they perswaded thy selfe.’¹⁰ Wright conceives of emotional transference in the same way that he regards the transference of heat and light between physical bodies or spaces. Similarly, in *A Late Discourse ... Touching the Cure of Wounds by Sympathy* (1658), Kenelm Digby describes his famous ‘powder of sympathy’ – which could cure wounds without touching them – and suggests that laughing and sadness are also transmitted by an automatic process:

Now lets consider how the strong imagination of one man doth marvailously act upon another man who hath it more feeble and passive ... If one come perchance to converse with persons that are subject to excesse of laughter, one can hardly forbear laughing, although one doth not know the cause why they laugh. If one should enter into a house, where all the World is sad, he becomes melancholy, for as one said, *Si vis me flere dolendum est primum ipsi tibi ...*¹¹

Here Digby refers to Horace’s often-cited Latin tag ‘*si vis me flere*’ – the rhetorical ideal that in order to move others you have to be moved yourself. As Horace puts it in *The Art of Poetry*, ‘The human face smiles in sympathy with smilers and comes to the help of those that

¹⁰ Thomas Wright, *The passions of the minde in generall. Corrected, enlarged, and with sundry new discourses augmented* (London, 1604), p. 173.

¹¹ Sir Kenelm Digby, *A Late Discourse Made in a Solemne Assembly of Nobles and Learned Men at Montpellier in France, Touching the Cure of Wounds by Sympathy, With Instructions how to make the said Power; whereby many other Secrets of Nature are unfolded* (London, 1658), p. 93. See Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping*, pp. 5-6; and Seth Lobis, ‘Sir Kenelm Digby and the Powder of Sympathy’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 74 (2011), 243-60 (pp. 252-3).

weep. If you want me to cry, mourn first yourself; *then* your misfortunes will hurt me'.¹²

Digby invokes this familiar rhetorical trope but suggests that such emotional transference has a physiological basis, continuing with the reflection that 'Women and Children being very moist and passive, are most susceptible of this unpleasing contagion of the imagination' (p. 93). Using language that recalls Renaissance antitheatricalists, Digby proposes that the transmission of sorrow is a form of contagion that affects weak and passive individuals.¹³ Such examples offer a compelling picture of sympathy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the term, it would seem, described the process by which two things influenced each other, or were attracted to one another.

This picture of early modern conceptions of sympathy – as a predominantly physical and physiological phenomenon – corresponds with the history of the word *sympathy* that we find in the *OED*. The idea of sympathy as 'The quality or state of being thus affected by the suffering or sorrow of another; a feeling of compassion or commiseration' (*OED*, 3c) does not, we are told, appear until 1600; while the more complex idea of sympathy as 'the fact or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another or others; fellow-feeling' (*OED*, 3b) only appears in 1662. The *OED*'s account of the word's development might thus confirm the view that the modern understanding of sympathy – as a complex, imaginative engagement with the other – only emerges fully in the eighteenth century with the philosophical writings of David Hume and Adam Smith.¹⁴ And yet when we turn to literary texts from the late-

¹² Horace, *The Art of Poetry*, in D. A. Russell and M. Winterbottom, eds., *Classical Literary Criticism* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 98-110 (p. 100). See also Joseph R. Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Newark, 1985), and Robert Cockcroft, *Rhetorical Affect in Early Modern Writing* (Basingstoke, 2003).

¹³ On the relationship between fellow-feeling and theatrical contagion see James, 'Dido's Ear', pp. 361-4.

¹⁴ In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith writes that 'By the imagination we place ourselves in [the sufferer's] situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him ... by changing places in fancy with the sufferer

sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries we can see the gradual emergence of the more ‘modern’ usages of the term considerably earlier than the *OED* suggests. This more complex usage of *sympathy* grows out of, and extends, an early modern fascination with ideas of pity and compassion; and even before the term is used in this sense, dramatic and poetic representations of fellow-feeling from this period point to a complex imaginative and cognitive engagement with the other.

As critics have begun to recognize, *Titus Andronicus* reflects this early modern interest in pity and fellow-feeling. In a recent essay Joseph M. Ortiz has suggested that the play invokes Ovid as a way of ‘exploring the possibility of sympathy in art’. Focusing on the idea of musical sympathy, he argues that *Titus Andronicus* ‘raises serious doubts about music’s ability to impart understanding – or, more generally, to mean anything at all’.¹⁵ Ortiz’s view of sympathy in the play is thus rather pessimistic, and he argues that Shakespeare’s treatment of Lavinia ‘undercuts any sense of true sympathy or expressiveness’ (p. 70). It seems to me, however, that Shakespeare’s treatment of sympathy in the play is more complex – and indeed more optimistic – than Ortiz suggests. I agree that Shakespeare is questioning the earlier occult conception of sympathy, but not that he is rejecting the possibility of sympathy altogether. As we shall see below, Shakespeare uses the term *sympathy* to mean emotional correspondence; and throughout *Titus* he explores the extent to which pity and compassion are bound up with language, narrative, and the imagination.

... we come either to conceive or to be affected by what he feels’ (Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge, 2002), p. 12).

¹⁵ Joseph M. Ortiz, “‘Martyred Signs’”: *Titus Andronicus* and the Production of Musical Sympathy’, *Shakespeare*, 1/1&2 (June/December 2005), 53-74 (p. 54). The influence of Ovid on the emotional world of *Titus* is also considered by Cora Fox in ‘Grief and the Ovidian Politics of Revenge in *Titus Andronicus*’, in *Ovid and the Politics of Emotion* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 105-124.

There are certainly moments in the play that allude to the idea of sympathy as a physical or occult process. In 3.1, for example, Titus pleads for the lives of Quintus and Martius by attempting to elicit pity from the tribunes. He claims that he has ‘never wept before’ (3.1.25), because in the past his other sons have been killed in battle, and thus died a noble death. When Lucius points out that no one is listening, Titus states that he has to go on talking, even if only the stones at his feet can hear him:

Why 'tis no matter man, if they did hear,
They would not mark me, or if they did mark,
They would not pity me; yet plead I must,
And bootless unto them.
Therefore I tell my sorrows to the stones,
Who, though they cannot answer my distress,
Yet in some sort they are better than the tribunes
For that they will not intercept my tale.
When I do weep, they humbly at my feet
Receive my tears and seem to weep with me,
And were they but attired in grave weeds
Rome could afford no tribunes like to these.
A stone is soft as wax, tribunes more hard than stones;
A stone is silent and offendeth not,
And tribunes with their tongues doom men to death. (3.1.33-47)

Titus suggests that the stones are a better audience than the Tribunes, as they will not ‘intercept’ – that is, interrupt – his tale. The senseless stones ‘[r]eceive’ his tears and thus

appear to weep with him. Ortiz reads this moment in relation to the double meaning of the word ‘moving’ in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. For Ortiz, the Ovidian sense of *movere* – which could refer to the literal moving of inanimate objects such as stones and musical strings – corresponds with the early modern occult notion of sympathy. However he argues that the occult model is being ironized here: ‘Titus’s confusion of the literal and metaphorical senses of “move” ... invokes the doctrine of sympathy in a way which appears ridiculous’. For Ortiz, occult sympathy ‘is merely an empty conceit in the universe of the play’.¹⁶ But perhaps Titus is not quite as confused as Ortiz suggests. Titus’s desire to move the stones can be read as a metaphorical expression of his desire to move others: as Titus himself notes, the stones only ‘seem’ to weep with him.¹⁷ The image of weeping stones is a way for Titus to express his disdain for the unsympathetic tribunes, and his desire for a more sympathetic hearing. Shakespeare does not simply offer a critique of occult sympathy, but rather has Titus use it as a powerful metaphor for the emotional receptivity he seeks.

Titus’s ability to express his grief is tested even further later in the scene when his daughter is brought on with her tongue cut out and her hands removed. Titus’s hand is then cut off by Aaron in what turns out to be a futile gesture to save the life of his sons. Titus asks the heavens to pity him: ‘If any power pities wretched tears, / To that I call’ (3.1.209-10). His language becomes increasingly metaphorical, as he describes how his sighs will ‘breathe the

¹⁶ Ortiz, “Martyred Signs”, p. 69.

¹⁷ This recalls the moment in *Venus and Adonis* when Venus comes across Adonis’s dead body after he has been killed by the boar. She sees the ‘wide wound’ made by the boar’s tusk, and the blood on the landscape around Adonis: ‘No flower was nigh, no grass, herb, leaf, or weed, / But stole his blood, and seemed with him to bleed’ (1055-6). Here the landscape *seems* to be capable of appropriating Adonis’s blood, and indeed human passions. The narrator describes this phenomenon as ‘solemn sympathy’ (1057). It is not clear, however, whether this is supposed to be an example of occult sympathy, in which the landscape magically bleeds in response to Adonis’s injury, or whether his blood has simply dripped onto the flowers.

welkin dim / And stain the sun with fog' (212-13). The stoical Marcus tries to get Titus to tone down these outlandish images, and to temper his passions with reason: 'do not break into these deep extremes' (216). Yet Titus suggests that, because his sorrows are bottomless, his 'passions' should be likewise (218), using the word in the relatively new, but now obsolete, sense of 'A literary composition or passage marked by deep or strong emotion; a passionate speech or outburst' (*OED*, 'passion', 6b). Titus allows himself another passionate outburst in which he compares the exchange of grief between himself and Lavinia to the processes of the natural world:

When heaven doth weep, doth not the earth o'erflow?
If the winds rage, doth not the sea wax mad,
Threatening the welkin with his big-swollen face?
And wilt thou have a reason for this coil?
I am the sea. Hark how her sighs doth blow.
She is the weeping welkin, I the earth.
Then must my sea be moved with her sighs,
Then must my earth with her continual tears
Become a deluge, overflowed and drowned,
For why my bowels cannot hide her woes,
But like a drunkard must I vomit them. (3.1.222-32)

In this complex metaphorical schema, Titus is both the earth and the sea, while Lavinia is the sky, acting upon him. The metaphor develops into a description of the physiological nature of his emotions. The bowels were seen as the seat of the tender and sympathetic passions, and could actually mean 'Pity, compassion, feeling, "heart"' (*OED*, 'bowels', 3a). In addition, the

‘her’ in line 231 is ambiguous, and could refer to the woes of Titus’s bowels, or to Lavinia’s woes, further blurring the distinction between Titus’s body and Lavinia’s grief. This speech might thus be seen as evidence that ‘the passions of the early modern subject have an elemental character more literal than metaphoric in force’.¹⁸ Indeed Titus’s comments recall Paster’s description of the humoral body being ‘like climates in the outer world’, and suggest its open and porous nature.¹⁹ Titus’s woes have a physiological basis, and have to be literally vomited out. But perhaps using the term ‘literally’ in the context of an explicitly poetical speech about the passions is problematic. Should we regard this speech, rather, as a metaphorical evocation of feeling, rather than an attempt to offer an accurate or quasi-scientific description of Titus’s emotions?

The idea of bodily or automatic sympathy is further complicated in the play by its juxtaposition with what we might term a cognitive and imaginative conception of emotional correspondence. Immediately after Titus’s meteorological speech we have a Messenger who feels the woes of Titus and his family, but not due to any kind of automatic sympathy:

Worthy Andronicus, ill art thou repaid
For that good hand thou sent’st the emperor.
Here are the heads of thy two noble sons,
And here’s thy hand in scorn to thee sent back:
Thy grief their sports, thy resolution mocked,
That woe is me to think upon thy woes
More than remembrance of my father’s death. (235-41)

¹⁸ Paster, *Humoring the Body*, p. 19.

¹⁹ Paster, *Humoring the Body*, p. 19.

The Messenger remembers his father's death as he 'think[s] upon' Titus's woes: his pity for Titus is thus bound up with his own emotional experiences. Here emotional correspondence is the product of thought and memory, rather than a process of bodily contagion or straightforward 'identification'. Indeed the Messenger suggests that Titus's grief is actually worse than his own grief, but nonetheless invokes his father's death as he attempts to express and conceptualize his response to Titus's predicament. We might also suggest that the Messenger's speech implicitly reflects upon the audience's responses as well: Titus's losses will, one hopes, be far more violent and extreme than anything that members of the audience will have experienced; yet they may nevertheless recall their own losses as they too 'think upon [Titus's] woes'. In this way the Messenger can be seen as an example of what Alastair Fowler has called an 'involved spectator'. Fowler notes the 'intense participation' of such spectator figures in Renaissance art and literature, and suggests that they 'illustrate how far the Renaissance viewer's role was from passive observation'.²⁰ As the Messenger compares his woes to those of Titus, the audience may, in turn, compare their responses to those of the Messenger. This speech thus highlights the extent to which there is often a comparative aspect to our sorrows, or perhaps to all our emotional responses.

II

The play's treatment of sympathy is even more complex, however, because Shakespeare also demonstrates that such comparisons do not always elicit pity or compassion. In the opening scene Tamora offers a passionate plea for the life of her son Alarbus. Tamora asks Titus to imagine what he would feel if one of his own sons were executed:

²⁰ See Alastair Fowler, *Renaissance Realism: Narrative Images in Literature and Art* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 66-84 (quotation on p. 76).

Stay, Roman brethren, gracious conqueror,
Victorious Titus, rue the tears I shed,
A mother's tears in passion for her son!
And if thy sons were ever dear to thee,
O, think my son to be as dear to me. (1.1.107-11)

Tamora invites Titus to 'rue' her tears, and to imagine her feelings for her son. She asks him to be merciful, like the gods: 'Wilt thou draw near the nature of the gods? / Draw near them then in being merciful. / Sweet mercy is nobility's true badge' (1.1.120-2). As Tamora suggests, *mercy* was a quality associated with nobility, and implied a power structure in which the merciful individual was positioned above the poor wretch asking for pity.²¹ In *A Table of Humane Passions* (1621), Nicholas Coeffeteau writes that '*Mercy is a Griefe or feeling which we have of another mans miseries, who we hold worthy of a better fortune.*' He continues: 'it is most certaine that such as feele their hearts toucht with pittie, must bee in that estate as they thinke that either themselves or their friends may fall into the like accident, and runne into the same misfortune that he hath done, whose misery doth move them to this commiseration'.²² Yet Tamora's attempts to make Titus imagine experiencing the same losses, and thus move him to commiseration, are ineffective. Titus suggests – in a mathematical, business-like way – that Alarbus needs to be killed in order to pay for the deaths of others.

²¹ For a valuable account of the ways in which mercy was discussed in the period – as a virtuous act, or a kind of 'contagion' – see John Staines, 'Compassion in the Public Sphere of Milton and King Charles', in Paster et al., eds., *Reading the Early Modern Passions*, pp. 89-110 (esp. pp. 99-100).

²² Nicolas Coeffeteau, *A Table of Humane Passions. With their Causes and Effects*, trans. Edward Grimeston (London, 1621), pp. 357-8.

In 2.2, however, Tamora faces the piteous pleas of another woman: Lavinia. Demetrius enjoins his mother not to feel pity: ‘let it be your glory / To see her tears, but be your heart to them / As unrelenting flint to drops of rain’ (2.2.139-41). Stones, flint, and steel could all serve as metaphors denoting a lack of compassion, as we have already seen in Titus’s description of the senseless stones in 3.1; we might also think of Lear’s comments in the final scene of *The Tragedy of King Lear*, ‘O, you are men of stones’ (5.3.232). At the same time, however, hard substances were said to be worn away by water, as in Lucrece’s comments to Tarquin in *The Rape of Lucrece*: ‘O, if no harder than a stone thou art, / Melt at my tears, and be compassionate. / Soft pity enters at an iron gate’ (593-5).²³ As these examples suggest, metaphors relating to compassion had a gendered dimension, with women often figured as water or tears, and men often figured as stone or flint. However, *Titus Andronicus* reminds us that this seductive set of metaphors does not describe intrinsic differences between men and women. Lavinia attempts to invoke the stereotypical idea of compassionate femininity, and asks Chiron to entreat his mother to ‘show a woman’s pity’ (2.2.147). Lavinia hopes that, even if her sons may be pitiless, Tamora may nonetheless show mercy:

’Tis true, the raven doth not hatch a lark.
 Yet I have heard – O, could I find it now –
 The lion, moved with pity, did endure
 To have his princely paws pared all away.
 Some say that ravens foster forlorn children
 The whilst their own birds famish in their nests.

²³ See R. W. Dent, *Shakespeare’s Proverbial Language: An Index* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1981), H311 and D618.

O be to me, though thy hard heart say no,
Nothing so kind, but something pitiful. (149-56)

Lavinia uses a proverbial fable as a kind of exemplary narrative to encourage Tamora to show pity.²⁴ Yet Tamora states that she will remain ‘pitiless’ in imitation of Lavinia’s father: ‘Remember, boys, I poured forth tears in vain / To save your brother from the sacrifice, / But fierce Andronicus would not relent’ (162-5). Tamora’s description of Titus recalls the ‘unrelenting’ flint invoked by Demetrius, and she thus resists the stereotype of soft or passive female compassion. Tamora’s emotional state is presented as a deliberate choice in which she imitates Titus’s lack of feeling rather than Lavinia’s passions.

The absence of pity or compassion is a key feature of the play, and part of its insistence that passions involve a considerable degree of choice, thought, and judgement. Marcus’s address to the heavens at the end of 4.1 also bemoans a lack of pity, but here amongst the gods: ‘O heavens, can you hear a good man groan / And not relent or not compassion him’ (4.1.123-4). This striking and unusual use of *compassion* as a verb – which corresponds with Titus’s use of *passionate* quoted above – again implies that passions are active processes.²⁵ The play’s interest in presenting emotions as things that individuals do illuminates Steven Mullaney’s claims about the changes taking place in the emotional landscape of early modern England. Mullaney suggests that Elizabethan plays in particular ‘demanded and produced new powers of identification, projection, and apprehension in their audiences, altering the threshold not only of dramatic representation but also of self-representation, not only the fictional construction of character but also of the social

²⁴ See Bate’s note to 2.2.151-2 and his ‘Introduction’, p. 93.

²⁵ The *OED* cites this passage as one of the few examples of *compassion* used as a verb, and notes that this usage was short-lived: ‘To have compassion on, to pity. (“A word scarcely used”, Johnson.)’.

construction of the self'.²⁶ Mullaney's argument about the role played by dramatic texts in shaping early modern emotion is compelling if broad; *Titus* gives us a specific example of an Elizabethan play that explores social processes of identification, projection, and apprehension, not only through its complex exploration of pity, but also through its use of the word *sympathy*. The appearance of this word in the play highlights a shift in the understanding of the concept from a quasi-scientific phenomenon to a process of imaginative engagement.

Towards the start of 3.1 Marcus offers to dry Titus's eyes, but Titus suggests that Marcus's napkin has lost its absorbency as it is already 'drowned' (3.1.142) with Marcus's tears. Lucius then offers to dry Lavinia's cheeks, and Titus suggests that he might have the same problem. There is thus a curious double-mirroring here: Marcus's grief matches that of Titus, while Lucius's grief matches that of Lavinia. In other words, there is a correspondence between these two examples of matching grief. And when Lavinia makes a non-verbal attempt to communicate, Titus attempts to imagine her thoughts, and what Lavinia would say if she still had the facility of speech:

Mark, Marcus, mark! I understand her signs:

Had she a tongue to speak, now would she say

That to her brother which I said to thee.

His napkin with his true tears all bewet

Can do no service on her sorrowful cheeks.

O, what a sympathy of woe is this;

²⁶ Steven Mullaney, 'Affective Technologies: Toward an Emotional Logic of the Elizabethan Stage', in Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr, eds., *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 71-89 (p. 81).

As far from help as limbo is from bliss. (3.1.144-50)

Intriguingly, Titus employs the term *sympathy* to describe this correspondence of woe. The word is not glossed in Bate's Arden 3 edition, while the *Riverside* simply has 'sharing'.²⁷ Alan Hughes suggests 'likeness in suffering' in his New Cambridge edition.²⁸ The word does appear in several of Shakespeare's other early dramatic works in its earlier sense of correspondence and agreement. In *2 Henry VI*, for example, which was probably written in 1590-1, King Henry uses the term as he welcomes Margaret to the court: 'Thou hast given me in this beauteous face / A world of earthly blessings to my soul, / If sympathy of love unite our thoughts' (1.1.21-3). There is a similar usage in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when Lysander comments on the various scenarios in which love has failed to run smoothly: 'Or if there were a sympathy in choice, / War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it' (1.1.141-2). But in *Romeo and Juliet*, which is roughly contemporaneous with *Titus*, the Nurse uses the word to describe the similarity between the emotions of the two protagonists: 'O, he is even in my mistress' case, / Just in her case! O woeful sympathy, / Piteous predicament!' (3.3.84-6). In this example Shakespeare again uses *sympathy* to mean correspondence, but uses it specifically to describe a likeness of grief. In the case of *Titus*, however, the word is not only used in conjunction with woe, but also associated with communication, understanding, and the imagination: Titus imagines what Lavinia would say, and tries to communicate what she feels. It is striking that the word *sympathy* is used in this context, and not in the passage later in 3.1 in which Titus employs a set of meteorological metaphors to describe his bodily passions. Titus's speech about a 'sympathy of woe' thus represents an important moment in the history of the word *sympathy*, and highlights the ways in which

²⁷ *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, 2nd edition (Boston, 1997), note to 3.1.148.

²⁸ Alan Hughes, ed., *Titus Andronicus*, updated edition (Cambridge, 2006), note to 3.1.148.

Shakespeare's early dramatic and poetic works played an important role in refining and modifying the meaning of the term.

III

In the remainder of this essay I want to discuss the ways in which the concept of sympathy relates to the emotional responses of the play's audiences and readers. *Titus*'s fascination with the relativity or comparability of sorrows is also apparent in 3.2 – the so-called fly scene, first printed in the Folio – and here Shakespeare raises further questions about the ways in which grief might impede our ability to tell the difference between representation and reality. The Boy asks Titus to break off his sorrowful speech, and instead to make Lavinia merry 'with some pleasing tale' (3.2.47). Marcus notes the extent to which the Boy is moved by Titus's pain: 'Alas, the tender boy in passion moved / Doth weep to see his grandsire's heaviness' (48-9). Yet their discussion of the Boy's passion is broken off when Marcus stabs at a fly with his knife. Titus berates Marcus for his murderous act, and when Marcus responds that he has 'but killed a fly' (59), Titus invites him to consider the grieving parents the fly has left behind:

'But'?

How if that fly had a father and a mother?

How would he hang his slender gilded wings

And buzz lamenting doings in the air.

Poor harmless fly,

That with his pretty buzzing melody

Came here to make us merry, and thou hast killed him. (3.2.60-6)

Here Titus's powers of sympathy are extended as he projects his own paternal grief for Lavinia's plight onto the newly deceased fly. Yet the scene also suggests that Titus's sympathy for the fly is excessive, or even arbitrary. Indeed the instability of Titus's interpretation of the fly is revealed when Marcus states that he killed the 'black ill-favoured fly' (67) because it reminded him of Aaron the Moor. Titus immediately accepts Marcus's suggestion that the fly is a figure for Aaron, and he asks Marcus's forgiveness, repeatedly stabbing the fly with Marcus's knife. It is at this point that Marcus points to the fragility of Titus's mind, in terms that are particularly germane to the present discussion: 'Alas, poor man! Grief has so wrought on him / He takes false shadows for true substances' (80-1). On one level, this comment suggests that Titus has lost the ability to tell the difference between fantasy and reality. For Bate the scene represents 'a glorious comic parody of tragic empathy'.²⁹ But rather than simply being a parody, we might also see Marcus's comment as reflecting upon the audience's engagement with the fictional world of *Titus Andronicus*. After all, the word *shadow* is often used by Shakespeare to refer to actors, or to artistic representation more generally.³⁰ Most strikingly, perhaps, the word is used to describe a painted representation of the tragic Hecuba in *The Rape of Lucrece*, in the context of Lucrece's passionate reaction to her plight: 'On this sad shadow Lucrece spends her eyes, /

²⁹ Bate, 'Introduction' p. 121. Charlotte Scott has also written about this scene in 'Still Life? Anthropocentrism and the Fly in *Titus Andronicus* and *Volpone*', *Shakespeare Survey 61* (Cambridge, 2008), 256-68. Scott writes that 'This scene uses shadow to find its way to substance ... the shadow or flattery of distraction leads Titus into action' (p. 264), but she does not tease out fully the metadramatic implications of Titus's comment.

³⁰ See the *OED*'s definition of *shadow*: 'Applied rhetorically to a portrait as contrasted with the original; also to an actor or a play in contrast with the reality represented' (*OED*, 6b). Cf. Theseus's comments in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: 'The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse if imagination amend them' (5.1.210-11).

And shapes her sorrow to the beldame's woes' (1457-8). These passages from *Titus* and *Lucrece* implicitly explore the ways in which audiences and readers might respond to 'false shadows' – the fictional personages who inhabit Shakespeare's plays and poems – as though they were 'true substances'. Both texts suggest that powerful representations of grief can work to blur any simple dichotomy between 'real' and 'imagined' emotions.

Certainly *Titus Andronicus* is interested in the ability of fictional narratives – including, implicitly, the play itself – to elicit an emotional reaction amongst readers and spectators. This concern with the complex interplay between life and art is made more explicit at the end of the fly-scene. We find that Titus is still attempting to make sense of unspeakable events by returning to other texts. He seems to want to replace emotion with narrative, and proposes a retreat to Lavinia's closet in order to read old sorrowful tales:

Come, take away. Lavinia, go with me;
I'll to thy closet and go read with thee
Sad stories chanced in the times of old.
Come, boy, and go with me; thy sight is young,
And thou shalt read when mine begin to dazzle. (3.2.82-6)

On one level, this recourse to other sad stories could be seen as a denial of reality. Yet Titus's remarks also point to the consolations that such tales can offer. In the following scene Titus suggests further ways in which fictional narratives can offer a welcome distraction from suffering: 'Come and take choice of all my library, / And so beguile thy sorrow till the heavens / Reveal the damned contriver of this deed' (4.1.34-6). For Cora Fox, this is a problematic moment for Titus, in the sense that he is deluded about the ability of literature to make sense of one's sorrows: 'Titus tries to instruct Lavinia about literature's place in social

life – that it can entertain her, or distract her from the “real” sorrows occurring around her – but literature in this play, and especially Ovid’s poetry, does not function in the way Titus describes’. Fox goes on to suggest that ‘Titus appears to be spouting a useless and escapist aesthetic theory’.³¹ Yet the fact that Titus encourages Lavinia to compare her sorrows to those described within other texts does not necessarily suggest that Titus’s aesthetic theory is useless: the play suggests, rather, that we need narratives to make sense of our lives, and to contemplate others’ suffering. This is perhaps analogous to the way in which Titus uses the concept of occult sympathies as a way of expressing and making sense of his passions, despite his apparent awareness that the concept may be more fanciful than real.

The use of fictional or mythical narratives as a way of articulating extreme passions is also a focus of the play’s final scene. The Roman Lord seeks an explanation for why the body of Rome – in a metaphorical sense – has been dismembered like Lavinia’s body:

Speak, Rome’s dear friend, as erst our ancestor
When with his solemn tongue he did discourse
To lovesick Dido’s sad-attending ear
The story of that baleful burning night
When subtle Greeks surprised King Priam’s Troy.
Tell us what Sinon hath bewitched our ears,
Or who hath brought the fatal engine in
That gives our Troy, our Rome, the civil wound. (5.3.79-86)

The Roman Lord here attempts to pre-empt the story he is about to hear by placing it in the context of other sad stories. He explicitly alludes to Aeneas’s tale to Dido, one of the

³¹ Fox, *Ovid and the Politics of Emotion*, pp. 113-14.

archetypal tragic narratives in the period.³² And yet what has occurred is so dreadful that Marcus struggles to put it into words or translate it into a story. Nonetheless he is able to say that he cannot speak, and he tells us (rhetorically) what the effects of his narrative would have been:

My heart is not compact of flint nor steel,
Nor can I utter all our bitter grief,
But floods of tears will drown my oratory
And break my utterance even in the time
When it should move ye to attend me most,
And force you to commiseration. (87-92)

Again, the audience's response is anticipated, but in a highly self-conscious manner. Marcus claims that he does not conform to the conventional male stereotype – which we considered earlier – of being flint-hearted, and is thus incapable of articulating his grief without being overwhelmed by tears. Yet he goes on to suggest the emotional power that such a speech would have, echoing Philip Sidney claims that tragedy 'stir[s] the affects of admiration and commiseration'.³³ On the one hand, then, this passage seems to confirm the idea – described by Horace, Quintilian, and many Renaissance commentators on acting and oratory – that an actor's tears could provoke spontaneous tears in their audience, and 'force [us] to commiseration'. On the other hand, however, it is worth emphasizing that this is a description of Marcus's story, rather than the thing itself. It is Lucius who offers a partial account of the

³² See James, 'Dido's Ear', pp. 366-8.

³³ Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy* in *The Oxford Authors: Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford, 1989), pp. 212-50 (p. 230). See Bate's note to 5.3.92.

play's events, after which Marcus finally begins his own narrative. The passage cited above invites the audience to *imagine* a scene of tragic storytelling, and perhaps it is all the more powerful for the fact that Marcus's tale is temporarily withheld from us. Marcus invokes the idea of emotional contagion and spontaneous sympathy, but it features here primarily as a rhetorical trope. This moment further highlights the extent to which sympathy in the play is often relational, comparative, and intertextual – and bound up with the audience's imagination.

Perhaps, then, what is most striking about the emotional landscape of *Titus Andronicus* is that various early modern conceptions of the passions – such as occult sympathies and correspondence, humoral theory, and rhetorical affect – are employed in ways that highlight their metaphorical or imaginary status. The play suggests that conceptions of emotional correspondence in the period involved a degree of imagination, projection, and self-recognition, long before the supposed emergence of 'modern' notions of sympathy in the eighteenth century. This is not to say that the play is incapable of producing spontaneous tears in its audiences, nor that Shakespeare is dismissing Galenic humoral theory in any simple sense, but rather to suggest that *Titus* reflects upon the multiple and complex ways in which early moderns understood and experienced the grief of others. Along with several other early Shakespearian works the play dramatizes – and thereby facilitates – the redeployment of *sympathy* as a new term for expressing a highly complex emotional and cognitive process. The representation of sympathy in *Titus Andronicus* thus allows us to question certain critical conceptions of early modern emotion, and reminds us that Shakespeare's works present us with a range of frameworks and models for thinking about the attempts of his characters – and perhaps his audiences and readers – to 'passionate' their grief.