

Letter From the Editor

In Act I, Scene I of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, the opening action shows the preparation for a human sacrifice. Titus has returned victorious from war, bringing with him the barbarian queen Tamara and her sons, and the eldest of these he intends to give to the flames as a thanks offering to his gods. Tamara begs for the life of her son, but Titus insists that the souls of his dead countrymen will not be appeased without the blood of an enemy. In response, the queen cries "O cruel, irreligious piety!" This is the inspiration and the title for this issue of the *Baylor Journal of Theatre and Performance*.

Events on the contemporary world stage have fueled the questions posed by this issue of the journal: What drives human beings to harm one another in the name of religious devotion? How is spiritual identity or well being impacted when devotional acts are also violent acts? Why do some expressions of the divine seem to be inextricably bound up in blood and pain? As we watched the media, shaking our heads in disbelief at the images of detainees at Abu Ghraib prison and the videotaped beheadings of hostages, the editorial staff of this publication decided that this was a necessary moment to examine the performative dimension of the intersection between faith and violence, the places where piety takes shape as cruelty, and human beings use the demands of religious devotion to justify unspeakable acts of destruction against one another. The articles and other features of this issue confront these problems in varied ways.

Mark Pizzato's editorial "Holy War Theatres" contemplates terrorism and war as theatre, and investigates the long history of western theatre as religious ritual with human aggression. It gives particular attention to the American experience of September 11, 2001, and to the framing of recent U.S. military action as melodrama.

Two feature articles discuss ways that the stage can be used to discuss or frame violence for spectators. "Staging Terezín: A Performance-Based Research Project" follows Lisa Peschel and Alan Sikes's investigation of the experiences of Jewish survivors from the Terezín concentration camp in Czechoslovakia during World War II. Here the authors chronicle their own vexed experience of trying to interpret these survivor stories, trying to negotiate the process of discussing and representing "the unspeakable." David J. Eshelman addresses the role of Mary as an object of audience identification in plays from the medieval Towneley cycle in "Great mowrning and mone': Modeled Spectatorship in the Towneley *Scourging*."

Our "Highlights" section includes a special interview with playwright Eve Ensler, a conversation that highlights the spiritual dimensions of violence between human beings and the religious controversies that have recently sprung up around V-Day performances of her play the *Vagina Monologues*. The political troubles of Northern Ireland unite the remaining two Highlights, though they represent unrelated performance events.

This issue also features our new “Profiles” heading. Jennifer L. Good’s piece on Nobel prize-winning playwright Elfriede Jelinek inaugurates this section, which we intend to serve as a space for spotlighting the contributions of noteworthy, but less widely known, theatre practitioners and writers. It is part of our ongoing effort to continually expand the conversation about the intersections between religious/spiritual faith and theatrical performance.

In a recent speech on Baylor’s campus, literary critic Stanley Fish looked at the connections between the hero of Milton’s *Samson Agonistes* and recent acts of terrorism (a talk slated to be published in a larger collection by Dequesne in 2006). He commented on the “demonizing and dehumanizing of the enemy...that are standard features of religiously justified acts of violence” (“There is Nothing He Cannot Ask: Milton, Liberalism and Terrorism”, 2/05). Is not this gesture an imminently theatrical one, part of a long human tradition of performative activity aimed at casting oneself in the role of hero and one’s adversaries as antagonist in the dramatic conflict of social life? With this issue, the *Baylor Journal of Theatre and Performance* seeks to foreground the public, staged nature of violence in order to better understand (and idealistically to help diminish) the painful consequences of our more aggressive interactions.

