SENSING DEATH: ITALIAN RENAISSANCE COMFORTING RITUALS AND THEIR VISUAL AND AURAL IMPACT ON CONDEMNED CRIMINALS' SPIRITUAL REDEMPTION

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This thesis will examine the rich, and sometimes overwhelming, sensory environment of punishment rituals in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy to draw attention to the intimate relationship between sight and sound. In recent decades, the study of art history has expanded to consider the appreciation of the work of art as part of a coherent sensory experience for the viewer. It analyzes the justice systems use of tavolette (hand held images) and laude (devotional songs) during the public execution process in order to give criminals the chance for redemption. Images of Christ's crucifixion, as well as other martyr scenes, were used in tandem with laude particularly focused on redemption in order to place salvation in the front of the criminal--visually and aurally. These thoughts would subdue the criminal, making him or her more likely to follow along with the rituals willingly, which would have sent a message to the public about the importance of repentance.

Examining these visual and aural components not only provides a look into the judicial system of this period, but it provides a look at how the justice system determined the types of imagery to use for their very specific purposes, allowing for a deeper understanding of arts place in this society. Using tavolette, laude, and the text of the Bolognese Comforting Manual, along with the narratives of primary witnesses and images of execution, this essay will highlight the way in which the tavolette contributed to the carefully controlled sensory experience of Renaissance criminals during the punishment process, creating an environment that provoked the criminal to ask for redemption, not necessarily for his own well-being or beliefs, but to appease the political and public ideas of death and justice.
We must consider not only beholders' symptoms and behavior, but also the
effectiveness, efficacy, and vitality of images themselves; not only what
beholders do, but also what images appear to do; not only what people do as a
result of their relationship with imaged form, but also what they expect imaged
form to achieve, and why they have such expectation at all.

---David Freedberg, Power of Images
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMAGERY AND EXECUTION</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXECUTION SOUNDSCAPE</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A: FIGURES</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 1581, Michel de Montaigne came upon a public hanging while he was strolling in Rome. As he recorded:

...they carry in front of the criminal a big Crucifix covered with a black curtain, and on foot go a large number of men dressed and masked in linen. There is a brotherhood of them who, they say, are gentlemen and other prominent people of Rome who devote themselves to this service of accompanying criminals led to execution and the bodies of the dead. There are two of these... who attend the criminal on the cart and preach to him; and one of them continually holds before his face a picture on which is the portrait of Our Lord, and has him kiss it incessantly; this makes it impossible to see the criminals face from the street. At the gallows... they still keep this picture against his face until he was launched. He made an ordinary death, without movement or word..."¹

As Montaigne witnessed, the members of the comfort brotherhood, or confraternity, prayed, preached and presented images to the condemned men and women throughout the entire procession and execution.² The dual attention to sight and sound fostered by the comforting practices of the confraternity members worked together to keep the prisoner focused on penance and salvation of the soul, both necessary for the possibility of an afterlife within Paradise.

¹ Michel de Montaigne, trans. Donald M. Frame, The Complete Works: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958): 1148. The text goes on to discuss the way the body was punished after execution and how this was seen as punishment as well, almost more severely; "They hardly ever kill men except by a simple death, and exercise their severity after death... for these people, who had appeared to feel nothing at seeing him strangled, at every blow that was given to cut him up cried out in a piteous voice." This goes on to show how the body and soul were believed to be separated, with one getting the right to redemption in death, and the other being punished for the crimes done in life. These ideas go hand in hand with the Comforting Confraternity and their practices.

The imagery presented to the criminal in Montaigne's day most likely took the form of a small painted panel, known as a *tavoletta*, which was often painted on both sides and held by means of a short pole that was attached to its bottom edge. While in earlier centuries throughout much of Christian Europe, crucifixes were often held to a condemned criminal's lips during the punishment rituals, *tavolette* rose to prominence within the Florentine and Bolognese criminal justice systems around the fifteenth century, and then extended to Rome and elsewhere. Not many examples of these *tavolette* remain, perhaps due to their functional wear and tear or purposeful destruction in a ritual elimination due to their connection to such a difficult practice as execution. A few do survive, however, and many can be found in Rome, while others have been traced back to Bologna.

For example, within the former headquarters of the Roman Archconfraternity of San Giovanni Decollato, several portable *tavolette* have been preserved that give insight into the history of the lay organization and the larger penal justice system it served. One depicts opposing scenes of the *Crucifixion* and *Lamentation of Christ* on its two sides. On the side of the panel with the *Crucifixion* (fig. 1), four figures occupy the entire panel, with Christ taking up the very center. The cross is positioned in the middle of the panel, breaking the space in half, with Christ already presented there, arms stretching out across the horizontal section of the cross, reaching

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3 These images were produced with the purpose of salvation in mind, and they add valuable information to the discussion of public execution and comforting practices. The tavolette and *laude* (devotional songs) that will be explored come from Bologna, though many aspects of these are similar to those seen in Florence.


5 Very few remain today, and those which do are in museums with their handle removed and their original purpose unannounced. Ferretti, "In Your Face: Paintings for the Condemned in Renaissance Italy," in *The Art of Executing Well: Rituals of Execution in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Nicholas Terpstra (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2008): 79-97 discusses *tavolette* that are traced back to Bologna, while examples that are now in Rome can be seen in Samuel Y. Edgerton Jr.'s *Pictures and Punishment: Art and Criminal Prosecution during the Florentine Renaissance*.

from one side of the panel to the other. The image is very balanced in presentation, with Christ on the cross in the center, as the figures of the Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist flank each side. The body of Christ is laid out in a manner that gives the body form and shows the agony that is being felt by Christ, while still managing to keep the image balanced. Christ's legs extend to the right of the panel, as he bends his knees away from the cross, yet the artist balanced this shift by having Christ's head leaning to the left, resting on his outstretched arm. The placement of Mary Magdalene at the feet of Christ also helps even out this movement, as she is placed so that her face and upper body take up the space to the left of Christ's legs. Her face is turned towards the Virgin Mary at the left-hand side of the cross, while her arms are circled around the base of the cross and Christ's feet. Her face is contorted in grief and although her head turns towards the Virgin Mary, her eyes look out towards the viewer to draw them in to the scene being depicted.

The Virgin Mary is focused entirely on Christ, her face tilted and hands up, as if she is questioning the scene before her. On the right side of the cross, Saint John the Baptist is depicted in a similar position, eyes focused on Christ, with one hand to his chest and one pointing out toward the cross. Both figures are set apart from Christ and do not touch him, such as Mary Magdalene does. The dark background provides a contrast to the figures in the lower portion of the panel, while the light streaming down from the top edge of the image alludes to Christ's impending ascent to heaven. By leaving the background simple and the composition balanced and uncluttered, the artist created visual focus on the scene itself. A criminal viewer was intended to meditate on Christ's sacrifice for man and consider his or her own behavior in contrast. The scene is a visualization of the death of a criminal, much like the real criminal before the image. Christ's willingness to be crucified distinguished his death as fulfillment of
prophecy; through his death, he was transformed into an everlasting state and, in turn, offered this promise to those who followed him. The criminal who looked upon the image was asked to consider his or her own willingness to die and embrace an everlasting life in heaven.

In contrast to the intimate focus of the Crucifixion, the Lamentation of Christ on the other side of the panel is filled with action (fig. 2). The scene is composed differently as well, as it is not organized around the center, such as the Crucifixion scene fixed by the cross, but rather the most significant action occurs around the edges of the imagery. Christ's body lays at the bottom of the image; its dominant position within the foreground of the panel and relatively lighter tonality draw the attention of the viewer. His upper body rests against the Virgin Mary who occupies the left side of the panel. Her dress is dark and her head is turned to the left, drawing attention to the figure behind her, most likely John the Baptist. Her eyes look up towards the sky, possibly to heaven, or to the Cross that Christ had been on moments before, as is signified by the ladder that cuts through the middle of the panel.

Christ's legs extend across the bottom-center of the panel, and Mary Magdalene can be seen behind them, kneeling on the ground and grasping Christ's hand. She is also much lighter in the composition and is located more centrally than the others. Right behind her and angling up to the top left of the panel the ladder that was used to remove Christ from the cross splits the scene. To the left of Mary Magdalene and the ladder is a group of figures, some facing away as if they are leaving the scene, while others still look upon the body. All of these figures appear in dark clothes and are surrounded by more shadowing than Christ and the two women. These figures are likely representing the crowd of nonbelievers that were responsible for the crucifixion of Christ. As viewers follow the ladder up to the top of the panel the sky lightens up and the forms
of clouds can be seen, as well as the figure of an angel in the sky. The placement of the angel near the top of the ladder, while Christ is at the bottom, signals to his ascent to heaven.

While the imagery on this side of the tavoletta is more complex than the other, the themes of salvation and the ascent of one's soul to Paradise are consistent. The figures surrounding Christ in this panel embody a much calmer mood than in the scene of the Crucifixion, reflecting their understanding of Christ in heaven. It is possible that the image of the Crucifixion was shown to place fear in to the criminal, as he realized his own death was near and thought of the grief that would be caused to his family, much like the grief that is visible on the faces of those figures around Christ on the panel. This imagery was then paired with the Lamentation scene, where the criminal would see the moments after Christ's death and how Christ was going to ascend to heaven. While in this scene Christ is dead and his followers are surrounding him in mourning, they also seem to be more at peace than the figures in the Crucifixion scene, which shows the criminal how redemption can save his soul, as well as give his family peace in his death.

In addition to their extensive and purposeful use of images, comforters often performed prayers and chants, called laude, that were intended to focus the mind of the condemned toward God and salvation.  

Practices of comforting did

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not rise up out of a desire to assist the criminal members of society, so much as they arose as a way to send a message to the public about the importance of following the church and the rules of the city.

These texts and rituals were seen in Florence, Bologna, and Rome, and they all were influenced by the traditions initiated by *The Art of Dying Well*, as well as by contact between the confraternities through the exchanges between these cities. While there were occasionally small differences in the texts of manuals, and only some imagery remains from these places, the extant documentary evidence from all three cities reveal that these Renaissance communities placed a large significance on the practice of comforting the condemned. Evidence from each of these cities will be used in this essay to demonstrate how this region of Europe was influenced by such texts, as well as to strengthen the argument that comfort practices were put in place strategically to influence the criminal's last moments. The mission of confraternity members who participated in the comfort rituals was to assist the condemned, not only during the actual execution, but throughout the entire judicial process extending from sentencing to burial.\(^9\)

Execution rituals were performed in the city much like theatrical plays or religious ceremonies, and the study of these performances can add insight to the way that these rituals were carried out, and how they impacted the community. Judith Butler discusses performativity as aiming to, "...counter a certain kind of positivism according to which we might begin with already delimited understandings of what gender, the state, and the economy are... Thirdly, performativity starts to describe a set of processes that produce ontological effects, that is, that

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\(^9\) The laymen worked to prepare the condemned for death in many different steps, and similar images as seen on the tavolette would be seen in spaces such as "Il tempio" as can be seen in Allie Terry, "Criminal vision in early modern Florence: Fra Angelico's altarpiece for "Il Tempio" and the Magdalenian gaze," in *Renaissance Theories of Vision* ed. John Shannon Hendrix and Charles H. Carman (London: Ashgate, 2011), which also discusses an image of a Lamentation, such as the imagery on the tavolta mentioned.
work to bring into being certain kinds of realities." Examining these performances as a way to understand what the intentions of the judicial system were in this period can lead to a better understanding of how imagery and the senses played a role in their objectives. This in turn brings new information to the way that images such as the *tavolette* are approached, as their purpose and influence is made clearer.

This thesis will examine the rich, and sometimes overwhelming, sensory environment of punishment rituals in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy to draw attention to the intimate relationship between sight and sound. In recent decades, the study of art history has expanded to consider the appreciation of the work of art as part of a coherent sensory experience for the viewer. Thus, art historians have begun to focus not just on what a viewer would have seen in his or her exchange with the image, but also on what this individual would have heard, felt, smelled, and sometimes even tasted, while experiencing the work. In a case such as the *tavoletta*, where the intention of the work was not solely for aesthetic pleasure but for use by comfort confraternities, the entire sensorial framework of viewing must be considered. In his pioneering research, Samuel J. Edgerton, Jr. introduced the link between Renaissance art and criminal justice to show how artists actively crafted both the private experience for criminals in the days and minutes leading up to execution and the public image of justice for the community who came to witness. Edgerton makes a case for what the senses meant in this society and how they were incorporated in to the ideas of a good death by discussing the power of imagery in the

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11 Sources about senses and places to find more on those studies: Terry, "Criminal Vision"; Terry-Fritsch, "Performing the Body and Mind"; Allie Terry Fritsch, "Renaissance Bodies, Renaissance Minds: Historicizing Somaesthetics in Medicean Florence" in Somaesthetic Experience and the Renaissance Viewer: Art and Political Persuasion in Medicean Florence, 1300-1500 (forthcoming); Johnson, "The Art of Touch in Early Modern Italy"; Jenni Lauwrens, "Welcome to the Revolution: The Sensory Turn and Art History"; Yujin Lee and Paul Duncum, "Coming to our Senses: Revisiting the haptic as a perceptual system."
justice system, not only by showing how public executions influenced the imagery of the period, but also showing how imagery was used to influence those being punished.  

Building from Edgerton and others, Allie Terry-Fritsch has focused on the interrelated role of art and the senses in the criminal justice system, and has discussed the somaesthetics of the criminal experience that impacted the way that art was used and interpreted by criminals. Other scholars, such as Niall Atkinson, discuss the connection between art, architecture, and sound, and have analyzed what these choices say about the way communities operated and how they used their surroundings to accommodate to their larger goals. All of these areas lend a great deal of insight into the ways in which a criminal in Renaissance Italy would have experienced the comforting rituals through sight and sound. This thesis will draw on the insights of these scholars and others to investigate how lay comfort confraternities, such as those established in Florence and Bologna in the fourteenth century, and Rome in the late fifteenth century, used a combination of the *tavolette* and *laude* to help negotiate the punishment process for the condemned.

This analysis focuses on the senses of sight and sound, which dominate the rituals of the comfort confraternities. Building on Atkinson's studies of sound and architecture, in connection

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15 While smell and touch, such as the feeling of movement through the procession, are also critical sensory modes of engagement in these rituals, it is not as dominant and therefore does not add to the overall goal of this essay. Sources about senses and places to find more on those studies: Terry, "Criminal Vision"; Terry-Fritsch, "Performing the Body and Mind"; Allie Terry Fritsch, "Renaissance Bodies, Renaissance Minds: Historicizing Somaesthetics in Medicean Florence" in *Somaesthetic Experience and the Renaissance Viewer: Art and Political Persuasion in Medicean Florence, 1300-1500* (forthcoming); Johnson, "The Art of Touch in Early Modern Italy"; Jenni Lauwrens,
with Edgerton's research on the power of images, and that which Terry-Fritsch has done on the senses and penal justice in Renaissance Italy, this thesis will explore the sensory landscapes of the criminal justice system. Examining these images and texts not only provides a look into the judicial system of this period, but it provides a look at how the justice system determined the types of imagery to use for their very specific purposes, allowing for a deeper understanding of arts place in this society. The evidence discussed will include actual *tavolette*; however, few extant examples are known today, and all have been removed from their original context. To supplement this relatively sparse material evidence, the thesis relies on other forms of primary visual and textual sources, including the depictions of *tavolette* in painted execution scenes, as well as first-hand descriptions of them in actual use. Using these narratives and images, this essay will highlight the way in which the *tavolette* contributed to the carefully controlled sensory experience of Renaissance criminals during the punishment process, an environment that provoked the criminal to ask for redemption, not necessarily for his own well-being or beliefs, but to appease the political and public ideas of death and justice.

"Welcome to the Revolution: The Sensory Turn and Art History"; Yujin Lee and Paul Duncum, "Coming to our Senses: Revisiting the haptic as a perceptual system."
IMAGERY AND EXECUTION

Tavolette were an important aspect of the comforting practices; serving many purposes during the ritual, such as, blocking the condemned from the public, keeping the condemned focused on attaining salvation, and giving a visual relationship to the condemned that could provide comfort by connecting their situation to that of a religious martyr. Such imagery would have provoked the criminal to think of these martyrs and what they stood for, focusing their thoughts on redemption and salvation. Tavoletta imagery was not random, which can be seen in the consistency of the imagery depicted. Redemption and salvation were the objectives that the comforters had when they approached a criminal and the imagery present was meant to underscore these ideas. Even those individuals executed for deviant practices that challenged Christian ideology were still prompted to come back to the faith and ask for forgiveness; the imagery placed in front of them during their confession powerfully impacted their emotional state and guided them to seek redemption.

The development of tavolette as a genre of painting used for the criminal justice system in Italy is connected to the development and spread of religious literature on the proper way to prepare for death, which required meditation with the aid of images. The widely read manual known as The Art of Dying Well advocated for the dying to hold imagery in their hands and actively pray as the end arrived. The first version of The Art of Dying Well was produced by an anonymous Dominican friar in 1415, and was spread through much of Western Europe, being translated into many different languages. Indeed, the manual was found in most Christian households when someone was nearing the end of their life. The text would have been placed in the hands of the dying believer, while relatives and loved ones gave their prayers and provided

16 Mary and Michael Grizzard, Clinical Infectious Diseases, 52.1(2011): ii.
solace for the departing soul. This practice has a distinct parallel with those of the comforting confraternities, particularly in their shared emphasis on preparing for a "good death" through the redemption of the soul through prayer and penance. Italy was one of the few places that instituted comfort confraternities and one of the few areas in Europe where the condemned were allowed the right to redemption.

The imagery of the *tavoletta* engaged the condemned criminal's sight throughout the procession and execution. As seen in Filippo Dolciati's painting of the *Execution of Girolamo Savonarola* (fig. 3), members of the comfort confraternity carried *tavolette* and walked beside condemned prisoners up until the moment of execution. Set within the civic heart of Renaissance Florence, Dolciati's painting depicts the scene of one of the most significant public executions of the fifteenth-century, the burning of the heretical Dominican friar and his supporters in front of the Palazzo della Signoria in 1498. Condemned as heretics due to their beliefs and attempts to influence the public by inventing prophecies and visions, their execution inside the walls of the city ensured that they would be recast in their role as deviants for a wide Florentine public. While the painting reads as one image it shows multiple phases of the punishment process as a whole, with the three criminals in prayer at the beginning of the platform, and then being led down the platform by the laymen, before finally being placed on the cross where they were hanged and burned.

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20 Filippo Dolciati (1443-1519), *Execution of Girolamo Savonarola*, 1498, 15 x 22.8 in., currently housed in the Museo Nazionale di San Marco in Florence, Italy; The painting shows the execution of Fra Giolamo as well as his supporters Fra Domenico and Fra Silvestro Maruffi.

21 Savonarola admitted in prison that he had made the prophecies up, though he later took this confession back, just to make another one at a later time.
The scene is situated in a public square, as can be seen from exterior views of the buildings, and the clear lines they create, signaling the streets used for the procession. Taking up almost two thirds of the left side of the canvas, the execution draws attention to itself, with much of the scene taking place here overloading this section of the painting with activity. The circular end of the platform protrudes out into the left side of the painting, appearing closer to the viewer than the rest of the platform. Smoke clouds wind their way around and up from the floor of the platform, leading into flames, which continue upward until they reach the feet of the condemned who are hung on a large cross. Three criminals are situated on the cross, two prominently at the front, and another whose head sticks out from the back side of the stand. To the side of the flames a ladder is shown, with a man at the bottom dressed in red and white, separating him from the comforters and the criminals. The execution serves as the focal point of the image, not only being the most dramatic and striking event taking place, but it is aligned with the rest of the painting in a manner that connects this scene to the rest of the activities taking place around it.

Looking straight back from the cross the viewer finds a street that is leading away from the public scene. Pairs of citizens can be seen spread out at different sections of the street, marking the event as one that was not only public and open to anyone coming or going, but insinuating it is common nature, as the figures moving through the streets are walking away from the square as if there is nothing unusual happening.

Connected to the circular platform where the criminals are being burned, the rest of the platform continues back and to the right through the painting, leading the viewer's gaze with it. As the platform goes back through the painting different scenes are taking place, all of which demonstrate a step in the punishment process. Right behind the fiery execution scene, another criminal kneels, facing away from the viewer, likely in the middle of praying with the
comforter's that flank his sides. The criminal is clad in an off-white tunic, while the comforters are completely concealed in black robes and masks, with pointed tops. Following right behind the praying criminal, there are two more criminals making their way down the platform with comforter's to their sides. The comforter to the right of each of these criminals holds a *tavoletta* in front of them. While the criminal closest to the viewer seems to be staring diligently at the *tavoletta*, as the comforter holds it close to the criminal's face, it appears that the criminal behind them is less engaged with the imagery, as the comforter holds the object further away, possibly about to turn it over to reveal the image presented on the opposite side of the panel.

Further down the platform and to the right, three criminals kneel in front of an altar. A man on the right holds a book, likely a bible, as the criminals pray and ask for redemption. Men and women are seated behind the altar, watching the execution. These are possibly members of the judicial court and the church. They are separated from the rest of the crowd by the wall and platform in front of them, placing them on a higher level, not just physically but metaphorically.

On the ground below the platform where the criminals are kneeling in prayer, a crowd gathers. The crowd does not express much emotion towards the events, as they stand facing the criminals being executed, at a distance from the actual scene. While the crowd watches in a calm, curious, manner, another crowd can be seen on the left-hand side of the painting, below the circular platform where the execution is taking place.

The execution scene represents multiple stages of the punishment process, from the performance of prayers to the procession and execution. Not only does the viewer see multiple stages of the events, there are multiple criminals being executed. This depiction of multiple executions occurring at the same time on the same stage is not surprising, as at least half (some years as much as 80%) of the executions that took place each decade, between the years of 1540
and 1600, were mass executions.\textsuperscript{22} During these mass executions, each condemned offender would be given his or her own comforter and would have been processed individually, although in many cases the crimes were linked in some manner, such as the three friars in this case.\textsuperscript{23} Two condemned prisoners are being escorted down the platform, with comforters flanking them on both sides. The comforter to the left of each prisoner holds a five-sided plaque connected to a pole, a \textit{tavoletta}. Each of the comforters are shown wearing black gowns and hoods, effectively covering their entire body, keeping their identity hidden and creating even more focus on the imagery.\textsuperscript{24}

Since executions were performed in such a public manner, it is important to consider the act as one that was seen by the people, and not uncommonly. Artists would use such opportunities to study the body of the condemned, both during and after the execution. Visual records of executions may be found in paintings, such as Dolciati’s, as well as in the writings and poetry of authors, such as the earlier journal entry from Montagine. The practice of public execution had many influences, and while it was not uncommon prior to the fifteenth century, there was an increase in the events during the latter half of the century, as those who were sentenced to execution were not only convicted of severe crimes, but also began to include political crimes as well.\textsuperscript{25} Public executions were also seen fairly often in the sixteenth century, as Pope Sixtus V was trying to enforce papal authority after a period of minimal severity in the

\textsuperscript{22} Nicholas Terpstra, \textit{The Art of Executing Well: Rituals of Execution in Renaissance Italy} (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2008): 131. Table 6.3 shows the number of multiple executions in Bologna between 1540-1600, with 1540-49 having the least, with only 54.92\% being mass executions, and 1600 having the largest percent, with 80\% being mass executions.
\textsuperscript{23} ibid. 130
justice system due to the rule of the previous pope.  

During this period, specifically the 1580's, executions became more prevalent than they had been in the previous years. 917 executions were recorded between the years 1540 and 1600 in Bologna, with more than 50 executions taking place in 1585 alone, versus only 116 for the previous decade. This increase in public executions was not only in service of justice but it also served to make a clear message to the community that there would be punishment served for their crimes, especially in Bologna during the Counter-Reformation, when there was an increase in political attention on the ideas of penal justice.

The method of punishment was determined by the crime committed, as well as the criminal's willingness to return to the Catholic faith. The most violent forms of execution were burning and quartering, although criminals often were hung before either of those methods of destroying the body. Those convicts who had committed crimes against the Catholic faith (such as witchcraft, impersonating priests, raping nuns, or misusing sacraments) would be given a simple death if they repented and pledged themselves to faith, while those who refused, such as Protestants, would often be burned alive. Quartering was often reserved for paid killers and the decision to quarter them alive or post-hanging was often dependent on whom they had murdered. Executions were acted out as lessons and they were planned with clear intentions to

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29 Michel de Montaigne, trans. Donald M. Frame, *The Complete Works: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958): 1148. At least this was the case in Italy, though cities who did not believe in separating the body and soul for punishment were less careful with these practices.

deliver a particular message. The punishment was decided with attention to both the crime and the criminal, and there was an intentional use of specific rituals to increase the amount of spectators.

In Italy, this shift to *tavolette* was not out of convenience or curiosity, but it was under the influence of the literature and beliefs encompassed in *The Art of Dying Well*, which made its way across Western Europe in the later part of the fifteenth century. In other words the shift to these portable images did not come from a pure desire for the community to help ease the execution of the criminal, nor was it just a simple tool to create a barrier from the criminal and the crowd. While it managed to do all of these things, the change in how one handled executions came from a sense of duty that *The Art of Dying Well* presented readers, emphasizing a "good death" and a redeemed soul, and the judicial system found a way to use the text and its teachings as a way to influence the public, as well as the criminals they condemned to death.

This text grew over time with many versions being produced over the years, but the original manual consisted of two texts, in Latin, which were printed as pamphlets and often given to those about to die. These manuals described the importance of redemption for the completion of a good death, which influenced society to make an effort to not only save their own souls in death, but even the souls of those who had done greater sin, such as the condemned. Much like the manual being placed in the hands of the dying in their last days, the comforting confraternities placed religious imagery in the sight of those on their way to execution, in the form of the *tavolette*. These images would have served to share the same messages that the text of *The Art of Dying Well* circulated, the key focus being salvation.

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31 ibid: For more examples of *tavolette*, including some which are now hung in museums without any connection to their past as instruments for comforting.
One particularly intriguing tavoletta comes from the Archconfraternity of San Giovanni Decollato in Rome. The artist is unknown, but the panel dates to the sixteenth century. This tavoletta differs from the one discussed above in its composition and its depictions, yet it still provides a very similar message. On one side, the anonymous artist has depicted a *Scene of Hell* while on the other the *Crucifixion* is painted.\(^{32}\) Again, there is a *Crucifixion* scene taking place, but on the opposite side instead of seeing the imagery of followers mourning the body of Christ and finding peace knowing he is in heaven, the criminal would see the *Scene of Hell*. Such imagery would still work to influence the criminal to ask for forgiveness, but this time it would be connected to his or her fear of eternal damnation, rather than the comfort of ending the families suffering. Both of these panels are by unknown artists, and their compositions are very different, signaling that they were likely made by different hands. The anonymous nature of these artists is not peculiar when considering that the images were used for something as difficult and sacred as execution rituals.

This particular tavoletta has five sides, and the bottom of the frame is squared, while the top comes together to form a point. On one side the imagery depicts a *Scene of Hell* (fig. 4), which is not the typical martyr imagery that was depicted on many tavolette, but it is a scene that would hold a lot of meaning for someone facing their death and working to gain their eternal salvation. It is important to address this particular imagery, as it signifies a work that is a bit different than many of the tavoletta that are discussed in these practices, yet it still connects to the ideas that are driving the rituals, making it a strong statement for the motivations that went behind these compositions. At the top of the image a woman holds an infant against a light cloudy background, and looks down to the bottom of the image where figures engulfed in

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darkness stand motioning up at the clouds. This imagery would have accompanied the criminal on his journey to death and it could be seen as a tool to remind the condemned that they have the ability to decide if their fate differs from the fate of those in the image.

On the reverse side is painted a depiction of Christ's Crucifixion (fig. 5), which was one of the most popular images placed on the devotional objects used during comforting. The scene is sparsely populated by just two figures. Christ is on the cross in the top of the image, his arms reaching from one side to the other, while a woman takes up the bottom right hand corner. The image is simple yet powerful, especially when considering it in the context of execution, as the criminal would be about to experience his own death while seeing an image such as that of Christ accepting his death, knowing that it was part of God's plan. This imagery would bring the idea of redemption back to the criminal's mind, as he would be faced with the decision to either embrace death without asking forgiveness for his soul, or to die knowing that though his body will be punished, and his life on Earth through, his soul will be able to join Christ in the afterlife.

The use of tavolette can also be seen through their representation in contemporary drawings and paintings, such as Annibale Carracci's The Hanging (fig. 6). This sixteenth century drawing from the Royal Collection shows two prisoners during execution, one having already been hanged, while the other is being led up the ladder with a comforter holding a tavoletta in front of his face. In this scene the execution is not happening in a public square, but seems to be confined to an enclosure where a simple structure has been assembled for the hanging.

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33 This drawing was part of a study for a painting of an execution: "Collection, 901955" Royal Collection Trust, accessed November 25, 2016. https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/901955. It serves as an example of how these practices were occasionally adapted due to status or possible risk, showing that sometimes these rituals that were laid out did not happen how they were intended, but that they were still deemed necessary, as the use of the tavoletta can still be seen even though the execution here is not public.
34 For more on this image and its place in the history of confraternities see Massimo Ferretti, "In Your Face: Paintings for the Condemned in Renaissance Italy," in The Art of Executing Well: Rituals of Execution in Renaissance Italy, ed. Nicholas Terpstra (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2008): 80.
consisting of just three poles, two going from the ground up, and one going across connecting the two. From this top pole one criminal is already hanging limply, while the rope for the second criminal is tied on the other end, waiting for his ascent up the ladder. The executioner climbs the ladder while holding the criminal, who is facing away from the ladder, focusing on the tavoletta that is being presented in front of him by a Capuchin friar.\footnote{An order of friars within the Catholic church, at one time there was an attempt to keep laypersons from the confraternities and only allow capuchin's to be part of the execution practice. for more on this see : Massimo Ferretti, “In Your Face: Paintings for the Condemned in Renaissance Italy,” in The Art of Executing Well: Rituals of Execution in Renaissance Italy, ed. Nicholas Terpstra (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2008): 80.} In this image the comforter does not wear a mask to cover his face, as would have been the typical practice. The enclosure that the scene is taking place in appears to be outside in a recess in the ground. Walls define the room but they do not lead to a ceiling, but instead they meet the ground above, where plants can be seen in the background. In the upper left-hand corner a crowd is seen looking over the wall at the execution.

Representations of executions were common in this period and are not only useful for understanding the rituals of execution, but they give an insight into the public and political aspect of execution. In images such as Carracci's drawing, the public involvement is minimal, with the citizens peeking over a wall to see what is happening in the space below, almost as if they are not supposed to be present at all. The comforter is present, but his identity is not concealed, as was seen in Dolciati's painting. Carracci’s image contradicts what is known about these practices, which signals a significant change in the narrative of this particular execution. It is possible that the wall blocking those on the outside from the execution is signaling to a case of "secretive justice," where the criminal would be executed privately, which was often only used for high-ranking citizens or clergymen.\footnote{ibid. 81} A change of location could also have something to do with the attention expected for the execution, such as if it was believed that there would be an aggressive
crowd or possibly an attempt to free the prisoner during the procession.\textsuperscript{37} Such differences as the ones seen between the Carracci drawing and the Dolciati painting show the complexity of the punishment practices at this time by illustrating the ways in which these common rituals were occasionally disrupted or adapted.

*Tavolette* served an important role in the conversion of the condemned from his old identity as criminal, to his new identity as a faithful convert by constantly reminding the prisoner of the role of Christ or a martyr, which he should channel throughout the process. In Carracci’s drawing the criminal is already on his way up the ladder to the spot where he will be hanged, and his focus is on the *tavoletta* in front of him. As he is on his way to his death, very aware that his time is limited, he is confronted with imagery of martyrdom, reminding him that his bodily existence is about to end but that there is still hope for his soul should he choose to ask for forgiveness and promise himself to the faith before death. In the drawing there is already an execution completed, while in Dolciati's painting it is likely that the men were each hanged separately before the fire was started so at least two of the men would have been present for the execution, which would have added to the intensity of the moment for the criminal, as not only did he know what his fate was, he could see it as well.

The *tavoletta* is also a powerful tool for creating a sensory wall between the condemned and the public during the execution procession. The visual and aural effects of the *tavoletta* and the *laude* would have overpowered the sights and sound of the public square, working together to create a sensory experience that immersed the criminal on his way to death.\textsuperscript{38} Not only does the *tavoletta* block the criminals face from the witnesses, but it blocks the witnesses from the

\textsuperscript{37} ibid.

criminal. At the same time, the laude would have been the dominant sound coming to the criminal, eliminating some of the noise from the public square. The criminal would also take part in singing the laude as they requested their salvation throughout the procession, as the comforters often encouraged. The criminal would have been subdued by this sensory environment and more likely to follow along with the rituals of the execution, setting an example to the public by accepting death and asking forgiveness of his or her sins, ultimately admitting wrong doing and accepting God and the justice systems choice of punishment.

EXECUTION SOUNDSCAPE

While the goal of public punishment in late medieval and early modern Italy was to ensure that the community saw the distribution of justice, religious rituals underscored the simultaneous goal involved, such as the goal of the comfort confraternities to take the focus off of the condemned man's crimes and place it on his penance and afterlife. These rituals were important to those performing them, as well as to those being comforted by them. A step-by-step guide for the comforting of criminals, known as the Comforters' Manual, provides a critical window into the historical staging and experience of punishment processions and executions. Dated to the fifteenth century, the manual includes prayers, songs, and the mission of the comforter, as well as specific instructions on the comforting process.

The manual shows how completely these rituals were thought-out and how much importance was placed on the comforter's to perform the rituals the way that they were intended. This can also be seen in witness writings produced at the time, such as those by the poet Giulio Cesare Croce, who wrote about many executions, such as that of two lovers who were convicted of patricide. These two lovers, Ippolita Pensarotti and Ludovio Landinelli, were executed by beheading due to their high social status, on January 3, 1587. Croce describes the experience as conforming to all the rules and desires of the execution rituals, even stating that both parties died willingly and that the blow from the executioner was "mercifully" precise. The reactions of the loves to their execution would have been influenced by the rituals, just as Croce's description of their reactions being suitable was influenced by the interpretations the public had of the rituals and their value.

40 ibid. 125.
42 ibid.
In another of Croce's writings he presents himself as Manas the Jew in his final moments before execution, in April 1590.\footnote{Guilio Cesare Croce, "Lament and death of Manas the Jew, who was put on a wagon and tortured with pincers, whose hand was cut off, and who was then hung for murder and other great and terrible crimes. An event which took place in the magnificent city of Ferrara on the last day of April, 1590," in \textit{The Art of Executing Well: Rituals of Execution in Renaissance Italy}, ed. Nicholas Terpstra (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2008): 336-339.}  

Oh Manas, traitor, what have you done, shameless oh? You have been impious and ruthless in committing such a misdeed. Oh Manas, traitor. 

Merciless and cursed one, what did you think you were doing by so crude and horrifying an act? Oh Manas, traitor... 

...Wretched is he who believes that sins can stay hidden, for in the end all abuses are made manifest to the Prime Mover. Oh Manas, traitor. 

I thought that I had committed this excess secretly, and that I would go on happily without punishment or pain. Oh Manas, traitor.\footnote{ibid.: 336, stanzas 1-2 and 4-5.} 

In these opening stanza's the message is clearly one of regret coming from the criminal. It is important to remember that this is not the word of the criminal himself, but that of Croce, a bystander to the events. The way in which Croce writes these words shows just how powerful the rituals were in influencing the community, and it also gives an idea as to what those watching an execution may have seen from the criminal to strengthen their belief that these were the criminal's thoughts. At the end of the writing the criminal is even advising others in his last breath to stay close to God:

And in these final breaths I want to give advice to everyone, adults and children, and I say these things fervently. Oh Manas, traitor.
Oh, Jacob, my dear friend, everyone should remember that they too will soon end up a lifeless form. Oh Manas, traitor.

Pay attention to God, I can say no more than this, since I am already feeling the approach of the final terror. Oh Manas, traitor.

Now that I am strung up here and I kick the wind once or twice, I will end my lament, for my last breath escapes me. Oh Manas, traitor.\textsuperscript{45}

Just as the \emph{tavoletta} and \emph{laude} would have followed the criminal through his last moments until he has passed, reminding him to look for redemption, Croce's writing of this criminal's final moments and words continues to the last breath, with the focus being on the importance of remaining in God's graces. Writings such as this may not provide strong evidence for how an actual criminal themselves was feeling in the moment, but it does provide a sense of how the public viewed these rituals and their purposes, which would have also impacted the criminal's thoughts on the tools being used.

Comforting the condemned was a practice common in Italy from at least the fourteenth century through the first half of the sixteenth century. A large number of the confraternities that participated in this practice were penitential confraternities who were known for having a participatory aspect to their faith.\textsuperscript{46} The use of \emph{tavoletta}, a major piece to the comforting act, is linked especially to the Dominican order. This argument is supported with philosophical evidence found in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican follower of Aristotle.\textsuperscript{47} In Aquinas' writings, there is a strong emphasis on using images for penance, as well as an

\textsuperscript{45} ibid.: 338, stanzas 28-31.

\textsuperscript{46} Kathleen Falvey, "Scaffold and Stage: Comforting Rituals and Dramatic Traditions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy," in \emph{The Art of Executing Well: Rituals of Execution in Renaissance Italy}, ed. Nicholas Terpstra (Kirkville: Truman State University Press, 2008): 13.

\textsuperscript{47} Larry J. Feinberg, "Imagination All Compact: \emph{Tavolette} and Confraternity Rituals for the Condemned in Renaissance Italy," \emph{Apollo} 161, no. 519 (2005): 50.
understanding that the human mind was a key piece in the exchange of images, externally and internally.\textsuperscript{48} Derived from the ideas of Aristotle, who argued that knowledge and thought were merely the receiving, distributing, and forming of imagery, Aquinas' text clearly underlines imagery as having power in all relationships between man and his environment.\textsuperscript{49} These images were referred to as phantasms, and they were vital to the soul and its understanding of the world. Philosophers believed that they were an important piece of sensory images and mental images. As Larry Feinberg states, "Implicit is the understanding that both sensory and mental images, of the various components of thought, pass through the intellect to the soul most directly and efficiently."\textsuperscript{50} Such concepts of participation and performance are important to the study of public executions, as they were viewed by the community and can be seen as a form of performance.

Public executions were planned and thought out like performances, and they were seen in some of the same spaces as plays about martyrdom, or the Passion of Christ. The penitential confraternities that were involved in the comforting practices were also known for their active and participatory devotion to Christ's Passion. During this period, religious plays were frequently staged throughout the Italian peninsula, and often plays that featured Christ's Passion or the martyrdom of saints were presented in juridical spaces, such as the scaffolds, in which confraternities comforted prisoners.\textsuperscript{51} The public spaces of Italy were the heart of the city and the community, and on any given day a number of small and large events were occurring.

\textsuperscript{48} ibid.
\textsuperscript{49} ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} ibid.
throughout, which added to the sensory scenery of the city.\textsuperscript{52} Such spaces were venues to both the religious plays and public executions.\textsuperscript{53} The role of the public square as a place for both of these events demonstrates the importance of the public eye at this time, as well as providing a clear connection between these two events which were performative in nature, as well as grounded in the religious and political ideals of the community. The act of execution had a performance aspect as well, and the lack of separation from the public sphere where these performances and everyday events took place helped strengthen the political ideas placed on the execution performance, which was meant to be seen and set a specific tone of what was and was not acceptable to the church and the courts. The performative scene of executions was one of the many reasons that the senses were so intertwined in the process, as it created movement which would have been felt by the criminals, just as the sight of the \textit{tavoletta} would have connected with them visually.

One of the other major senses that was activated during the comforting ritual would have been the condemned's hearing, as the comforters read or sang from the comforting manual. Prayers were a significant part of the comforting process, as the comforters worked to provide the prisoner with peace and acceptance of his fate. Along with prayers, eventually some of the devotional songs found in the confraternity manuals, known as \textit{laude}\textsuperscript{54}, were brought in to the comforting ritual. \textit{Laude} were used much like the prayers and chants being used at the time and were meant to help the prisoner focus on his eternal salvation, often by relating his situation to


\textsuperscript{53} Kathleen Falvey, "Scaffold and Stage: Comforting Rituals and Dramatic Traditions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy," in \textit{The Art of Executing Well: Rituals of Execution in Renaissance Italy}, ed. Nicholas Terpstra (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2008): 13

that of Christ, saints, and martyrs, much like the *tavolette*. A comforter used such ideas to help prepare the prisoner for execution, with the hope of the prisoner having a "good death."\(^{55}\) It was the comforter's job to help the prisoner come to peace with the death of his body, and this was accomplished by reminding the prisoner that others have gone through this before him.\(^{56}\) However, he can only be considered a martyr if he comes to peace with his execution and forgives those who have played a part in his death. By doing this he is not only taking on the identity of a martyr in death, but he is ensuring that, like the Good Thief, Saint John the Baptist, and the other martyrs, he would join Christ in Paradise upon his death.\(^{57}\)

Such themes were common topics for the texts in the manual and many *laude* dealt with the suffering of martyrs and saints or the Passion of Christ.\(^{58}\) It is important to remember that the manuals for comforting varied among confraternities, just as the rituals of execution practices varied between various cities. Some of the comforting manuals from Bologna have slight differences than those in Rome and Florence, ranging from grammar and spelling, to larger differences such as additional passages, but overall the concept and the intentions behind the passages were the same. The variation in Bolognese manuals suggests that there was not a set of *laude* specific to comforting, and likely it was up to the confraternity who produced the manual copies.\(^{59}\) While the *laude* are present in the manuals, the way in which they should be used is not detailed, leaving some freedom to the comforter on which *laude* to sing, and when. Their


\(^{58}\) ibid.

\(^{59}\) ibid: 32.
popularity and wide-spread use throughout Italy is likely how their purpose was readily known, as *laude* had been around for over 200 years before the idea of comforting arose.60

There were numerous forms of the *laude* and some of them could have served as reminders of lessons that the comforters had given to the prisoner during the ministry the previous evening, while others emphasized the relationship between Christ, the martyrs, and the prisoner.61 Not all of the *laude* would have been used during the rituals, but instead the comforter would choose which ones to perform for that particular execution, which gave them the ability to adapt each performance to the criminal that was being executed, allowing them to make a deeper connection to his crimes and the lessons in the manual. During the comforter's prayers and ministry the night before the execution, his mission is to convince the prisoner that his body and soul are separate and that the body takes punishment so that the soul can move on instead of suffering for eternity. These ideas are then repeated through the imagery and singing that is surrounding the condemned during the procession. Though the manual does not clearly give a purpose to the *laude*, by analyzing them along with the images used during the rituals, arguably they should be considered another critical aspect in the process of influencing the criminals in their choice to ask for forgiveness. In the manual, the comforter would have found numerous *laude* which they could present to the prisoner for comfort to influence him or her to ask for redemption.

The *laude* would have dominated the criminal's soundscape, eliminating some of the noise from the public square. Not only would the voices of the comforters be surrounding the

60 ibid.
criminal, but often his or her own voice would be present, taking part in the singing.\textsuperscript{62} The sensory experience of the criminal was already strongly focused on ideas of redemption, with the \textit{tavoletta} being presented before him, encouraging him to follow the paths of these men. Adding to this concept the \textit{laude} that were being performed were also often related to martyrs, the Passion of Christ, and the Virgin Mary acting as an intercessor, making their words harmonious with the ideas presented on the \textit{tavoletta}.\textsuperscript{63} Sensory environments like the ones created during an execution procession would not have been completely by chance, but were likely performed with very precise intentions to create a specific space for the events taking place. Noise was an aspect of everyday life in the Renaissance period, just as (if not more so) it is today, and there were far fewer ways to cover up unwanted or distracting sounds, which left many to consider how to manipulate the aural landscape around them for their purposes.

Noise not only disrupts the experience of time, but also of space, when it negatively impacts the relationship between the individual and the environment.\textsuperscript{64} Communities that tackled the issue of auditory interruptions in periods such as the Renaissance, which was focused around sensation,\textsuperscript{65} saw it as a way to creatively manipulate their surroundings and find ways to use the undesirable sounds to their advantage, or ways in which to create a soundscape around them that fit their needs and enhanced their physical and mental experiences in the moment.\textsuperscript{66} Comforters and their rituals were no exception to this process. Although their manuals and rituals were

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{63} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Niall Atkinson, "Thinking through Noise, Building toward Silence: Creating a Sound Mind and Sound Architecture in the Premodern City," Grey Room 60 (2015): 12. See for more on the history of noise, as well as discussion on how we are aurally distant from the past.
\item \textsuperscript{65} Richard G. NewHauser, "Foreword: The Senses in Medieval and Renaissance Intellectual History," Senses and Society 5.1 (2010): 6. Discusses further the relevance of sensory studies in fields such as art and renaissance studies.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Niall Atkinson, "Thinking through Noise, Building toward Silence: Creating a Sound Mind and Sound Architecture in the Premodern City," Grey Room 60 (2015): 12.
\end{itemize}
influenced by the *Art of Dying Well*, the way in which they went about performing these rituals was heavily influenced by the environment around them physically, politically, and aurally. Executions were done in a public sphere, where the community was able to be present, and everyday life continued to go forward.\(^6^7\) Such a public area would likely be crowded and loud, as street vendors and shoppers did their work, not to mention any chaos that witnessing an execution could then add, especially if the family of the criminal and those who had been victims of the criminal's actions were present. By adding their own aural environment to the event, the comforters managed to separate the criminal from those distractions and keep the focus on God, which in turn blocked out any reactions that the criminal would have had to the sounds coming from the square, as they were muffled by the sounds of devotional songs.

The *laude* presented in the comforting manual were aimed at creating an environment focused on God, his forgiveness, and the criminal's sin and need for redemption. They accomplish this by pointing to ideas such as mercy and martyrs, such as the *laude* entitled, "Have Mercy, Oh God Most High" (*Misericordia o alto Dio Soprano)*:

Have mercy, oh God most High

With heart and mouth I call you,

To help me at this dread time.

\(^6^7\) As can be seen in the descriptions from Montagine, as he came across the execution on his way to do other errands in the town.
Have mercy! Oh sweet Lord
By your grace and pity
Reaching out to me at this awful time.\textsuperscript{68}

The opening stanzas of this prayer put an emphasis on the idea of forgiveness by repeating the phrase "have mercy," as well as using terms like "grace" and "pity." They also signal that the criminal needs to ask for this forgiveness and redemption publically; ",...with heart and mouth I call you, to help me at this dread time." This makes it clear that just asking for forgiveness internally, or privately, is not enough, but that it must be spoken aloud and the faith claimed publically. It was not unusual for the prisoners to be encouraged to chant or sing along during these activities,\textsuperscript{69} therefore the words of the laude became their own. As they sang about redemption they were also asking to receive it.

The song goes on to signal towards Christ's sacrifice and crucifixion as well as to the martyrs that died in allegiance to Christ:

Have mercy! By your suffering
That you bore on that wood for me
That was our deliverance and salvation.
Have mercy! For that high kingdom;
Promising years in the heavenly court
With favored saints, oh good Lord.

Have mercy! Through that bitter fate
Of martyrs, constant and blessed,
With favored saints, oh good Lord.\textsuperscript{70}

In these lines there is a clear connection drawn between the criminal and the martyr, especially when asking God to have mercy, "through that bitter fate/ Of martyrs, constant and blessed./ with favored saints..." as the \textit{laude} links the death of the criminal and the martyr in their "bitter fate."

This connection was important because it allowed the criminal to link his death with the sacrifice of a martyr, giving him a sense that they are dying with a purpose, should they ask for forgiveness and allow their soul to ascend to heaven. It also served to connect the criminal and Christ, with references to the Crucifixion and his death serving to deliver individuals from sin.

As the condemned heard, and possibly sang, these words, while looking at the image of Christ on the cross, they would be led to consider their own sin, and how their soul can be saved, thanks to Christ's sacrifice.

The first 16 of 17 stanzas in the song begin with "Have mercy," with the last stanza beginning simply with "Mercy." Stanzas 10 through 14 do not only start with "Have mercy" in the first line, but the words begin each line in the stanza.\textsuperscript{71} Repeating these words brought a sense of urgency to the idea of God's mercy by using the term so frequently. The criminal thus was surrounded by the concept of forgiveness, both visually surrounded with the imagery on the \textit{tavolette} before his or her face and aurally through the songs that permeated the judicial space.

Whether or not the \textit{laude} were produced with the idea of the criminal in mind specifically, it is clear that the \textit{laude} that were chosen to be represented in the comforting manual were intended to


\textsuperscript{71} ibid.
place the criminal in an environment where the only positive path to take was asking for redemption. Faith was a large part of this society and seeing the condemned actively asking for forgiveness before death visualized a powerful message for the public about the justice system, as well as the faith. Not only would it have made it clear that the city was focused on keeping the community safe and righteous by eliminating sinners and making them receive justice, it also set a clear precedent for how one should live their life to have a "good death," and just how essential it was to openly and actively take part in the faith. The sound of the prayers would have been heard by the onlookers as well, reminding them that staying loyal to the faith and the community is the only way to guarantee a "good death."

While the images being discussed in this essay provide evidence for what one would have seen at an execution in this period, they also include small details that allude to an aural environment. Looking at Dolciati's painting again, the depiction of various crowds of citizens, religious figures, and even animals, give the sense of a busy public square, which would signal the presence of numerous sounds. The horse rearing in the center of the square and the groups of people moving around signal to the viewers that there was talking and movement occurring in the background. While one cannot hear the prayers coming from the criminals in the painting, their kneeling images next to the priest gives insight into what was happening in this scene, and when combined with the knowledge from the manual it is easy to place the sounds of the prayers into the context of this scene.

*Laude* were not just used to create a block between the criminal and the sounds of the piazza, nor was their sole purpose just to comfort, but they were a strong tool for influencing the criminals in their decision to ask for redemption and have a "good death." *Laude* were thought to strengthen the relationship between man and God, and they were also thought to be a major
factor in influencing the community; as Blake Wilson has argued, "A closer look at lay company activities reveals what they considered to be one of the most effective means of persuasion--song. The laudai of the laudesi companies were deemed strong spiritual currency..."\textsuperscript{72} Song was a powerful tool and those in charge of the confraternities knew how influential it could be, therefore the choice to use song as part of their rituals held more meaningful intention than just comforting criminals on their way to their death. The songs worked together with the imagery to create an environment that surrounded the condemned in the stories of Christ and martyrs, ensuring that they took their fate seriously and found redemption for their soul before it departed their body.

CONCLUSION

The powerful imagery of the *tavolette* and the sounds of the confraternity members praying and singing helped to construct a sensory barrier that disconnected the condemned from the sights and sounds of the public square. This acted as a way to keep the prisoner calm and focused on his penance, as he was unable to make visual contact with members of the crowd of witnesses, whether family, friends, or possibly angry citizens who were in favor of his death. Such a separation eliminated an emotional aspect by disconnecting the prisoner from his family and peers. However, this connection was then replaced by the constant reminder of God and salvation presented in the form of the *tavoletta* and the *laude*. In this manner a sensory landscape was built around the criminal, which would have influenced his or her experience during the execution.

It is important to consider the meaning behind the prayers and images, as well as the sensory overload that the prisoner would have been experiencing at the time, with the imagery and *laude* surrounding them, when interpreting criminal reactions. A report from a witness account in 1512 describes the reactions of Pietro Pagolo Boscoli during his public procession to execution:

And as he ascended the stairs he kept his eyes on the *tavoletta*, and with most loving accent said: Lord thou art my love; I give thee my heart... here I am, Lord; I come willingly... And this he said with such tenderness that all who heard him were in tears...

And halfway down the stairs he met the Crucifix, and said: What ought I to do? And the
friar replied: This is your captain who comes to arm you. Salute Him, honour Him and pray that He gives you strength... and he continued praying...\textsuperscript{73}

Here the criminal is focused on the imagery he is presented with and he follows the instructions of the friar, staying calm and praying for his salvation. A moment that would be imagined by most as a troubling and anxious one is met with calmness from the prisoner as he focuses on the images presented before him. David Freedberg discusses this passage by pointing out that the matter of interest here is not whether the criminal is just unusually calm for the circumstance or whether it was really the image that subdued him, but why people believed that it was the power of the image that calmed the prisoner.\textsuperscript{74} This again points to the significance of imagery in this period, and how it was seen by society as an instrument of power, and therefore easily used as one by the church.

Regardless of whether the witness of the execution was an artist who diligently watched the events, or just a member of the community who was there to see justice be served, the impact of public executions was large. There are numerous witness accounts of executions, such as those discussed already, and these accounts are often very detailed, which shows how deeply the public was affected by them. Regardless of the viewers' intentions as they experienced the execution, they would have had a much different experience than the prisoner, which also conveyed a much different message. Witnesses to the execution would have seen a procession of about a dozen laymen, dressed in black robes, concealing their identities. These members of the comfort confraternity would be performing different tasks, but one would be holding a crucifix, while the other would be with the prisoner. One member would hold the \textit{tavolette} in front of the prisoner, who would not be visible to the viewers. From their viewpoint they would have seen

\textsuperscript{74} ibid.
merely the body and movements of the prisoner. This would disconnect the public from the 
prisoner in a way that made them less relatable, but would show them that crimes would not go 
unpunished, and that remaining faithful to God was their only route to salvation. 

Comforting practices were an important part of the religious ritual of the city, allowing 
the city and the confraternity to eliminate sin through the execution of criminals and the 
forgiveness of these criminals by God before death. Tavolette were thought of as images with the 
power to comfort and move the prisoner in his final hours. The use of such imagery, as seen on 
the tavoletta of the Crucifixion, came together with the laude to conceal the prisoner in an 
overwhelming sensory experience, which would have kept him focused on asking for 
forgiveness rather than on the movements and noises coming from the public square. In the same 
way that the prisoner was separated from the public, they were separated from the criminal. This 
made a clear distinction between the objectives of the performance for each party, as the public 
was meant to see a message of justice, while the prisoner was supposed to be accepting his death 
willingly and asking forgiveness.

These events were set in a public scene deliberately and the rituals that went behind them 
were just as thought out and intentional. Comforting manuals provide evidence that these rituals 
were complex and considered incredibly important and sacred, as seen in the instructions and 
prayers that were documented for the comforters use. Comforters were expected to use these 
very specific tools to perform their goal of saving the criminal's soul and giving him a "good 
death," which makes the comforting manual one of the strongest pieces of evidence supporting 
the argument that the rituals were intended to influence the criminals in their choice to ask for 
redemption.
The imagery used on the *tavolette*, as well as the stories presented through the prayers, make for another strong argument about the intentions of the comforting confraternities. The stories all revolved around the crucifixion of Christ, martyrs, and redemption. These images and songs were the most present sensory elements for the criminal before and during his execution. When combining these with the emotional context of the criminal being walked to his death, it would create a very pointed message for the criminal, pushing him to accept himself as sinner and ask for forgiveness in order to save his soul. While some criminals may have been willing to ask for forgiveness on their own, some would have been less likely to adopt this approach, especially those who were being punished for acts against the faith. By focusing their last moments on the public request for redemption, comfort confraternities placed psychological pressure on the criminal to consider his or her death, and it also serves to show the public that going against the faith was not wise. Comfort confraternities changed the way that executions were performed in Italy, allowing criminals peace and last rights, while other regions (such as France) did not give their condemned these same rights, believing that their soul should also suffer. While some of the changes in practice made it seem as if these cities were being more accommodating or kind to criminals, there was much more to these choices than just saving the souls of sinners.

As the rituals were put together with these specific goals in mind, the role of the senses was also present in the justice systems process. There was a strong awareness of the influence of sight and sound in this period and the comfort rituals were designed to create their own sensory environment around the criminal, that would not only separate them from the public sensory landscape they were in the middle of, but it would guide them to a place of acceptance and redemption concerning their impending death. Through an examination of the *tavolette* and
laude used to create such an environment, as well as the first-hand descriptions of executions which utilized them, it is clear that the influence of the sensory landscape went beyond that of the criminal. The ideas behind these rituals were embedded in to the communities that utilized them and while what the witnesses saw and heard differed from what the criminal experienced, the way in which the texts describe the criminal’s reaction to execution shows that these sensory environments also influenced those who were not directly a part of them. In this manner, it was possible for the justice system to make a point to the rest of the community through these rituals, as they demonstrated the punishment that crimes would receive, while also showing that one must accept God and go gracefully in to death.

This deep examination of the comforting practices of Renaissance Italy, and their use of the senses through tavolette and laude, provides a new look at how images were used in this period by going past the meaning of the images alone and looking at how the influence the society around them. Not only were these images made and used with the intention of influencing criminals in to salvation, but they themselves were heavily influenced by these goals that were presented through *The Art of Dying Well*. While they were not made for aesthetic purposes, they were indeed made with their reception by the viewer in mind, just as the laude that were chosen to be in the *Comforting Manual* were included with the purpose of evoking certain experience from the viewer. Such an awareness of the influence of these tools and their message demonstrates how actively these sensory aspects were considered in the daily life of these communities, providing the study of these images and texts with a more complete and direct purpose.


Croce, Giulio Cesare, "Lament and death of Manas the Jew, who was put on a wagon and tortured with pincers, whose hand was cut off, and who was then hung for murder and other great and terrible crimes. An event which took place in the magnificent city of Ferrara on the last day of April, 1590,*" in *The Art of Executing Well: Rituals of Execution in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Nicholas Terpstra, Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2008.


Johnson, Geraldine, A., "The Art of Touch in Early Modern Italy."


###. "Donatello's Decapitations and the Rhetoric of Beheading in Renaissance Florence;"


Wilson, Blake, *Music and Merchants*. 

Figure 1: Unknown artist, *tavoletta* showing a *Lamentation* on one side and a *Crucifixion* on the other, Archconfraternity of San Giovanni Decollato, Rome. *Crucifixion* side. Located in Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment*, pg. 171.
Figure 2: Unknown artist, tavoletta showing a Lamentation on one side and a Crucifixion on the other, Archconfraternity of San Giovanni Decollato, Rome. Lamentation side. Located in Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment*, pg. 170.
Figure 3: Filippo Dolciati, *Execution of Girolamo Savonarola*, 1498, Museo di San Marco, Florence.
Figure 4: Unknown artist, *tavoletta* showing a *Scene of Hell* on one side and a *Crucifixion* on the other, Archconfraternity of San Giovanni Decollato, Rome. *Scene of Hell* side. Located in Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment*, pg. 168.
Figure 5: Unknown artist, *tavoletta* showing a *Scene of Hell* on one side and a *Crucifixion* on the other, Archconfraternity of San Giovanni Decollato, Rome. *Crucifixion* side. Located in Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment*, pg. 169.
Figure 6: Annibale Carracci, *The Hanging*, late 16th century, Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 901955. Located at: https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/901955