KELLY, MAGGIE S. Ph.D. Blood Cries Out: Negotiating Embodiment and Otherness in the Premodern World. (2023) Directed by Dr. Jennifer Feather. 203 pp.

My dissertation focuses on medieval and early modern literary uses of blood symbolism to describe and represent these marginalized groups: Christ, women, Jews, and disabled persons. My key argument is that blood is the nexus at which competing rhetorics of otherness converge—it both connects and complicates these discourses; blood becomes the locus of social and bodily rhetorics of marginalization because of its complex and fluid nature. Blood can be used both to include and exclude various groups of people. While I will cover numerous discourses of otherness, my key focus here will be religious and medical rhetorics. During the medieval and early modern periods, we see a burgeoning shift from religious to medical discussions of embodiment, especially as they relate to marginalized groups, and the use of blood symbolism appears in both of these rhetorics. It is not my intention to argue that medical rhetoric outright replaces/displaces religious rhetorics of the body, but rather that cultural ideas about *blood* in particular allow society to shift between—and merge—these two discourses, and many others, more fluidly.

While the meanings of blood abound, a similar vein runs through them all: the presence of blood—either literal or metaphorical—coats whatever it touches with a stratum of gravity. Hundreds of years after humoral theory has been discredited and abandoned, complex and paradoxical beliefs about blood still remain. Why, of the four humors, are we still talking about blood? Why do we still ascribe cultural and personal value to this bodily fluid?

In my dissertation, I turn to premodern writers to address these questions because blood symbolism is so heavily employed and encoded, and more importantly being redefined, in a number of literary texts during the medieval and early modern periods. Blood has remained a cultural fascination for centuries because it is rife with symbolic power, and premodern writers utilized this emblematic potential repeatedly in literary texts. More specifically, these writers often used blood rhetoric to demarcate and define marginalized groups of people. These others exist in a liminal social space, and the fluidity of blood's symbolism enables these marginalized groups and individuals to occupy multiple identities and spaces simultaneously in the larger social mind. Blood is the nexus at which the social and physical converge, and blood symbolism allows cultural meaning to be transcribed onto (and within) the body. As Genesis notes, blood cries out, and in this case, it cries out for attention, and it cries out for definition.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See Genesis 4:10

# BLOOD CRIES OUT: NEGOTIATING EMBODIMENT

## AND OTHERNESS IN THE

### PREMODERN WORLD

by

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Approved by

Dr. Jennifer Feather Committee Chair

# DEDICATION

Dedicated to my kind and brave daughter, Piper Violet Kelly. Always know that you can do anything. And, don't forget: girls rule!

## APPROVAL PAGE

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#### INTRODUCTION: BLOOD CRIES OUT

"Blood...is used to substantiate cultural assumptions."<sup>2</sup>

The English language overflows with metaphors and phrases about blood. "Blood is thicker than water," a common adage in the Western world, illustrates the idea that loyalty— amongst family especially—is a bond to be esteemed above all others. Blood in this case signifies a genetic connection; blood, more generally, can betoken a myriad of meanings. "Blood brothers" describes a bond even deeper than biology; someone who is "cold-blooded" shows no remorse; a "blood pact" is an almost sacred way to seal an agreement. While the meanings of blood abound, a similar vein runs through them all: the presence of blood—either literal or metaphorical—coats whatever it touches with a stratum of gravity. Hundreds of years after humoral theory has been discredited and abandoned, complex and paradoxical beliefs about blood still remain. Why, of the four humors, are we still talking about blood? Why do we still ascribe cultural and personal value to this bodily fluid?

I turned to premodern writers to address these questions because blood symbolism is so heavily employed and encoded, and more importantly redefined, in a number of literary texts during the medieval and early modern periods. Blood has remained a cultural fascination for centuries because it is rife with symbolic power, and premodern writers utilized this emblematic potential repeatedly in literary texts. More specifically, these writers often used blood rhetoric to demarcate and define marginalized groups of people. These *others* exist in a liminal social space, and the fluidity of blood's symbolism enables these marginalized groups and individuals to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> (Bildhauer 20). Bildhauer, Bettina. *Medieval Blood*. Paperback ed, Univ. of Wales Press, 2009.

occupy multiple identities and spaces simultaneously in the larger social mind. Blood is the nexus at which the social and physical converge, and blood symbolism allows cultural meaning to be transcribed onto (and within) the body. As Genesis pronounces—blood cries out—and in this case, it cries out for attention, and it cries out for definition.<sup>3</sup>

The symbolic representations of blood throughout medieval and early modern history, both varied and complex, evidenced numerous social ideas about identity. Or, as Paster notes "Like other kinds of ideologically overdetermined signs, blood in early modern England was a discursive site of multiple, competing, even self contradictory meanings and the relations between blood and the individual body containing it was no less ideological than physiological. In one's blood were carried the decisive attributes of one's cultural identity" (66). For example, women's blood was believed to be thinner and more abundant than that of men, and this belief offered both medical explanations for the female body's need to menstruate as well as social explanations for the supposed superficiality and capriciousness of women. People of lower classes were also thought to have thinner blood due to their strenuous labor and excessive sweating, as compared to the members of the upper class who did not have to exert themselves physically as often.<sup>4</sup> It is also during this time that beliefs surrounding the sacred blood of Christ are starting to transform; as the Protestant Reformation begins in the late medieval period, the idea of transubstantiation is hotly debated: the question of whether or not the Eucharist literally transforms itself into the blood and flesh of Christ. Aside from the Protestant/Catholic transubstantiation debate, artwork from this time, especially the Middle Ages, demonstrates a fascination with the blood of Christ, with some images even depicting Christ's blood as a form

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See Genesis 4:10

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Ultimately, it is the thickness, and thus the purity and richness, of the white upper class male's blood that sets him above the lower classes and above women of all classes.

of lactation and physical sustenance for penitent believers. These aforementioned beliefs are really just an iota of the abundance of blood culture from the medieval and early modern periods. Ultimately, the culture's fascination with blood, coupled with the plentitude of metaphors attached to blood, make this red liquid the consummate microcosm of cultural belief about embodiment.

Numerous scholars have explored the symbolic implications of blood in the premodern world. These studies range in perspective and approach from historical, religious, medical, to literary. It is my goal in this dissertation to combine all of these aforementioned approaches in my own discussion of premodern blood symbolism. When it comes to discussions of medieval blood symbolism, two works have especially influenced me: Caroline Walker Bynum's Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond and Bettina Bildhauer's Medieval Blood. For my study of early modern blood symbolism, these two works have been monumentally helpful: The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England by Gail Kern Paster and Blood Matters: Studies in European Literature and Thought, 1400-1700, which is a collection of essays edited by Bonnie Lander Johnson and Eleanor Decamp. Bynum's work was especially insightful in my discussion of the religious implications of blood; Paster's work contributed to my understanding of gendered bleeding; and Bildhauer along with Johnson and Decamp's works provided a prototype for a more comprehensive and varied examination of premodern blood symbolism. Altogether, these four works have been fundamental in bolstering my understanding of premodern assumptions about blood and embodiment at large.

Blood in literature is no new topic in early modern literary studies. However, I will be creating an original avenue in this scholarly discussion in that I will include a analysis of

numerous epistemologies of embodiment (including especially religious and scientific), I will focus on literary analysis of 14th century to 17th century texts (most of which are British), and I will incorporate a number of forms of identity rather than discussing just one. Many of the scholarly works about blood focus on one component of identity (i.e. race, gender, etc.), while my dissertation plans to explore numerous forms of otherness throughout. In summation, my dissertation will combine ideas that no one particular scholar has discussed in any particular depth. By creating a monograph that examines numerous aspects of otherness, I will be able to create a more coherent and expansive discussion of the cultural shift in epistemological thought about the physical presence of the body and how it demarcates social standing. By taking a more comprehensive approach to blood studies, I will demonstrate my key argument: that blood's fluidity makes it the ideal nexus point to negotiate contingent epistemologies of social identity.

At this point, I'd like to establish some of these key terms that I will be using throughout my dissertation. These include *othered/other(s)/otherness* and *norm* as well as the terms *medical rhetoric* and *social rhetoric*. In my dissertation, I will explore a number of *othered* groups: Christ, women (especially mothers), those with physical deformities and/or disabilities, and Jews. I chose these groups in particular because they are *othered* foremost by their *physical bodies*, which in some way differ from the *norm* (see definition immediately below) and thus mark them as deficient in society. I define the term *othered* as "people who have been deemed outcasts for physical and/or social traits outside of the accepted *norm*," which I define as "white upperclass hetereosexual cisgender males with no marked physical ailments, disabilities, or deformities." If someone does not adhere, in one or more ways, to these aforementioned standards of the *norm*, they become *othered*. I will also use *marginalize(d)* interchangeably with *othered*. I define *medical rhetoric* as language that describes the physical condition and presence

of the body (its functions, parts, ailments, etc.) using terms deemed by scholars as professional/expert vocabulary. I define *social/cultural rhetoric* as language that describes both metaphorical and literal conditions of the body through standards of the *norm* and the *othered*. I will argue that when it comes to language surrounding blood specifically, medical and social rhetoric collide and overlap, demonstrating a cultural movement towards legitimizing social otherness through medical terminology while simultaneously adhering to social rhetoric of the past, which relied more heavily on religious epistemologies of embodiment. These are all of the key terms that I will use repeatedly throughout my dissertation.

In conclusion, this dissertation seeks to explore the multifarious and complex nature of blood symbolism in the premodern world. In doing so, I will argue that blood's fluidity facilitated a conduit through which a wide application to numerous epistemologies of identity and embodiment could be examined and negotiated. I will demonstrate this through an exploration of the blood symbolism in various medieval and early modern literary texts. Ultimately, I intend to show that blood is the fundamental pivot point at which premodern culture begins to redefine selfhood at a tumultuous time in history; blood works to both cement and challenge social distinctions because it is at once bodily and immaterial.

#### **Blood: A Premodern History**

My dissertation will focus on literary texts from the medieval and early modern periods. This is a time in history that is rife with uncertainty—about national identity, religious affiliation, and medical models of thinking about the body and personhood. The premodern citizen had to negotiate their place in a world where identity was anything but secure and stable. Of this personal and collective negotiation of identity, Johnson and Decamp remark that "Blood offered a vital conceptual terrain through which to pose questions about the self as separate from and

embedded within the blood that circulated in collective bodies, from the body of Christ, and the body politic, to the social bodies that underpinned economic negotiation and the world of the professional theater itself' (5). With Johnson and Decamp's argument in mind, my dissertation seeks to demonstrate that blood symbolism was such a dominant discourse in the premodern epistemologies of otherness because it too was just as fluid, and just as unstable, as the premodern concept of self.

As I mentioned earlier, religious beliefs about blood were undergoing massive transformation during the late medieval and early modern periods. Of particular contention during the premodern world is the nature of the blood of Christ, especially as it relates to the Eucharist and the concept of transubstantiation. The Protestant Reformation brought the blood and body of Christ to the forefront of religious debate. Wars were waged, societies were torn apart, massive schisms occurred—and at the center of all of this turmoil was blood. Medical notions of blood were also changing during this period. As the humoral theory began to lose its sovereignty, definitions of blood and its role in shaping identity were certainly in flux. One significant change in thought about blood during this period occurred through William Harvey's discoveries about blood circulation. Harvey learned that the heart circulates blood throughout the body in a singular flow, thus reversing the long-held "Galenic notion of an interventricular septum."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Harvey's studies led him to conclude that spirit was contained within all blood, which also contradicted Galen's belief that blood was of two types, those with and without spirit. Ultimately, the discoveries of Harvey are significant to the history of blood for two reasons: one, his findings underscored the vital nature of blood to the body; secondly, his breakthroughs were key in the gradual rejection of Galenic medicine, which had been the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> (Healy 18).

dominant school of thought for centuries. This gradual move away from Galenic medicine also prompted a shift in early modern epistemologies of embodiment: if one was not made up of humors, and subject to the balance of these substances, what regulated the body, and how could we monitor it? Blood became the conduit, even more so than ever before, through which the body could be observed, measured, and understood. So, as humorology became less and less popular, notions about most of the humors held less sway, all except for blood, which arguably became increasingly indispensable to both the cultural and medical epistemologies of embodiment.

Despite the waning popularity of the humoral theory, the practice of bloodletting persisted well into the 19th century. Much like Galen and Harvey's notions of blood, bloodletting was a medical practice rife with cultural connotations, which is perhaps why people continued to practice phlebotomy even after its medical efficacy was disproven. To partake in this practice was to participate in a ritual—a ritual that became a demonstration of both physical and mental autonomy. In fact, the practice of bloodletting had social implications about both the patient and the practitioner. For example, women, who were widely assumed to possess a superfluidity of blood, could have their blood let if they did not experience regular menstrual cycles, which were thought to be the body's natural way to purge women of their multitudinous toxins; thus, when a woman practiced bloodletting, it was an exercise in self-correction and selfcontrol. Not only did bloodletting carry social connotations for patients, but for practitioners as well. Both surgeons and barbers practiced phlebotomy in the early modern period; while the former were deemed knowledgeable practitioners of this practice, and the latter were unlicensed and technically unable to practice phlebotomy, both groups were still heavily involved in the practice. Despite barbers' inability to legally perform bloodletting, many people still visited them

because they were the least expensive choice of the two. It was so common that the practice of using a barber to perform phlebotomy became a standing joke in literature, as Eleanor Decamp notes.<sup>6</sup> In fact, bloodletting was a medical practice so tightly wound to deeper cultural meaning, that it was repeatedly employed in early modern literature to convey symbolic gestures to the audience. Decamp examines one such scene in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, when Lavinia uses a basin to capture her rapists' blood; Decamp reads this scene as a metaphorical bloodletting, as do I, and I will discuss this in more depth in chapter 2 of my dissertation. Bloodletting, more so than most other medical practice, was inundated with cultural meaning.

Historically, blood has been a complex bodily fluid, whose meanings and implications have extended far beyond the medical world. I'd argue that no other part of our body is so flooded with nuanced meaning as is blood. While the Galenic humoral theory placed an emphasis on bodily fluids as a means of well-being and balance, blood is the most paradoxical entity of the four, arguably because it is the most visible of the four. While humors such as yellow and black bile were much more interior than blood, and phlegm was much less mysterious and sexy, blood was and *still is* a complex symbol of humanity, or in other words, "blood touches and is codified by every area of human experience."<sup>7</sup> It is because of this perplexing and often paradoxical nature that I'm interested in exploring representations of blood in medieval and early modern literature, especially the *language* used to describe blood and bleeding. When literature from this period speaks of blood, it is not just speaking of the physical entity, the red liquid—it is also speaking of ideas about selfhood and society.

#### **Premodern Notions of Otherness**

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See "'In such abundance... that it fill a Bason': Early Modern Bleeding Bowls," pages 170-171. In addition, much of the information in this paragraph about bloodletting was gleaned from Decamp's article.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> This quote is taken from the Introduction of *Blood Matters: Studies in European Literature and Thought, 1400-1700* (2), ed. by Johnson and Decamp.

Premodern Europe, especially England, is the perfect example of a culture with an identity crisis. Monumental changes were taking place in the medieval and early modern periods, leading entire groups of people to question their very existence. Among these shifts were the religious upheaval of the Protestant Transformation, at which blood became a key point of debate. In addition, notions of nationhood were beginning to become solidified, especially as global exploration and colonization became a priority for many monarchies, most notably England under Queen Elizabeth's reign. Furthermore, new advancements in the world of science and medicine were happening at a monumental pace, generating a world ripe for the Scientific Revolution. Whether it was religious debate, national identity, or transforming medical thoughts, all of these changes were implicated in the notion of one's self, and blood was at the center of all of these notions. Blood allowed the premodern human to examine the social and physical implications of his/her own embodiment; and because of blood's fluidity, these conceptions were sometimes contradictory and often disparate.

In my dissertation, I will explore a number of *othered* groups: Christ, women (especially mothers), those with physical deformities and/or disabilities, and Jews. I chose these groups in particular because they are *othered* foremost by their *physical bodies*, which in some way differ from the *norm* and thus mark them as deficient in society. Each of these above-named othered groups will be highlighted in a chapter, and each chapter will examine several early modern and/or medieval works of literature that feature characters of that particular othered group. Through this literary examination, I will argue that the author(s) use *blood rhetoric* to depict and mark the otherness of those particular characters in question. Literature is the perfect way to examine this theory because it is a reflection on and/or indictment against contemporary cultural values.

Additionally, the literary use of medical rhetoric to describe otherness, and the other's blood, is significant because it, as I will argue, demonstrates a cultural attempt to scientifically legitimize long-established social prejudices against the *othered*, which were previously defined by class and religion. This shift towards the more widespread use of medical rhetoric marks a transition in the medical world, which was on the precipice of the Scientific Revolution, towards using empirical forms of observation and experimentation to understand the unknown and then ultimately define it. Furthermore, the increased use of medical rhetoric in the layman's vocabulary underscores a cultural shift which places medicine and science at the top of the empirical pyramid, thus challenging, and in some ways supplanting, both class and religion's top positions as the measures of all value—the definitive gauge of what is good or evil, right or wrong, normal or deviant, valued or worthless. At the core of both of these medical and social changes is blood, and this is because blood is the most observable and quantifiable of the humors. So, as the world of science begins its shift away from the humoral theory, scientists and laymen alike move towards measuring otherness by something that they can touch, see, and taste (ew, no thanks)-blood. Thus, blood, and not the other four humors, becomes the standard measure of otherness. Ultimately, we see changes in both social and scientific ways of thinking that both mirror and impact one another simultaneously.

Blood is the ideal conduit through which to examine the instability of the premodern notion of self. Blood's meanings, both symbolic and scientific, are constantly being negotiated during this time period; these mediations of definition reflect a larger cultural crisis of identity. In addition, blood's ubiquitous presence in premodern literature underscores society's fascination with blood as well as its repeated alignment of blood with identity. In other words, to

study premodern literary representations of blood is a way in which to better understand premodern social consciousness.

#### **Chapters Overview**

#### Chapter 1- "Nothing But the Blood of Jesus": The Abounding Dualities of Sacred Blood

Religion is the main school of thought that the medical world seeks to supersede during the early modern period, but ultimately blood allows these two key epistemologies about embodiment to *coexist*, rather than compete. Religious thought about blood is a key example of how ideas surrounding physical and social elements of otherness intersect, as the body of Christ, and especially his blood, represents an *othered* body that is at once both physical and spiritual, alive and dead, present and omnipresent, holy and human. Most importantly, Christ's body encompasses all of the other forms of otherness that I will discuss in later chapters and thus stands as the prototype of embodied otherness—he is the Ultimate Other. If the premodern world largely locates definitions of self within religion, and Christianity is at the center of Western religion, then an examination of Christ's identity arguably imparts key truths about social identity in Western Europe at this time. Furthermore, if Christ's blood is so fundamental to the Christian's understanding of the deity himself as well as their connection to this sacred entity, then blood is the bridge in this understanding. All of these elements work together to provide an introduction to cultural, religious, and literary representations of otherness in the premodern world.

Chapter 1 will focus on two types of Christ's blood: the blood that Christ shed during the Crucifixion and the blood of the Eucharist. By centering my discussion around these two forms

of sacred bleeding, I will examine a number of the paradoxes of an entity that is simultaneously a signifier of life and death; a marker of both violence and peace; a symbol that underscores both Christ's humanity and his divinity; matter that is both masculine and feminine. Furthermore, I will argue that a number of premodern depictions of Christ's blood utilize medical rhetoric in order to paint the blood of Christ as something miraculous and supernatural. So, while the idea that blood, the thing which marks our humanity, here belies the divinity of Christ seems to be a paradox, these ideas are frequently presented in medieval and early modern works (and arguably in present-day theological works as well) to underscore the very sanctity of Christ's embodiment, as well as the immortality that Christ's humanity afforded his fellow humans. Ultimately, I will argue that medieval and early modern literature present Christ's blood as something beyond medical explanation—something that defies the medical norms of human blood—and it is this inexplicable and supernatural nature of Christ's blood which simultaneously marks his entire being as divine and human, and more specifically his blood as medicinal and miraculous. Blood serves to both *unite* Christ to his community of believers through blood's salvific nature, and to *separate* Christ, as a holy being, from these same believers by setting him apart from (and above) humanity and its sinful nature.

For this chapter, I will first focus on three medieval works: The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and *The Showings of Julian of Norwich*; I will then end the chapter with an analysis of the early modern poetic work *The Temple* by George Herbert. While most of my other chapters will also explore various medieval works, this chapter will focus the most heavily on literature from this time period in order to highlight the gradual shift in thought about Christ's blood during the Protestant Reformation. This is another reason why I plan to put my chapter on Christ's blood first in my dissertation in that it establishes a

chronological and historical vein that I want to trace throughout the remainder of my dissertation. In regards to the literary works, I want to compare and contrast several of the aforementioned medieval works and their representations of Christ's blood with Herbert's repeated depictions of Christ's blood and the Eucharist. I will argue that between the medieval and the early modern works, we see a shift in the way in which blood is discussed and that the way these pieces represent Christ's blood, especially as it's present in the Eucharist, represent a change in the epistemology of otherness. The key shift here is a movement from a largely physical and visceral understanding of the incarnation of Christ to one more interested in the symbolic and metaphorical implications of said incarnation—and this shift, I argue, demonstrates how religious thought about transubstantiation influences cultural, and even medical, thought about the body and social marginalization.

Ultimately, a discussion of Christ's blood, and the medieval and early modern beliefs surrounding his blood, is a useful way to begin my discussion of blood and otherness because it underscores the historical shift in epistemological thought about otherness and blood—from the unseen to the seen. In addition, as I mentioned before, Christ's blood encompasses all of the dualities and paradoxes of the subsequent marginalized groups for the later chapters; this makes Christ the *Ultimate Other*, or a prototype for otherness, even as he is the founding principle of Christian, religious identity. In order to discuss otherness and its connection to blood, I therefore must start with a discussion of Christ's blood.

#### Chapter 2- Bloody Wombs, Bloody Tombs: Secrecy, Female Sexuality, and the Male Gaze

In Chapter 2, I will argue that the female body is made more visible to men through the medicalization of female bleeding. As the early modern period progresses, women's health (especially as it relates to female bleeding) is placed increasingly in the hands of male

physicians, whereas traditionally, female practitioners such as midwives were the key caregivers for women. With this shift, there is an increased focus on the various forms of female bleeding, such as menarche, hymenal bleeding, and menstrual blood; this, I argue, is largely because blood is the most visible facet of female health that both demarcates sexual, bodily differences as well as notable physical *and* social transitions for a woman's body. In other words, the occasions in which these types of female blood are present demonstrate not only a woman's physical health, but also her social standing. With that said, my main argument for this chapter is that women's blood works simultaneously as an endangering *and* empowering factor for the premodern woman. I will discuss shortly how this relates to the literary texts I have chosen.

In regards to the female body, we see a shift in the examination of the body between the medieval and early modern periods, especially as female dissections/autopsies/anatomies become more common. Whereas, medieval culture is especially fascinated with the mystery and hiddenness of the womb, the early modern world wants to open up bodies and expose the unseen as a way to better understand and ultimately control female bodies. However, because anatomies were not performed on most women, blood became an easier way to physically mark their difference from men. Blood is physically present at a number of crucially important social transitions for a woman, and blood marks a woman's otherness in a way that the mysterious and hidden womb often cannot. Much like the blood of Christ, the fascination with women's blood also marks a cultural transition in a fascination that moves from the unseen to the seen. I envision this chapter following the chapter on Christ, because I see both Christ's blood and female blood as coexisting in multiple liminalities: life and death, corruption and purification, the seen and the unseen. In addition, Christ's body, and especially his blood, is repeatedly feminized throughout medieval and early modern depictions. The premodern transition from a focus on a woman's

womb to her bleeding, as well as the repeated social and literary connection between female sexuality and endangerment is why I've entitled this chapter "Bloody Wombs, Bloody Tombs."

For my chapter on women's blood, I plan to use three early modern plays: Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus, Ford's Tis Pity She's a Whore, and Webster's The Duchess of Malfi as my primary sources—each of which I will argue casts the female body, and more specifically the female womb, as a dangerous locus where life and death coexist. The paradoxical nature of the womb in turn demonstrates that female sexuality, while a generative force for future generations, can be deadly for the female herself. While *Titus Andronicus* focuses on blood as a sign of the loss of female innocence, it is the very absence of blood and then the resulting growth of the womb which mark this loss of purity in the latter two plays. I want to argue that when the blood and the womb become exteriorized, they mark the woman as other, and allow male society to police female bodies and female sexuality. Not only does female bleeding exhibit a very real and present danger to the women in these plays, it also becomes an empowering agent for them as well, as they use their blood to communicate sovereignty (albeit a temporary and incomplete form of agency) over the very same people who sought to use their blood to suppress them. The use of blood to disempower and then later empower these women marks not only a shift in female agency, but also the complex symbolic nature of blood, which can both hurt and harm.

Fundamentally, I want to argue in this chapter that female blood and its highly visible nature enables society to monitor and police the female body in ways that male bodies are not surveilled. This hyper-surveillance in turn results in an othering of women, specifically through casting their bodies as open, visible, and most importantly, inferior. Furthermore, the medical rhetoric surrounding female bleeding casts female blood and the female body as an entity that is both generative and corruptive and enables this policing. From there, the same blood which

allows their bodies to be policed by the men in their life, then gives them a form of agency to temporarily regain the power which their blood initially stripped from them. Blood's fluidity allows various groups to use it to fit their unique needs at any given time, and this adroitness is largely what makes blood such a powerful and prevalent rhetorical tool in the premodern world.

## Chapter 3- Affliction or Infection? Premodern Concepts of Disability and Blood

Chapter 3 will feature an analysis of disability and deformity in both the medieval poem Amis and Amiloun and Shakespeare's early modern play, Richard III. In the case of the disabled body, it is more the physical deformity that becomes the focal point of social discussion, rather than the blood itself, unlike the blood of Christ and women. However, the physical deformity is still inextricably tied to blood symbolism because during the premodern period many believed that any congenital physical deformity stood as a visible marker of a corruption or deficiency within. And, this interior corruption, I will argue, is located within and disseminated through the disabled person's blood. In other words, it is the deformed person's blood, the locus of connection between the soul and the body, that is polluted, and this leads to both a corrupted soul and a disabled body. I will also argue that in the premodern world, notions of disability are in constant negotiation between religious and medical epistemologies. To simplify it greatly: the medical model of disability pathologizes disability by viewing it as something which must be treated and/or cured, while the religious model considers disability a metaphor for sin.<sup>8</sup> While these certainly were not the only two ways of considering disability in the pre-modern world,<sup>9</sup> the religious and medical models will be the focus of my discussion in this chapter, because I

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Hobgood and Wood discuss these two models at length in both "Early Modern Literature and Disability Studies" and "Ethical Staring: Disabling the English Renaissance."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> In fact, Eyler notes that "while it is certainly accurate to say that *some* people in the Middle Ages believed disability to be God's punishment for sin, this way of understanding medieval disability has only a limited viability. In truth, there were many lenses through which medieval societies viewed disability..." (3).

argue that blood symbolism bridges the gap between the two and allows medieval and early modern notions of disability to oscillate between the two dominant models of the period. In addition, I will also explore the different rhetorics of disability utilized in the premodern world centered around the origins of one's disability: that of an acquired disability versus a congenital disability. In doing so, I will argue that the acquired nature of Amiloun's leprosy marks him as a saint and draws him closer to God, while the congenital nature of Richard's deformity marks him as a sinner who is in opposition with God. In much the same way, blood works to either draw marginalized groups closer to divinity (e.g. Jesus, saints) or push them further apart (e.g. Jews, women); the duality of blood and its simultaneous divisive and inclusive capabilities are the focus of this dissertation.

In my discussion of *Amis and Amiloun*, I will contend that Amiloun's disability casts him as a saint/Christ figure, and that this likeness is depicted through various forms of blood symbolism in the poem. I will focus on four types of blood symbolism within this poem to illustrate this point: the repeated phrase "blood and bone" used to describe both Amis and Amiloun, the bloody imagery in the fight scene between Amiloun and the steward, the friends' golden cups, and the murder scene of Amis' children. Ultimately, the acquired nature of Amiloun's disability, which I argue is a blessing from God rather than a punishment, allows the characters of the play to atone for their innately sinful nature—through the sanctification afforded by blood—all while experiencing the mercy of God.

In my section on *Richard III*, I will argue that the description of Richard's disability repeatedly oscillates between the religious and medical models, and this demonstrates the tricky contemporary negotiation of how to view and treat persons with disabilities. I will illustrate this argument by examining blood symbolism in the play which at turns points the blame for

Richard's congenital disability towards his mother, especially her womb (i.e. the medical model), and at times indicts Richard's own deformed inner nature (i.e. the religious model). Fundamentally, I will contend that Richard's disability, and the characters' (both his own and the other characters) negotiation of it, mirror the contemporary debate over the origins of congenital physical disabilities.

In conclusion, this chapter on blood and disability will seek to do two things: First, I will explore the different literary perceptions of congenital versus acquired disability; secondly, I will examine the epistemological variations between the religious and medical models of disability within this literature. And, most importantly, all of this will be done through an extensive analysis of the blood symbolism in each of these works, because as I argue here, and have continued to argue in my earlier chapters, blood is the nexus at which competing concepts of marginalization, embodiment, and prejudice converge.

#### Chapter 4- Men Who Menstruate: Premodern Beliefs about Jews and Blood

Chapter 4 will explore various social and biological beliefs about Jews, especially as it pertains to their own blood and its relationship to Christian blood. I will argue that beliefs about Jews and blood, such as the blood libel myth, work to legitimize the social ostracization of premodern European Jews, by first creating cultural biases about said group, and then authorizing those prejudices through racialization. In other words, within the embodied marginalization of Jews—which centers around blood rhetoric—the social, religious, and medical converge to construct a racialized religious group. Ultimately, beliefs surrounding Jews and blood during the medieval and early modern periods marginalized Jews in a number of ways: by marking them as both morally *and* physically inferior.

I am placing this as the final chapter of my dissertation, because I see it as the direct contrast to my first chapter on Christ's blood. In other words, if Christ's blood is used to both set him apart from all of humanity, while also connecting him to all of humankind, Jewish blood is used to separate and subjugate Jews for their own guilt in the shedding of Christ's blood. In essence, each of these forms of marginalization through blood cannot exist without the other. My chapter on Christ's blood begins my discussion of othered blood, because as I argue, Christ is the prototype of otherness—He is the Ultimate Other. My dissertation concludes with my Jewish chapter because this chapter most decidedly points towards the future of blood rhetoric as something used to medicalize and biologize otherness, which is demonstrated through my discussion of the racialization of Jews.

I will begin this chapter with a background on medieval and early modern beliefs about Jewishness and blood, specifically the concepts of ritual murder libel, blood libel, and Jewish male menstruation. I will argue that the medicalization of the Jewish people occurs through a gradual racialization of said group. This can be traced in literature through various uses of blood symbolism, which are first centered in social rhetoric and then shift to focus more on medical and bodily notions of the self. This move to racialize Jewishness, as something more than a religious and cultural difference, seeks to legitimize the long-recorded ostracization of Jews. The fluidity of blood symbolism allows definitions of Jews as the social and physical inferiors of Christians to coexist. Within notions of the Jewish body, we see other concepts from various forms of marginalization converge, such as the feminized body of Christ and the policed body of women; these are connections that I intend to trace throughout my dissertation.

In this chapter, I will analyze Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, and "The Prioress' Tale" from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. I will begin my literary

analysis of Jewish blood with an examination of "The Prioress' Tale." I chose to include this source first, not only because of its chronology, but also because this work encapsulates many of the myths about Jewish bleeding and allows me to simultaneously inspect medieval blood symbolism as well as provide a historical context about Jewish libel myths. From there, I will use the two aforementioned early modern plays in order to argue that Jewishness is racialized through blood rhetoric—both religious and scientific. For *The Merchant of Venice*, one area I'd like to focus on is the much-discussed Shylock monologue from Act 3: "If you prick us do we not bleed?" Here, I want to argue that Shylock takes the physical body of the Jew, and its ability to be injured and to bleed, its very vulnerability, as a marker of the Jew's humanity as well as their connection to Christians; with this speech, Shylock combines both interiorized and exteriorized arguments for Jewish inferiority and debunks them both. For my discussion of *The Jew of Malta*, I'm especially interested in the play's repeated reference to the Jewish rite of circumcision, which I argue stands simultaneously, as a social and biological marker of difference for the Jewish male.

This chapter will be divided into four sections, each of which focus on a particular aspect of Jewish blood: blood libel and myths, Jewish male menstruation, circumcision, and race. The first two sections will focus on the medieval work in this chapter, "The Prioress' Tale," and the latter two will be centered around an analysis of the two early modern works: *The Merchant of Venice* and *Jew of Malta*. These sections will trace the progression from a socially-centered to a physically-focused marginalization of the Jewish people. Ultimately, I will examine various premodern associations with Jewish blood (e.g. blood libel, male menstruation, circumcision, etc.) as they are presented in these works in order to argue that the racialization of Jewish people

is accomplished through blood rhetoric, which utilizes both religious and scientific epistemologies of race and embodiment.

Conclusively, all of these aforementioned representations of Jewish blood help to demonstrate that the Jew is viewed as less than human, a sort of man/woman, human/monster hybrid if you will. In addition, all of these beliefs about Jews and blood ultimately work to other the Jewish race by taking an hypothetical spiritual deficiency and making it physical through the racialization of said group. Much like the disabled and the female body, the Jewish body is marked by society as physically inferior, and this in turn lends credit to the social beliefs about Jewish inferiority as a whole.

#### Conclusion

In my dissertation, I ultimately seek to answer the following questions: Why should we study premodern beliefs about blood hundreds of years later? Of what interest is blood symbolism in medieval and early modern literature to us? While mine is not the first work to take an interest in premodern blood symbolism, it is the first to take a comprehensive, literary-based approach in order to discover what blood has to say about social prejudice and the ever-changing premodern epistemologies of embodiment. Not only does this dissertation give us insight into premodern societal practices, but it also helps us to better understand humanity today, because prejudice and social marginalization are not going anywhere anytime soon, nor is the prevalent literary use of blood symbolism. The power of blood has not faded—even centuries later, blood cries out.

# CHAPTER I: "NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD OF JESUS": THE ABOUNDING DUALITIES OF SACRED BLOOD

If you were to perform a simple internet search for hymns and songs about the blood of Jesus, the results would be staggering. Each religion has its own set of iconography, and for Christians, the crucial symbol is clearly the cross—*especially* the blood of Christ shed at this site. But why devote so much worship and attention to a moment of suffering? Why create so many songs describing the bodily agony of Christ? Of all of the types of othered<sup>10</sup> blood that I will discuss in this monograph, sacred blood is easily the most complex. The blood of Christ is no ordinary bodily fluid—it is one rife with symbolic meaning that tells us not only about who *Christ is* but about who *we are* if we choose to believe in him. In premodern England, Christian beliefs surrounding the blood of Christ present a number of paradoxes about corporeal and theological identity.

Throughout this dissertation, I will argue that blood symbolism becomes one of the fundamental and primary rhetorics of social marginalization because blood's fluid nature and metaphorical ability enables opposing ideas and definitions to coexist. Like those who live on the margins of society and of societal labels, blood also defies clear definition and finite labels, and thus becomes the perfect emblem for otherness. To begin my discussion of the blood of otherness, I *must* start with the blood of Christ because this blood encapsulates all of the label-defying binaries that I will explore throughout the rest of the chapters. In fact, the blood of Christ embodies a dizzying exhibition of paradoxical beliefs—for this blood represents a being who is both human and divine as well as feminine and masculine; an entity that marks both death and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> As I discussed in my introduction, the term *othered* refers to marginalized social groups; as I use it throughout, I will sometimes use it as a verb, as in "to other/to marginalize," and sometimes as an adjective of said outcast groups.

everlasting life; something that is simultaneously polluting and cleansing; blood that is sacrificed willingly and yet simultaneously flows superfluously without control or individual agency. All of these qualities of sacred blood embody and highlight the complex nature of Christ and the way that his incarnation defies physical and scientific norms—his miraculous and sinless conception, the blood and water that flows from his side on the cross, his resurrection. In other words, each of these instances would be impossible if God had not taken on a physical human form, yet none would be possible without the divine presence that is implicitly embodied in the person of Christ. So, how do we comprehend a being who both defies and reifies all that we know about what it means to be human? If Jesus is a tangible creature with superhuman abilities, perhaps we can understand him if we seek to understand the physiological nature of his body. After all, he has a body like the rest of us; but, is his body really like ours?

An examination of Christ's blood is especially illuminating because premodern and early modern beliefs about Christ's blood reflect not only contemporary theological beliefs, but also cultural beliefs about social order and embodiment more broadly. That means that when we look at literary conceptions of Christ's blood, we are not only looking at a reflection of contemporary theological debates about sacred rituals and deification; we also are delving into contemporary notions of the self. This is why it is key to begin a discussion of premodern social marginalization with an examination of Christ incarnate.

Jesus Christ is the Ultimate Other—he is a baby born of a virgin; a man who mothers; a divine human who dies and rises again in three days' time; the second person in the Holy Trinity. Christ is also the Ultimate Other in that he simultaneously cohabits two spaces of marginalization: that of being cast out from society and that of being set above it; Christ was and is both rejected and rejoiced. If one believes in the Holy Spirit, then that also means that one

must believe that Christ lives in all believers; thus, through his spiritual presence within believers' physical bodies, these believers are all automatically othered the moment they place faith in the Holy Trinity.<sup>11</sup> And, in order to rationalize this otherness they find in themselves, they seek to explicate something complex and almost completely indiscernible by placing it into a context that they can see, touch, and comprehend: a physical body. This is one of the many reasons why Christ's blood is at the center of many theological beliefs and debates—because this one liquid, which is very visible and very vibrant,<sup>12</sup> embodies all of the complexities and paradoxes of the Christian faith and of Christ himself, or as Leviticus 17:11 affirms: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood." It isn't just something that one can see, it is something that cries out for our attention.<sup>13</sup> It is something whose presence immediately marks a breach in the norm: it calls to violence, sexuality, and life itself. So, in order to understand ourselves and to understand Christ, we turn to the blood of Christ—a substance that we can touch and see, a substance that is immensely real and vital to our lives, a substance that connects us bodily and spiritually with Christ himself.

For a medieval and early modern audience, one of the key ways to better understand the paradoxical incarnation of Jesus Christ was to medicalize<sup>14</sup> him through an empirical understanding, especially his blood, which was the specific fluid that caused so much fascination and consternation for the premodern world. Later, in the early modern period, we see George Herbert move away from this medicalizing trend to instead conceive of Christ's incarnation in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Othered in the sense that they are both sanctified through their salvation and often historically marginalized for their religious identity.

 $<sup>^{12}</sup>$  See also Eugene Roger's *Blood Theology* (8) for a discussion about the vibrancy with which blood marks the boundaries of the body.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> I will discuss blood crying out in more depth in my later chapter on Jewish blood.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> When I discuss medicalization in this chapter, I am describing a move towards medical and scientific epistemologies of the body, which sought to pathologize physical abnormalities.

metaphorical terms through the mode of metaphysical poetry. The increasing popularity of medical rhetorics of embodiment did not displace the pre-existing dominant religious model; rather, the two slowly began to co-exist, while the medical model gradually became the dominant view. Most importantly, blood exists at the intersection of these two models, allowing them to coexist. This is why blood is so often the focus of discussions of otherness—because it allows multiple modes of thought to work together. Furthermore, there are several instances of Christ's blood that are particularly important to this discussion: the blood present (and absent) at Christ's virgin conception, the blood shed during the passion and crucifixion of Christ, and the blood of the Eucharist. Each of these instances of Christ's blood presents a number of complications and clarifications about the incarnation of Christ and premodern thought. Thus, those medicalizing the sacred body, and especially the sacred blood of Christ, sought to understand the divine body of Christ in empirical, tangible terms; in other words, people medicalized him in order to humanize and conceptualize him. On the other hand, understanding Christ's body and blood through metaphor rather than medicalization yields similar results for Herbert: Christ's blood repeatedly resists finite definition and instead exists in a liminal space where it frequently inhabits a number of dualities of identity. Throughout this chapter, I will examine several medieval and early modern literary pieces to explore the ways in which Christ's blood was being imagined and discussed, and more specifically to explore the binaries that are repeatedly presented and deconstructed in relation to divine blood.

Earlier, I posed this question: "Why are Christians so enthralled with the body, and especially the blood, of Christ?" Several scholars have explored this question, and I'd like to

focus on two key insights here. Leanne Groeneveld<sup>15</sup> contends that the medieval fascination<sup>16</sup> with the crucified body of Christ reflects a view that Christ's wounds make him permeable and vulnerable, while also simultaneously inviting and threatening. She argues that participation in the sacraments provided inclusion (or exclusion) into both the body of Christ and the body of the church. In other words, Christ invites the believer into his body through the wounds he endured on the cross; however, these same wounds which open Christ, also allow the possibility for the same believer to be expelled from the body of Christ at any moment. According to Groeneveld's observations, I contend that Christ's blood repeatedly represents a number of dualities that both set him apart from his believers while also inviting them into his most intimate circle of friends.

Sarah Beckwith makes a similar argument in *Christ's Body*<sup>17</sup> when she asserts that the symbol of Christ's body works on a cultural and a religious level to include/exclude various members of society through numerous rituals such as the Eucharist; these rituals, she argues, also empower certain members (i.e. clerical members in particular) of the church, while simultaneously reinforcing social striations due to class and rank.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, says Beckwith, medieval concepts of the body and embodiment influence representations of Christ's incarnation, in which the body of Christ represents a narrow gate through which only certain people are allowed to enter in order to receive eternal salvation. The multivariate, and often contradictory, medieval concepts of the body lend themselves to theological debate not only about the

search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2007300345&site=ehost-live.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Groeneveld, Leanne. "Salvation, Damnation, and the Wounded (Corporate) Body of Christ in Late Medieval Culture." *Florilegium*, vol. 22, 2005, pp. 81–104. *EBSCOhost*,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Groeneveld cites such medieval works as those of Julian of Norwich, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Thomas Aquinas to demonstrate said fascination.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Full title: *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings*. Beckwith, Sarah. *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings*, Taylor & Francis Group, 1996. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/lib/uncg/detail.action?docID=235111.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> See especially Chapter 2, "Christ's Body and the Imaging of Social Order," for this discussion

Eucharist, but about who and who does not have access to Christ's grace and mercy. Beckwith comments on these concepts saying:

If Christ can be emblematic of resistance, he can also be emblematic of acceptance, of humility, of being a body not *acting*, but *acted upon*. It is a depiction which appropriates the revolutionary Christ back on the side of the church militant, and in doing so reveals the signification of Christ's body as a highly contested area, an area that is crucially related to the strained social relations of late medieval English society, and an area that touches the very core of self-perception and identity as a means of social control.<sup>19</sup> (22)

In other words, the theological debate about Christ's body, especially as it pertains to the real presence in the Eucharist, is not just a *theological* debate, it is also a *social* debate, as it is about social and cultural access to grace—or the idea that Christ's body can invite anyone in and just as easily force them out. Interestingly, both Beckwith and Groeneveld argue that Christ's body becomes the premodern locus of social order. This is key to note in my consideration of various marginalized social groups—that Christ, through premodern employment of blood symbolism, comes to represent both the Ultimate Other as well as the director of all social order—this is a paradox unto itself.

In this chapter, I will analyze the portrayal of Christ's blood in these particular works: The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, the Showings of Julian of Norwich, and the lyrical poetry of George Herbert. Through this examination, I will argue that Christ's blood works to *other* him while simultaneously making him more accessible to the everyday believer, and this duality is reflected between the two predominant epistemologies of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup>emphasis original

Christ's embodiment: the theological and medical lenses. While these two rhetorics may seem at odds with one another on the surface, I will argue that actually they work in conjunction to conceptualize the person of Christ and all of the paradoxes that he embodies. In fact, I will go further to argue, throughout my dissertation, that blood symbolism is employed repeatedly in premodern society in attempts to define marginalized groups according to a number of epistemologies of embodiment and social categorization. Additionally, not only does blood symbolism allow two dominant epistemologies of embodiment to coexist, it also enables numerous identities to cohabitate within the same person. More specifically, in the Croxton *Play*, the blood of Christ is something that is both spiritual and physical, both miraculous and scientifically observable; in *Piers Plowman*, the blood of Christ is repeatedly commingled with water, representing the sacraments of communion and baptism, as well as the simultaneous helpful and harmful nature of Christ's blood; in Julian's showings, the blood of Christ works to represent the humanity and divinity inherent in the incarnation; and, finally, in Herbert's The *Temple*, the physical presence of blood is repeatedly replaced with the metaphor for salvation that it represents, marking it as an entity that is simultaneously physical and spiritual. Ultimately, this chapter will illustrate that Christ embodies a number of dualities, which defy both logical reasoning and rational explanation, and the heart of this otherworldly nature is found in the rhetoric of his blood.

Blood is the discourse that connects two dominant models of thought in the premodern world, religious and medical, about the body and about otherness. Both here in my discussion of Christ and in my later chapters, which explore numerous modes of social marginalization, I will trace the veins of blood symbolism which gather diverse modes of thought about both the individual and social body. Blood, both as a metaphor and as a literal life-fluid, enables

simultaneous systems of embodiment to coexist, and it allows people to think about the body and its relation to identity in a number of complex ways.

# Christ in a Cake: Faith through "Ocular Proof"<sup>20</sup>

To begin the conversation about Christ's blood in medieval literature, and how his blood is othered through both religious and medical rhetoric, I will first look at The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, which I argue, demonstrates an attempt to gather empirical evidence of Christ's embodiment. Overall, in this section, I will contend that the Jewish characters approach the Eucharist with skepticism because of its lack of "ocular proof." They then seek to test the physical and spiritual properties of this sacrament by performing a number of experiments on it, thus demonstrating an epistemological move towards experiential modes of knowledge. However, despite a number of "experiments" on the Eucharist, the Jewish characters of this play find themselves confounded by their attempts to understand a holy entity through empirical methods. What starts out as a test to disprove the Holy Presence in a mundane, everyday object such as bread, turns into a lesson in the miraculous and complex nature of Christ himself—as someone who repeatedly rejects finite classifications of self. Throughout the play we see the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> The phrase "ocular proof" originates in *Othello*, and is later used by Stephen Greenblatt in a discussion of transubstantiation as "ocular proof." See *Practicing New Historicism* by Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt (107). I first encountered this exact phrase in this particular context in C. J. Gordon's "Bread God, Blood God: Wonderhosts and Early Encounters with Secularization," where he discusses Greenblatt's aforementioned work (117). However, the idea of ocular proof, in a broader sense, is reminiscent of many of the tenets that William Harvey proposed that urged scientists to move from Humanistic approaches to more empirical methods of experimentation and observation.

Jewish characters testing the physical bounds of the Eucharist in order to understand its spiritual agency. Most notably, it is at the appearance of blood that the tangible proof<sup>21</sup> which the Jews seek transforms the physical entity into a miraculous, spiritual presence; blood makes bread become The Host, blood makes heretics believe.<sup>22</sup> Blood is evidence which can't be denied.<sup>23</sup>

In The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, the Jewish Jonathas and his compatriots scoff at the notion of transubstantiation and set out to disprove this dogma of Christ's bodily presence in the host through various modes of experimentation; in other words, they want ocular proof to either prove or disprove this alleged miracle. This play demonstrates a common trope of the Jewish heretic desecrating the sacraments, especially that of the Eucharist.<sup>24</sup> The parallel here between the Eucharist and the physical body of Christ on the cross is evident—that is to say that the Jewish characters both in this play and across various literary works of the time, were seen to corrupt and destroy the physical body of the Eucharist just as they did the physical body of Christ. Ultimately, while works such as these center around Jewish characters, they rely on Christian tenets—most importantly the belief that Christ is the incarnation of God. In order for the miracles to happen and the Jewish characters to convert, Christ's "this is my body" must literally prove true, and blood stands, here and in numerous other works, as the irrefutable stamp

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> See also: ""blood is given an almost instant authenticating value" (Bildhauer 20).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> See also: "...the most fundamental truth confirmed by blood in the Middle Ages is the existence of the integral body. In the eucharistic miracles, it is Christ's invisible integral body, unharmed by non-believers' attacks, that is evidenced by blood. What counted as Christ's body was often proven through blood, as when a desecrated host begins to bleed" (Bildhauer 21).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> See also: "...blood functions as proof in a variety of medieval discourses like medical diagnostics, theological and mystical writing and drawing as well as courtly fiction, confirming not only the presence of God's body in the host, but also the incarnation, the superiority of men's knowledge, the authenticity of specific texts, the idea that guilt requires punishment, and, most fundamentally, the conception of the body as a bounded entity" (Bildhauer 17).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> C. J. Gordon argues that this trope of Jewish host desecration is actually a way for Christians to explore their own misgivings about the legitimacy of transubstantiation (117-118). Gordon, C. J. "Bread God, Blood God: Wonderhosts and Early Modern Encounters with Secularization." *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2011, pp. 105–128. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1215/00166928-1260161.

of veracity.<sup>25</sup> However, with that said, while the *physical* presence of the blood stands as proof to the Jews, it is the *spiritual* and *miraculous* qualities of this blood that do the work of conversion. Ultimately, it is not the physical properties (i.e. outward appearance) of the host but rather its miraculous nature which resist earthly bounds that leads them to believe in the power of transubstantiation.

Throughout the play, we see a common epistemological move that reflects a contemporary medieval trend: the attempt to understand spirituality through physical means. In fact, this play reflects a larger cultural trend: from the Middle Ages on, we begin to see a growing use of medical and scientific rhetoric when discussing the body of Christ. As I have already noted, in the *Play of the Sacrament*, the characters perform a number of experiments on the Eucharist in order to test both its physical and spiritual properties. So, this shows that their means to salvation is found through an empirical, experimental, experiential approach; they are skeptical and can only be made to believe by testing the properties of the Eucharist, an entity which embodies both spiritual and physical traits. Many premodern works locate this skepticism in Jewish characters; however, the real work being done here is to reassure Christians of doctrines in which they already believe, but may doubt in some ways.<sup>26</sup> In other words, these miracle host plays, and other works like them, where the doubting Jew is converted at the sight of a Christian miracle, does more to uphold pre-existing beliefs than it does to convert any supposed heretic.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> In *Medieval Blood*, which is a work that I explore in more depth in other portions of my dissertation, Bettina Bildhauer makes similar statements about the power of blood as proof.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> See also: (Gordon 118).

In the *Play of the Sacrament*, the Jew Jonathas and his compatriots (Jason, Jasdon,

Masphat, and Malchus<sup>27</sup>) perform five tests on the bread of the Eucharist which in turn symbolize the five wounds that Christ received on the cross. In his opening monologue, Jonathas refers to the bread of the sacrament as a "cake," (1.200) which underscores its material property and simultaneously denies any spiritual essence. He goes on to elaborate that he thinks that Christian belief in transubstantiation is "onkind" (1. 200) or unnatural and something which he therefore plans to disprove through a number of tests that will indicate the very material, nonspiritual nature of the bread. For their first test, Jonathas and his fellow Jews stab the bread of the sacrament with daggers:

Iff that this be he that on Calvery was mad[e] red,

Onto my mind, I shall kenne yow a conceit good:

Surely with owr daggers we shall ses on this bredde,

And so with clowtys we shall know if he have eny blood. (ll. 449-452)

The purpose of this first test of the host is to see if the bread bleeds, and if it does, this proves that the bread possesses the body of Christ, which also bled on the cross. Here, blood stands as proof of the physical presence of Christ in the bread. And sure enough, upon striking the bread in its middle, it begins to bleed. At the sight of the bleeding bread, everyone begins to panic. So, again, the instant sight of blood stands as irrefutable proof that something miraculous is taking place in this physical entity of bread. It provides the ocular proof that the characters were looking for.

However, despite the miracle of the bleeding host, the play's characters still aren't fully convinced. In fact, they remark that the devil is in this event, rather than Christ. So, in a panic,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Interestingly, John 18:10-11 names Malchus as the servant whose ear Peter cuts off during Jesus' arrest. Jesus then heals Malchus' ear, and so this biblical character resembles the play's Jonathas.

they try to throw the bread into a boiling cauldron in order to stop the bleeding. As they do so, Jonathas and the other characters continue to refer to it as "cake"<sup>28</sup> which underscores their continued disbelief in the spiritual power of the bread, despite its current bloody state. Also, the fact that they plan to boil the cake, shows the dual nature of the host, as an item of food which can be baked, and as something which bleeds like a body and thus must be boiled and cauterized. While the bleeding bread stands as a sign of the Real Presence inherent in the host, to the characters of the play, it still exists in a liminal space, as something that is otherworldly, but perhaps not heavenly. When Jonathas picks up the bread to throw it into the cauldron, it sticks to his hand, and in an attempt to release his hand from the bread, his friends must remove his hand altogether (which remains strongly attached to the bread). In an attempt to extricate the bread from Jonathas' hand, they nail the bread (with his hand still attached) to a post, and this forms the second test, which mimics the nailing of Christ's body to the cross. Here we see that the Eucharist quite literally has a strong hold over Jonathas's body, if not yet his soul. That is to say, that the Eucharist first seeks to grip Jonathas through physical means—in the same way that Jonathas himself has approached the host through a series of empirical tests.

Upon Jonathas' injury, the audience is introduced to the character of Master Brundiche, the physician. While a number of scholars have depicted the play's physician as merely a comical quack, Jillian Linster<sup>29</sup> contends that Brundiche, though comic, is intended to be seen as a legitimate (albeit somewhat immoral) medical professional whose character has often been misread—and I agree with this assertion. She asserts that Brundiche offers sound medical advice which Jonathas rejects for a number of reasons, none of which are because of the physician's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Line 496

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Linster, Jillian. "The Physician and His Servant in the Croxton Play of the Sacrament." *Early Theatre: A Journal Associated with the Records of Early English Drama*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2017, pp. 31–48. *EBSCOhost*, search-ebscohost-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2018141075&site=ehost-live.

ineptitude. Linster goes on to argue that "Jonathas's lack of faith in Brund[i]yche echoes his lack of faith in transubstantiation. He rejects the services of a healer because he has no interest in curative treatment" (44).<sup>30</sup> In other words, Jonathas' rejection of the physician Brundiche for *physical* healing mirrors his rejection of Christ's *spiritual* healing. Linster goes on to add that this rejection of worldly medicine actually works in favor of both the theological message of the play and of Jonathas's own healing process (both physical and spiritual), because it allows God to intervene and divinely heal Jonathas's hand and his soul (44). Ultimately, the appearance of the physician Brundiche, which may seem like a simple comical relief scene (and certainly does have elements of that) works on a deeper level to directly contrast worldly medicine with heavenly intervention. In a similar manner, the appearance of blood throughout the play works to bridge connections—between the believer and the unbeliever, between the physical and the spiritual, and between medicine and religion.

Jonathas and his friends immediately resume their third test, boiling the bread in a cauldron, once the doctor and his assistant have left. This test again demonstrates the Jewish characters' treatment of the sacrament as though it were a literal "cake" rather than a holy host. As soon as the bread enters the cauldron, I argue that it begins its transformative process of becoming medicine for Jonathas, as the process both mimics the practice of medieval medicine making, and brings Jonathas and his friends one step closer to encountering the Holy Spirit. Additionally, the bread's bloody state mirrors the curative/invigorating properties tied to blood by contemporary belief and practice. As soon as the bread enters the cauldron, the water turns "redde as blood"<sup>31</sup> and begins to boil over. At the sight of this blood, Jonathas and his

 $<sup>^{30}</sup>$  Linster spells the character's name with a Y instead of an I.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Line 674

companions decide to perform a medical procedure on the host to stop its bleeding: "...throw it into the ovyn fast./ Sone shall he stanche his bleding chere!" (II. 686-7). In other words, through the extreme heat of the oven, they plan to cauterize the wounds and stop the bleeding of the host. Once they remove the host from the cauldron, Jason notes that Jonathas' severed hand, which remains soundly attached to the bread, has been boiled down to its bones. So, while the hand has had a natural reaction to boiling water, the bread has reacted in ways outside of scientific/empirical logic, as is seen through the boiling/bleeding bread. The moment that the host enters the oven, instead of stopping the bleeding, an image appears in the fire and speaks to Jonathas and his friends, at which point the oven explodes—destroying their instrument of worldly experimentation. Both the host and its bleeding presence symbolize Jesus, whose very existence defies clear definition and whose identity exists in a liminal space of simultaneous dualities.

When Jesus appears to the play's characters during their fourth test, he is bloody and covered in wounds. This is crucial to note, because it shows the characters, and the audience, that what is done to the host has also been done to Christ—again blood stands as ocular proof of transubstantiation. The bloodied Christ stands as the fifth test for the Jewish characters: they must decide whether they believe what they are seeing. Jesus rebukes Jonathas and company for torturing the host and thus inadvertently reenacting the torment he felt at the Passion. This rebuke, along with the sight of the bloodied Jesus, substantiates the Real Presence of Christ in the sacrament. Jonathas immediately repents, and Jesus offers him both physical and spiritual healing as he instructs him to place his hand into the cauldron, where he will medicinally and miraculously restore him, and both spiritually and physically heal him. This scene recalls the salvific power of Christ's blood, which when shed offers sanctification and healing. Ultimately,

while the bleeding host provides the Jews with the ocular proof that they sought to find in the first place, their characters represent the unrelenting disbeliever, and so the blood does not immediately convert them. For this hard-hearted type, the presence of Christ is necessary for their conversion, but this does not negate the remaining power of the blood as proof. When Christ does appear he is bloody and this blood connects him to the host, and the bleeding host substantiates the incarnation of Christ.

The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* demonstrates the epistemological move to form an empirical understanding of Christ's embodiment. Through an experimental and experiential process, Jonathas and his fellow disbelievers examine and test the sacred host, and in doing so assess the spiritual and physical traits of Christ's incarnation. Despite their best efforts, they find that the blood of Christ confirms their experimentation, while also rebuking their motive by reacting in otherworldly ways—thus proving its heavenly qualities, and underscoring the idea that it is not merely bread, but a living host. When the host begins to bleed, Jonathas attempts medical intervention and tries to cauterize the wounds. However, it is at this point that Christ blows their experiment wide open, both literally and figuratively, and addresses them directly. Once they have accepted the power of the host as well as the power of Christ, Jesus offers them spiritual and physical healing demonstrating the otherworldly power of his blood—a substance, which when shed, boldly demarcates the beginning of life rather than the end. It's key to note that their status as Jews, which automatically marks them as disbelievers to the audience, gives them the latitude to question the Real Presence of Christ, but the play ultimately affirms Christian dogma; thus the skeptical Jewish stock character works as a way for Christians to safely examine their own doctrine without risking heresy. Ultimately, while the Jews try to disprove Christ's divinity and his presence in the host, his blood, a marker of humanity itself,

actually becomes a testament of his divinity. This play demonstrates that blood can marginalize a number of groups of people—for one, the blood of Christ sets him apart as something different from both God and humans, while the Jews' disbelief in the blood of Christ marks them as outcasts; that's to say, the same blood can place one person above all others, while simultaneously casting a group beneath all others. Here, the fluidity of blood demonstrates its ability to work in numerous epistemologies of social marginalization, a point that I'll continue to reiterate throughout my dissertation.

### Christ's Blood: A Panacea for Body and Soul in Piers Plowman

Much like the Croxton Play of the Sacrament, William Langland's Piers Plowman explores Christ's blood through its physical properties. However, while the Play of the Sacrament repeatedly poses the blood of Christ as something both worldly and miraculous, Piers focuses on a different duality: that of Christ's blood and water commingled, to represent the two sacraments of the Eucharist and holy baptism and furthermore to demonstrate the salvific qualities of Christ's blood, as demonstrated by their connection to these two aforementioned sacraments. Either way, each of these works demonstrate the complexity of the blood of Christ in order to underscore its miraculous and almost incomprehensible nature, and to demonstrate that the blood of Christ holds power—the power to heal both the body and the soul. Throughout *Piers Plowman*, the reader repeatedly encounters rhetoric that depicts Christ's blood as having medicinal qualities, which work reparatively on both a spiritual and a physical level. One way in which the blood of Christ is othered in both of these texts is through the idea of Christ's blood loss as life-giving, rather than life-taking. That is to say, when Christ sheds blood, it offers redemptive power, which is often depicted as having medicinal qualities, to those who accept it; in addition, although Jesus' blood loss ends his own life, it is a life that is resurrected and a life

whose loss offers eternal life to others. While bloodshed is ordinarily depicted as something which weakens victims and demonstrates their vulnerability, with Christ, bloodshed empowers both him and others, and thus his blood, and the inherent nature it reflects, sets Jesus apart from everyone else.

Numerous scholars<sup>32</sup> have underscored the fact that death by crucifixion is rarely a bloody death, but rather the common cause of death by crucifixion is exhaustion and asphyxiation. And, while Christ's body was certainly bloodied from his beatings as well as his crown of thorns, his mode of death was not itself a blood one. So, why is the image of Christ on the cross so often focused centrally on his blood? In fact, in *Piers Plowman*, the narrator Will has a dream vision of Christ "painted all bloody"<sup>33</sup> and bearing the cross.<sup>34</sup> I argue that throughout medieval literature, and specifically here in *Piers Plowman*, the blood of Christ is so fascinating because of its othered nature—because it embodies so many otherworldly qualities (i.e. salvific power, omnipresence, etc.) while simultaneously demonstrating the very humanity of Christ; in other words, the blood of Christ is our direct connection, as humans, to divinity. More importantly, blood is the nexus at which numerous forms of identity can converge and co-exist, and this is why blood symbolism is so prevalent, not only in medieval literature, but also in many discourses of social identity and marginalization at large.

There are numerous areas in *Piers Plowman* that depict the blood of Christ, but there are a few in particular that I'd like to focus on for my discussion of Christ's otherness, each of which, I contend, demonstrate the medicinal qualities of Christ's blood, painting it as an entity

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> See Caroline Walker Bynum's *Wonderful Blood:Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* and Eugene Roger's *Blood Theology: Seeing Red in Body- and God-Talk.* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Passus XIX, lines 6-7

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> I will return to this passage in more depth later.

that when lost, offers life rather than taking it. First, I'd like to turn to this passage from Passus XI of the text:

For Christ called us all, come if we would,

Saracens and schismatics and also the Jews,

O all ye that thirst, come etc.

And bade them for their sins suck safety at his breast,

And drink remedy for wrong-doing, revel in it who would.

"Then may all Christians come," said I, "and claim entry there

By the blood that he bought us with, and through baptism after."<sup>35</sup>

There are several specific areas that I'd like to analyze in this passage. First, I'd like to explore the idea that Christ's blood is often commingled and/or replaced with water, especially baptismal water.<sup>36</sup> This is a motif that Langland will repeatedly explore in his depiction of Christ's blood. This connection between blood and water individuates the blood of Christ in that his blood comes to simultaneously represent numerous sacraments: both the Eucharist and baptism. This shows the doubly salvific nature of the blood of Christ, which allows believers to "drink remedy," providing both forgiveness of their sins and healing for their soul. In addition, the fusion of blood and water also illustrates Christ's blood as having nutritive qualities (i.e. it can quench your thirst), thus making it beneficial for both body and soul. Ultimately, in my discussion of this passage, I want to underscore the *duality* of blood, as it is key to my argument through this chapter and the rest of my dissertation. This particular passage demonstrates a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Passus XI, lines 119-123; emphasis original

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> This motif is found frequently both in this literary work as well as in more general doctrinal thought.

number of dualities present within Christ's blood: for one, the image of water and blood, and secondly the image of Christ as man and woman.

Another way in which Christ's blood is commonly othered in medieval texts, and here in Piers Plowman, is by its comparison to breast milk. Contemporary beliefs held that breast milk was one form of blood, as was semen. By casting Christ as a breastfeeding mother, it highlights the spiritually nutritive power of his blood as Christ urges sinners "to suck safety at his breast."<sup>37</sup> It also works to feminize Jesus, not only through the blood/breastmilk conflation, but also through the imagining of Christ's side wound as a vulva or a womb.<sup>38</sup> With this image in mind, Christ's side wound pours forth water and blood (much like a woman's placenta) and becomes a place where new life originates. However, although Christ's blood is given feminine aspects, it is ultimately gendered male, because, as Rogers argues, and as I agree: 1) it is readily displayed, whereas feminine blood is often hidden and ignored; 2) Christ's blood is depicted as cleansing, whereas feminine blood is often seen as contaminating (Rogers 84-88). So, ultimately, Christ's blood is repeatedly othered in that it can embody feminine qualities while remaining overall masculine. For Christ embodied, he is both the nurturing mother and the protective father—he is genderless, and the blood that stands as his hallmark iconography enables this fluidity of identity in a number of ways. While this passage in particular demonstrates two dualities: of blood and water, as well as masculine and feminine, other depictions of Christ's blood in *Piers* display a variety of other binaries, for example that of humanity and divinity.

The idea of Christ's blood simultaneously embodying humanity and divinity is powerfully illustrated in the scene of Longeus with Jesus' side wound in Passus XVIII. As I

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Passus XI, line 122

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> See Eugene Roger's *Blood Theology*, specifically chapter 4, for an enthralling discussion of the gendering of Christ's blood.

mentioned briefly, and as Rogers argues in more detail, the side wound of Christ can be seen as a vulva, and the water and blood that burst from it as the placenta (Rogers 88). This imagery can create two dualities: that of masculine and feminine, which I explored in the previous paragraph, and that of humanity and divinity-in other words, the ability to take on human form but also to create and heal it. In this particular depiction of Christ's side wound, the blood that springs forth has miraculous healing qualities. When Longeus, the blind soldier, spears Jesus on the cross, we see that "the blood sprang down the spear and unsparred his eyes."<sup>39</sup> Not only does this image give the blood itself agency, it also draws a similarity to water. In the first instance, the word sprang imparts a significant sort of agency to the blood of Christ, and it does this in two ways: first it shows Christ's willingness to give his blood-it does not weakly or involuntarily leak or seep, but springs forward with alacrity. Secondly, the word "sprang" calls to mind a spring of water, and thus recalls the common mixture of blood and water when it comes to the discussion of Christ's blood. As this blood springs from Christ's side it enters Longeus's eyes and restores his sight, demonstrating the salvific (blood) and cleansing (water) nature of Christ's side wound.40

Shortly after, the character of Faith scorns the Jews for sending a blind man to do their dirty work:

Cursed cowards, no kind of knighthood was it

To beat a dead body with any bright weapon.

Yet he's won the victory in the fight for all his vast wound,

For your champion jouster, the chief knight of you all,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Passus XVIII, line 86; emphasis mine

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> See also Davlin, Mary Clemente. *The Place of God in* Piers Plowman *and Medieval Art*. Ashgate Publishing Co., 2001. *EBSCOhost*, search-ebscohost-

com.libproxy.uncg.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2001580772&site=ehost-live.

Weeping admits himself worsted and at the will of Jesus.

For when this darkness is done, Death will be vanquished,

And you louts have lost, for Life shall have the victory. (XVIII. 96-102)<sup>41</sup>

In both of these passages, we again see the image of Christ's blood commingled with water—a symbolic mixture of the sacraments and the rites of inclusion and salvation that they embody. In the larger passage provided here, we encounter a *weeping* Longeus approaching Christ. Not only does this image highlight the knight's contrition for his part in Christ's crucifixion, the verb *weeping* itself calls to mind the duality of blood and water while simultaneously connecting Longeus' tears to the "vast wound" in Christ's side, which also weeps with blood and water. The commingling of the blood and water demonstrates both the life-giving force, as imparted by the blood, and the cleansing nature, as imparted by the water, of Christ's blood which he shed on the cross, and which will shortly after both heal Longeus, both body and soul. All in all, Christ's blood, shed on the cross, enables forgiveness for sinners as well as access to God through the second person of the Trinity.

While the wound which pours out blood and water from Christ's side marks Christ as a human who can bleed and suffer bodily, ultimately, it is the divine nature of Christ's blood which will vanquish Death and invite Life. Thus, his bloodshed serves to denote both his humanity and his divinity simultaneously, which is another way in which Christ's blood both represents a duality and demarcates him as otherworldly. Furthermore, the recurrent association of blood with water, both in this passage, and in the larger medieval literary tradition,<sup>42</sup> underscores the overall duality of Christ's being—he is one who encapsulates a number of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Both the image of blood and water commingled, as well as the scene of blind Longeus being healed by Christ's side wound are not unique to *Piers Plowman*, but each draw on a larger medieval literary tradition. This implies that Christ's blood as representative of complexity and numerous dualities was not an uncommon idea.

dichotomies simultaneously, and this complexity is enabled through a discourse of blood and the fluidity that it epitomizes. This, I argue, is why Christ is so commonly associated with blood, because just as he insistently escapes binding definitions and restricting labels, so does blood symbolism.

Later in Passus XVIII, Jesus enters hell and confronts Satan. In this passage, much like the previous one, Christ's blood simultaneously embodies a number of binaries. For example, here we again see Christ's blood depicted as a medicinal cure-all that both quenches *physical* thirst and satiates *spiritual* longing; thus his blood contains both worldly and otherworldly attributes. When addressing Satan, he commands him: "The bitterness that you have brewed, imbibe it yourself / Who are doctor of death, the drink you made" (II. 363-4). Here, Satan is a nefarious apothecary who has concocted a bitter and poisonous drink, which he must now ingest himself. Immediately after this statement, Jesus continues:

For I who am Lord of Life, love is my drink

And for that drink today I died upon earth.

I struggled so I'm thirsty still for man's soul's sake.

No drink may moisten me or slake my thirst

Till vintage time befall in the Vale of Jehoshaphat,

When I shall drink really ripe wine, *Resurrectio mortuorum*. (ll. 365-370)<sup>43</sup> Here, Christ's blood is directly contrasted with the bitter poison of Satan, where the former promises life and the latter only death. Furthermore, Jesus describes a thirst that reaches beyond physical needs and into the realm of spiritual desires, a thirst that will only be quenched at the end of times by a "really ripe wine," which stands as a metaphor for the blood of Christ

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Emphasis original.

(especially as it is represented in the Eucharist) and the everlasting redemption that it offers to those who ingest it. This is underscored shortly afterwards when Jesus contends: "For we are brothers of one blood, but not in baptism all./ And all that are both in blood and in baptism my whole brothers/ Shall not be damned to the death that endures without end" (ll. 376-8). Within this particular quote, there are several layers of meaning being applied to the blood of Christ. First, Langland once again repeats the theological motif of water and blood/ Eucharist and baptism. Secondly, the blood depicted here unites fellow believers and creates a bond that is stronger than the blood ties of earthly genealogy—it creates eternal kinship through Christ. Much like the blood of the Croxton *Play*, which defies scientific classification, here Christ's blood resists both social and medical notions of inheritance. It creates familial connection that goes beyond biology and worldly connection and extends into immortal bonds. And, this particular point brings me to the last passage of *Piers Plowman* that I'd like to discuss, which I argue demonstrates the message that Christ is the ultimate healer: his blood offers unification with him and with our brethren in Christ.

Lastly, I'd like to close with a brief examination of the beginning of Passus XIX, which depicts Will's dream vision of the bloodied Jesus the jouster and which takes place immediately after the sequence of Christ's descent into hell. Will partakes in the Eucharist and falls asleep shortly after in the middle of mass. As he dreams, he envisions a man "painted all bloody," (l. 6) whom he first mistakes for Piers the Plowman, but soon realizes is Jesus Christ himself. First, it is key to note that this vision only takes place once Will has ingested the Host, and this then enables his vision of Christ, as well as the intimate connection that this vision creates. In other words, participation in the Eucharist enables one to connect in a deeper way to the incarnation of Christ. It is also significant here that Christ is painted in blood, because his red appearance

enables him to take on the arms/coats of Piers, or in other words, take on humanity/human form and joust with death. The connotation of the body covered in blood represents the transference of mercy and salvation that occurs when Christ sheds his blood for humankind. Furthermore, the appearance of Piers as Christ shows the intimate bond created at the cross. By taking on human form, Christ enables his own blood shed, which in turn unites—in a Christian kinship—Christ to his followers. And again, as this Passus demonstrates, it is blood which allows Christ to simultaneously embody multiple identities—such as human and divine, savior and saved.

Throughout *Piers Plowman*, we see Christ's blood repeatedly othered when it is illustrated as an entity that cures numerous ailments, of both the body and the soul. With its conflation with water, the blood of Christ becomes something that can slake thirst, cleanse, and purify on both spiritual and physical levels. In addition, Chirst's blood creates a spiritual connection with fellow believers that is stronger than any biological bond. Ultimately, Christ's blood is a panacea for all of the ailments of the world, and especially for the most deadly disease of them all: death, which is the result of sin. Both in this work and in the Croxton *Play*, it is precisely blood imagery that enables Christ to embody numerous dichotomies and to demonstrate the complex, incomprehensible notion of a deity incarnate—someone who represents all of us, and yet none of us at all.

#### The Physiology of Jesus' Blood in Julian of Norwich

Christ's incarnation is something which theologians, believers, and non-believers alike have sought to comprehend for centuries, some through a close examination of his blood. But, his blood, like his being, repeatedly resists investigation and comprehension; his blood can be understood partially through its physical qualities, partially through its spiritual qualities, but never wholly, even when the two realms are fused together. If blood is empirically understood in *The Play of the Sacrament*, and if it becomes a miraculous medicine in *Piers Plowman*, then it's recognized on an intimately physical *and* spiritual level in the visions of Julian of Norwich. It is through Julian's own physical sickness that she is able to encounter the wounds and the blood of Christ in such visceral detail, and throughout these encounters she describes his blood repeatedly at a physiological level. But, why? Sarah Star contends (and I agree) that Julian is so fascinated with the physiology of Christ's blood because "blood is the site at which Julian's spiritual interpretation can occur, the generator of bodily and spiritual revelations, because it provides a hermeneutic for that very kind of twofold interpretation."<sup>44</sup> In other words, throughout her visions, Julian is grappling with the *spiritual* significance of Christ's *physical* body, and his blood is the locus in which she can reconcile the two.

Julian's physical and spiritual fascination with Christ's blood presents another way in which this sacred blood defies comprehension and is thus othered: by its copious and seemingly boundless presence. Star remarks that Christ's blood is plenteous not only in volume but in meaning and purpose, in that it can perform a number of deeds for an endless number of people (72). Like Star, I'd like to focus on the physiological rhetoric that Julian employs to describe the blood of Christ in her visions; in this regard, Star explains "Julian's emphasis on Christ's materiality in general and blood in particular relies on a physiological language shared with medical discourse" and shortly after, "When she describes Jesus's bleeding body, she engages both theological and medical languages, combining them to create her own unique picture of a Jesus, who as a man, shares a physiological nature with all humans, and who, as a Savior,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> See "'The Precious Plenty': Julian of Norwich's Visions in Blood" (74).

connects humans with the divine" (75-76). In other words, Julian's precise and medicalized descriptions of the blood of Christ work to simultaneously mark him as both human and divine, which I argue also works to other him, both from humans *and* from God, much in the same way that aforementioned works have presented numerous dualities present in Christ's blood and person.

It is through Julian's own physicality that she is able to experience intimately the incarnation of Christ. In other words, it is not until Julian is gravely ill that she is able to commune with Jesus on such an intimate level—her bodily suffering helps her to better comprehend both the bodily and physical pain of Christ. It's interesting to note that although her illness is not an especially bloody instance, her visions are flooded with the blood of Christ. In fact, the very first thing that Julian remarks upon when first envisioning Christ is his:

*reed bloud rynnyng downe* from under the garlande, *hote and freyshely*, *plentuously and lively*, right as it was in the tyme that the garland of thrones was pressed on his blessed head. Right so *both God and man*, the same that suffferd for me, I

conceived truly and mightly that it was him selfe that shewed it me without *anie meane* <sup>45</sup> There are several things that I'd like to examine closely here in Julian's first description of the body of Christ. First, she remarks upon the color and nature of Christ's blood, all of which underscores the active bleeding, and more importantly the active suffering, of Christ as she first encounters him. The blood is red, running down, hot, fresh, plenteous, and lively, and each of these characteristics mark the blood simultaneously as a sign of Christ's life *and* death; that is to say, the bright red of his blood, its warmth, its freshness, and its liveliness all underscore that the blood flows from someone who is still very much alive, while the plenteous, running nature of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> See Revelation 1, Chapter 4. Emphasis added.

the blood loss all show that this person will not be living for much longer if he continues to bleed so copiously. Christ exists here on the margins of life and death, and his blood, both hot *and* abundant, marks this precarious, liminal position as someone both human and divine, someone of this world and the next.

Furthermore, Star contends that Julian's observation about the warmth of Christ's blood is "coterminous with the characterization of blood in humoral theory" (76-7). She also explains that Julian's use of humoral theory denotes the "real, material presence of the hot humor" as well as "Christ's physical existence and the physicality of her visions" (77). In other words, Julian wants to emphasize to the reader that her visions of Christ were not just spiritual experiences, but ones that were very much rooted in a physical reality. Star's observation here, I'd argue, coincides with the last portion of the above quote from Julian's first revelation: "it was him self that shewed it me without anie meane." The italicized portion of this quote means "any intermediary," and I'd contend that when Julian adds this to her observation of Christ's hot and fresh blood, she is highlighting the fact that Christ is physically present with her in the room as she has these visions, and that he is not speaking to her through some veil or spiritual intermediary, but that he is there, in front of her, bleeding very real blood. In this case, Julian's detailed descriptions of Christ's blood underscores her own intimate knowledge of Christ-she understands both his divinity and his humanity. So, interestingly, both the paradoxical details of Christ's blood, and Julian's own visceral account of it, work simultaneously to other both Christ and Julian.

Shortly after, in chapter 7 of Revelation 1, we encounter another detailed account of the blood of Christ:

I saw the bodely syght lastyng of the plentuous bledyng of the hede. The grett droppes of blode felle downe fro under the garlonde lyke pelottes semyng as it had comynn out of the veynes. And in the comyng oute they were browne rede, for the blode was full thycke. And in the spredying abroad they were bryght rede. And whan it camme at the browse, ther they vanysschyd.

Here, Julian describes several physical characteristics of the blood: its plentiful nature, that it first falls in drops, that the blood seems to issue from his veins, and that it begins as a thick and brownish red and then spreads into a bright red before it vanishes altogether. Each of these observances carries medical significance, which underscore *both* Christ's humanity *and* his divinity. For instance, Julian remarks that the blood she observes issuing from Christ seems to be of a venous origin; this observation aligns with contemporary medical belief that blood was of two types and subsequently hierarchies: venous and arterial. Centuries beforehand, Galen proposed that arteries contain blood with spirits, while veins only carried blood with air; thus the blood that veins transported only nourished the body, while the blood of arteries nourished the spirit. This seems to point towards the very real, material, worldly nature of Christ's blood, which re-emphasizes that point that Julian repeatedly tries to make throughout her visions—that she is seeing Christ *incarnate*.

Not only does this scene catalog the physiological traits of Christ's blood, it also medicalizes Jesus in another way: it can be read like a blood-letting scene in that, the blood issuing from Christ's head is dirty, unhealthy blood that must be purged in order to cleanse both his body and his soul. On a symbolic level, the blood issuing from Christ is releasing the sins of humanity, which his very incarnation and passion were meant to do. On this same note, it's also important to observe that this venous blood is brownish red, meaning that it's old, dry blood.

However, upon flowing down Christ's head, it is miraculously transformed into bright red blood, a very lively blood. So, as Christ purges the physical, venous, brown-red, very physical blood from his body, his spirit and his suffering transform it into redemptive, living, spiritual blood, which will be poured out for the cleansing of humanity's sins. In regards to the transformation from brown, dried blood to red, lively blood, Star notes that "rather than drying, darkening, or clotting...the blood assumes a livelier color, brightening as it flows because it cannot decay or die: it lives on, providing life for others" (79). In other words, Christ's blood here works to other him in that instead of his blood loss ensuring his own death, it instead promises eternal life for many others; additionally, it is othered because it defies the physical properties of human blood in that it does not dry or clot. In this scene, Christ's blood is also set apart from human blood in that it vanishes.

The process of Christ's bleeding that Julian describes in this scene is like death in reverse. First, as we observed above, we see the thick, dried blood of someone who has suffered a grievous injury at some point in the recent past; this blood does not promise life, but rather belies the loss of it. However, this deadly blood soon transforms into a bright, red, lively blood that flows instead of clots. This blood marks the very liveliness of Christ's physical body and underscores the very humanity of his incarnation. Then, the blood vanishes altogether, as if it were never there in the first place. Christ's blood here is the ultimate other because instead of promising death, it ensures a physical and spiritual renewal that no other physical entity can offer. Christ bleeds, but then the blood is washed away; humans sin, but then their transgressions are forgiven and they vanish without a trace. While Julian uses her numerous detailed descriptions of Christ's blood to convince the reader that her vision of Christ is just as physical as it is spiritual, the paradoxical qualities of said blood actually works to also demonstrate the

miraculous nature of Christ's blood; that is to say that Christ's blood defies and reverses the physical properties of human blood while at the same time invoking that very humanity.

Finally, in Revelation 4, chapter 12, Julian describes an image of Christ covered in blood: "The hote blode ranne out so plentuously that ther was neyther seen skynne ne wounde, but as it were all blode." This depiction of Christ covered in his own blood is reminiscent of Will's dream vision in Passus XIX of Piers Plowman where Christ appears "painted all bloody." While in that particular passage, the bloodied body works to connect Christ to humanity, and enables him to take on both the arms/coat of Piers as well as his battle, I'd argue that the body covered in blood is working a bit differently in Julian's vision. Here, the ample volume of Christ's blood demonstrates its far-reaching salvific capability. In fact, shortly after the above quote, Julian remarks: "The precious plenty of his dere worthy blode ovyrflowyth all earth and is redy to wash all creatuers of synne which be of good wyll." Here, Christ's blood is othered in three ways: first its sheer volume makes it a divine entity, as no human being's body could physically contain enough blood to cover all of the earth. Secondly, through her verb choice (much like Christ's blood which "sprang" forth in *Piers Plowman*), the blood is given an agency of its own. Thirdly, again through her use of verbs, Julian repeatedly likens Christ's blood to water (a similar comparison is seen throughout Piers Plowman as well), and this connection works to underscore the cleansing/salvific properties of the blood of Christ-while most blood defiles, corrupts, and takes life, the blood of Christ cleanses, saves, and offers eternity. All of these intricacies about Christ's blood make him at once intimately known and incomprehensible as one whose existence defies all logic. While the blood in this passage washes over the earth and redeems those "of good wyll," Christ's blood eventually makes its way towards heaven, just as Christ himself did.

Ultimately, while Julian continues to describe Christ's blood in physiological terms in order to demonstrate the very real and visceral encounter she's had, her depictions of his blood also repeatedly work to underscore the divine nature of his person; that is to say, Christ's physical blood, while undeniably underscoring his humanity, time and again defies laws of human anatomy and biology and thus demonstrate his evident divinity. Much like the Croxton *Play*, Christ's blood shows itself to us as something we can touch and see, but also as something we can never fully comprehend.

#### From Affective Piety to Metaphysical Poetry

This chapter has focused on medieval works thus far, the reason being is that medieval conceptions of Christ's blood are fascinated especially with his incarnation, and much of this obsession with corporeality is located especially in the *blood* of Christ. Because of this, numerous medieval works abound with images of Christ's blood, and thus mark them as the ideal sources for a study on the social and medical implications of sacred blood symbolism. However, I'd like to now move forward towards the early modern period to examine several of George Herbert's metaphysical poems from *The Temple*. And, through this examination, I will consider the following questions: Does Herbert's poetry demonstrate a shift between medieval and early modern period social and theological epistemologies of the incarnation of Christ? How is Christ othered through the rhetoric of his blood in Herbert's poetry? How does Herbert employ medical rhetoric to perform this othering? Does Herbert's poetry demonstrate a change from affective piety to metaphysical poetry in regards to the depiction of Christ's blood? And why is this shift, if it exists, significant?

I will argue that throughout *The Temple*, Herbert's poems focus more heavily on the *corpus mysticum* rather than the *corpus christi*. In other words, when it comes to the blood of

Christ, Herbert is more interested in its spiritual qualities rather than its physical ones. For Herbert, the blood of Christ stands as a symbol for salvation rather than a physical entity, and this use of symbolism negates any need for physiological terms and/or a medical understanding of the body of Christ. Furthermore, it seems as though Herbert, unlike his medieval counterparts, is not interested in understanding the embodiment of Christ regarding its scientific implications, but rather, he wants to explore the metaphorical and *metaphysical* tenets of the incarnation. With this said, Herbert's use of blood symbolism, and the large lack thereof, presents a new binary, which the previous medieval works in this chapter have not explored: that of time and space that is to say, Christ is one who can simultaneously be both present and omnipresent, both a tangible entity and an abstruse metaphor.

Before I examine Herbert's magnum opus, I'd like to first briefly visit one of his Latin poems, "In Johannem  $\dot{\epsilon}\pi i \sigma \tau \dot{\eta} \theta i ov$ " or "On John, Leaning on the Breast,"<sup>46</sup> which explores the common medieval trope of a lactating Christ. In this poem, the speaker cajoles the apostle John to relinquish the breast of Christ, so that he too (the speaker) can suck the blood/milk of Christ and receive its salvific sustenance. The speaker's request to share in the breast of Christ represents the universality of Christ's redemptive blood—Christ is a savior to all. As this short poem oscillates between images of breastmilk, blood, and water at a dizzying pace, it recalls the medieval conflation of the three liquids; this conflation also evokes the gender fluidity of the medieval Christ, who is both a man and a mother. This poem stands as an insightful bridge between the medieval poetry discussed earlier in this chapter and Herbert's later poetry in *The Temple* for several reasons. For one, while much of *The Temple* relies more heavily on metaphor than physical entities, this earlier Latin poem is much more embodied, centered specifically on

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Also referred to as *Lucus* 34

the breast of Christ. In fact, at the outset of the poem, the speaker calls John a glutton (l. 1) for so greedily ingesting Christ's milk, thus marking the very tangible nature of Christ's incarnation and his presence within the poem, not only as a sacred figure, but as a physical entity, which emits bodily fluids. Secondly, this poem reflects religious and poetic ideals based in the medieval period, while *The Temple* is more strongly rooted in the later Metaphysical movement. More specifically, the poem repeatedly intermingles blood with milk and water and also feminizes Jesus by depicting him as a lactating mother. However, despite its emphasis on the physical, this poem does not neglect the spiritual and metaphorical facts of Christ. Just as soon as the speaker points to the breast of Christ, he immediately compares the blood it emits to a "Spring that's open to all" (l. 3), thus underscoring both its universal and salvific nature. So, through Herbert's *Lucus* 34, a poem which utilizes both medieval and metaphysical tenets, the reader is able to better understand Herbert's theological and poetic influences, which just like the blood of Christ, are complex and multi-varied.

Early on in *The Temple*, Herbert invites the reader to contemplate the emotional and physical suffering of Christ on the cross through his poem "The Sacrifice" in one of his most embodied poems of the entire collection. While the blood of Christ is repeatedly mentioned throughout the poem, it is not a key signifier of Christ's sacrifice and suffering—instead, Christ's blood highlights the future promise of salvation rather than the present state of suffering. In fact, many of the times when Christ's blood is mentioned within this poem it is in reference to its healing abilities. For example:

Therefore my soul melts, and my heart's dear treasure Drops blood (the only beads) my words to measure: *O let this cup pass, if it be thy pleasure:* 

## Was ever grief like mine?

These drops being tempered with a sinner's tears,

A Balsam are for both the Hemispheres:

Curing all wounds, but mine; all, but my fears:

Was ever grief like mine? (ll. 21-28)

There are several rhetorical moves being made here to compare the blood of Christ to its redemptive nature. For example, we first see the blood of Christ appear in drops and beads; this image recalls the medieval trend of depicting the blood in droplets, each of which signifies the many individual sins of believers.<sup>47</sup> For the blood to be enumerated as individual drops, not once, but twice, reiterates this point—the drop-like nature of the blood individuates each of the sinners that it will reach and save. Ultimately, the imagery of both the beads and the drops of Christ's blood encourages the reader to focus more so on the future promise of salvation inherent in the blood of Christ, rather than his (and our own) present state of suffering.

Additionally, in the second stanza of this passage, Christ's blood is likened to both the tears of sinners and a medical ointment. Both of these comparisons are similar to the rhetorical moves being made in *Piers Plowman*, where the blood of Christ is repeatedly commingled with water and also depicted as having healing qualities. The simultaneous dualities of Christ's blood as water and as medicine works to underscore the physical and spiritual capabilities of this blood, as well as the humanity and divinity of Christ himself. Later in the poem, we again see blood mixed with water, and here it directly highlights this mixture's likeness to the sacraments: "Nay, after death their spite shall further go;/ For they will pierce my side, I full well know;/That as sin

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> See also Bynum, pp. 3, 176

came, so Sacraments might flow" (II. 245-8). Here, we see the side wound of Christ, which was a common fascination in affective piety and metaphysical poetry alike. Christ's side wound abounds with metaphorical meaning: blood and water mix to form the redemptive sacraments of the Eucharist and baptism; blood and water combine to give life, much like the placenta and the womb during birth;<sup>48</sup> blood and water pour out to heal the blind and cleanse the sinner. Not only does Christ's wound and its likeness to the womb symbolize the healing capabilities of Christ's blood; it also demonstrates the duality of life and death inherently present in the body and especially in the blood of Christ—like the womb, which possesses the ability to create life, but also which engenders possible physical danger (for the mother and child alike), Christ's wound promises pain, suffering, and death for him, but salvation for everyone else. Ultimately, these images abound with complexities that represent the intricate and often bifurcated nature of Christ's blood.

Three poems later in the Church sequence, we encounter "The Agony," which maps the metaphorical transformation of Christ's blood into wine. Herbert makes clear here that while the wine of the Eucharist *is* Christ's blood, *it is not* the product of transubstantiation, which he underscores with the final two lines of the poem: "Love is that liquor sweet and most divine, / Which my God feels as blood; but I, as wine." Here, we see that the wine comes to represent, but not to transform into, the blood of Christ, and that the Eucharist exemplifies the redemptive work of Christ's blood shed on the cross. This subtle but significant rhetorical move is in line with Herbert's overall depictions of the blood of Christ—that is to say, Herbert is less interested in the physicality of Christ (in opposition to his medieval predecessors), and more fascinated with the spiritual work that Jesus' incarnation enables. This is why Herbert so infrequently discusses the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> See also Rogers' *Blood Theology* (88)

blood of Christ, and when he does, it is only to then shift the focus towards the metaphor(s) inherent within the blood of Christ. For metaphysical poetry, which is brimming with metaphors, symbols, and poetic conceits, the blood of Christ is rife with meaning, and Herbert explores and exploits that meaning multiple times throughout *The Temple*.

Earlier in "The Agony," Herbert further elucidates the idea that the blood of Christ as it is present within the Eucharist symbolizes the redemptive work of the blood of Christ as it was shed on the cross. For example, while Herbert describes the bloody hair and garments of Christ, he immediately begins to shift towards the metaphorical meaning of this blood: "Sin is that press and vice, which forceth pain/ To hunt his cruel food through ev'ry vein" (Il. 11-12). Here, the press is doing double work, in that it represents both an instrument of torture and a tool for making wine. Thus, the pain of Christ, and the blood which is shed at that moment of pain, is quickly, if not immediately, transformed into the wine of the Eucharist. Line 12 reiterates this idea with the images of "food" and "vein" harkening to the duality of Christ's blood as indicative of both physical suffering and metaphorical redemption. So, again while Herbert at moments points towards the embodiment of Christ, he quickly shifts the reader's gaze from the body of Christ to the spiritual salvation that Christ's incarnation enables.

As I've mentioned before, for poetry that is fascinated with borders, boundaries, and embodiment, most of Herbert's depictions of Christ are rather unbloody compared to the body of Christ as it is illustrated in the aforementioned medieval works. Instead, the body of Christ as well as the body of the Church are metaphorized into architecture rather than living, breathing beings. That is to say, Christ's embodiment repeatedly stands as a metaphor for the future salvation of the church, which is then depicted time and again as physical parts of the church's structure. A perfect example of this rhetorical move can be seen in "The Holy Communion,"

which is a poem focused on the salvific power of the Eucharist, but also one in which Christ's blood is virtually absent. In fact, only once is his blood directly mentioned, and even then it is described as "thy heav'nly blood," (1.38) or in other words a metaphysical entity rather than a physical, earthly one. So, how is blood working in a poem about the Eucharist that doesn't actually present the physical blood of Christ? Throughout the poem, we see Christ's blood enter into the communicant's body through the ingestion of the sacrament: "But by the way of nourishment and strength/ Thou creep'st into my breast" (11. 7-8). When the sacrament is described as "nourishment and strength," Herbert is depicting both its physical and spiritual redemptive qualities—as the food of the sacrament can nourish the body, while the miracle of the sacrament can nourish the soul. Once the sacrament has entered the communicant's body, the physical body is metaphorically transformed into the body of the church. Throughout the poem, grace is provided by the sacrament spreading through the body, which simultaneously represents the church with its walls, chambers, doors, and stone. In this poem, and I'd argue throughout the majority of *The Temple*, the body is presented as a metaphor rather than a physical entity, which is a significant move away from the affective piety of the medieval period, which is centered around and even obsessed with the physical body and sensations of both Christ, as well as the believer as she experiences Christ and lives out her faith. For Herbert, and for many of the metaphysical poets, understanding comes through metaphor, through removing the physical entity and transforming it into a higher ideal.

During a procession through Herbert's "Church," the reader encounters Christ on the cross in "The Sacrifice" early on in the collection. This is arguably the most embodied poem of *The Temple*, with its repeated focus on the physical pain of Christ. However, the repeated refrain at the end of each stanza reminds the reader to remove our focus from the body of Christ and to

instead focus on the spiritual anguish, or "grief," of Christ. Once we depart the scene at Calvary, Christ becomes less and less embodied as each poem progresses. We see this at work in "The Agony," where Christ's bloodied body is introduced only to be quickly replaced with images of the Eucharist. Then, later in "The Holy Communion," metaphor replaces literal presence time and again as the Host enters the body of the believer, which simultaneously stands for the building of the Church. Herbert's repeated use of metaphor within metaphor, especially when it comes to the body and blood of Christ, stands in stark contrast with the medieval literary tradition of a very visceral and corporeal focus on Christ's incarnation, and this in turn demonstrates the divergence of thought between the pre- and post-Reformation periods when it comes to the incarnation of Christ and to the Eucharist. In fact, Herbert and many of his fellow metaphysical poets do away with the need to understand Christ's body on empirical terms; to Herbert, it seems that Christ's corporeality is beside the point, when there's so much spirituality to study and praise. In conclusion, while a move towards the 17th century would lead many to assume that the body of Christ would become even more medicalized as the Scientific Revolution rapidly approaches, this seems to be the opposite of the truth for Herbert and many of his contemporaries. This just goes to show the fluidity and flexibility that blood symbolism allows when examining the body of Christ and all of its theological implications in both a preand post-Reformation world.

#### Conclusion

The body of Christ, and his blood in particular, was and still is a point of fascination, contention, and even obsession with many Christians for a number of reasons. Most significantly, blood's highly visible nature screams for attention, because blood's presence

represents a break in the body's barrier<sup>49</sup> which beckons to pain, injury, and even violence. When someone bleeds, our eyes are drawn to the wound, because it speaks to the body's livelihood and to its vulnerability. Christ's blood represents all of these things, but it also marks him as divine as doggedly as it does human; Christ's blood both encompasses and disrupts many aspects of identity. In fact, Rogers notes some of the many complexities of Christ's blood when he says: "The blood from the cross is the blood of Christ; the wine of the Eucharist is the blood of Christ; the means of atonement is the blood of Christ; the unity of the church is the blood of Christ; the kinship of believers is the blood of Christ; the cup of salvation is the blood of Christ; icons ooze out the blood of Christ; and the blood of Christ is the blood of God" (14). That's why Christ's blood makes him the ultimate other: the being who defies all human understanding and whose body does divinely infinite deeds, none of which would be possible without Christ taking a human form. Not only does Christ represent so many complexities about theological dogma, he also embodies all of the other forms of otherness that I will discuss in this dissertation: female and male, Jewish and Christian, human and non-human—in other words, Christ is the quintessential other-and this is why I've chosen sacred blood to be my first chapter. The otherness of Christ's incarnation, especially as it is embodied within his blood, both sets Christ apart from all humans and draws him more closer than ever to humanity. By exploring the implications of the blood of Christ, I have demonstrated how the language of blood works in a singular example, and this is important to establish at the outset of my dissertation before I begin to investigate how larger social groups are also othered through the rhetoric of blood.

In the Middle Ages, we begin to see a burgeoning interest in the blood of Christ, especially as it surrounds the Eucharistic debate about transubstantiation. However, as Beckwith

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> (Rogers 8)

contends, this debate isn't just about miracles, it's about who has access to them.<sup>50</sup> Thus, Christ's bleeding body represents boundaries through which one can enter and also exit; or in other words, Christ's blood, much like the blood of all of the other groups of marginalized people discussed in this dissertation, works to police people—to grant and deny access as society deems fit. Ultimately, Christ's wounded body illustrates Christian fears about salvation and about access to grace. So, what do you do when you fear something? You can run away from it, or you can seek to understand it.

Medieval and early modern literature reflects a repeated effort on the part of lay people to understand an entity that resists comprehension—the blood of Christ. While the medieval era tends to favor empirical, physiological, and physical modes of understanding Christ's incarnation and the blood of Christ, metaphysical poets like Herbert relied more on metaphors to fathom the magnitude of such a dynamic character as Christ. No matter the avenues of comprehension, the results are the same: Christ, and his blood, repeatedly defy concrete, finite definition. Through empirical efforts, such as the experiments of Jonathas in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, some sought to test the physical bounds of the host. Through a comparison to medicine and an exploration of its seemingly endless binaries, William Langland sought to comprehend the nature of Christ's blood. Through a physiological observation of Christ's blood, Julian of Norwich sought an intimate understanding of his incarnation connected to her own physical suffering. Through metaphorical meaning, George Herbert sought to construct an image of Christ that magnifies the mystery of God's grace in a way that will bring the reader spiritually closer to Christ. Furthermore, this chapter's comparison between medieval and early modern texts and their representations of Christ's blood highlights a number of binaries that this entity inhabits,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> See Beckwith's Chapter 2, especially pp. 30-31

including theological thought between both pre- and post-Reformation worlds. In other words, the blood of Christ, and blood symbolism in general, is so prevalent when discussing social identity because it allows fluidity of thought and allows complex natures to coexist. This is a notion that I will explore in each chapter—that idea that blood symbolism, especially the dualities that it presents, allows society to negotiate their evolving definitions of otherness. Ultimately, no matter what avenue we take to comprehend the nature of Christ's incarnation whether it be affective piety or metaphysical poetry, theology or science, metaphor or physiology—each time, the blood of Christ escapes our full understanding, and probably always will.

# CHAPTER II: BLOODY WOMBS, BLOODY TOMBS:<sup>51</sup> SECRECY, FEMALE SEXUALITY, AND THE MALE GAZE

Female blood, like sacred blood, embodies a number of dualities, which both create and justify the marginalization of misunderstood groups of people. In fact, women's blood shares many of the same traits with the blood of Christ: mother's blood and Christ's blood are both shed as a sacrifice for others; female and sacred blood both simultaneously represent life and death; both types of blood belie secret natures and abilities that men cannot comprehend, and this makes these bodies perceived as dangerous. In each instance, of Christ's blood and women's blood, the fluidity of blood symbolism creates instability; however, for the case of sacred blood, this fluidity lends itself to freedom of interpretation and a wider range of understanding, while for women's blood it leads to dangerous, and even fatal, misunderstandings. Ultimately, both the blood symbolism of Christ and women underscores this notion: when a body is mysterious, it poses a threat to pre-existing hegemonies, and so it must first be understood and then dismantled.

The female body has long (if not always) been policed by society for signs of immorality, overt sexuality, and a number of other expressions of independence that lie outside of the malegoverned institutions of acceptable femininity. This type of surveillance was widely present during the medieval and early modern periods. However, between these two eras, we begin to see a gradual and subtle—albeit crucial—shift in the ways in which female bodies were monitored and policed. Throughout much of the medieval period, medical and social jargon referred to the inner workings of the female anatomy as "secrets," a trend upon which numerous

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> The title for this chapter was inspired by Bonnie Lander Johnson's chapter in *Blood Matters*, "Blood, Milk, Poison," especially page 137 and her discussion of the 'womb of death' in *Romeo and Juliet*; see also page 141. David Willbern also makes a connection between wombs and tombs in his article "Rape and Revenge in *Titus Andronicus.*"

scholars have written, most notably Katharine Park and Monica H. Green.<sup>52</sup> This rhetorical shift illustrates a transition in thought about the female body around this time, in which men were more actively observing female bodies through a medical gaze; or in other words, the ways in which men described women's bodies changed, but the underlying ideas about women's bodies were the same-men were largely interested in women's bodies as they related back to the men themselves. Green remarks on this newfound medical interest in females when she says, "the introduction of the concept of 'secrecy' into gynecological discourse at this period may in part be due to a shift in audience: men are now presumed to constitute the principal audience for gynecological literature (or mentions of gynecological issues), and it is therefore men's perspective on women's bodies that renders the topic 'secret'" (12).<sup>53</sup> Thus, by calling the workings of the female reproductive system "secrets," medical discourse and practice engenders the notion that the woman's body is unknown and mysterious, and even perhaps more significantly, unseen-thus making it worthy of male surveillance and speculation. Because female's reproductive organs were situated within the female body, and because they played such a pivotal role in the creation of future generations, the female womb and all of its workings became central to medieval and early modern medical fascination.

In this chapter, I will argue that female-specific bleeding and the medicalization of said bleeding enabled male surveillance of the premodern female body; additionally, the oftenmisinterpreted nature of female blood posed a threat for women, as it reduced both their corporeal and social agency and greatly enabled false accusations as well as misunderstandings.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> See especially Katharine Park's *Secrets of Women* and Monica H. Green's "From 'Diseases of Women' to 'Secrets of Women': The Transformation of Gynecological Literature in the Later Middle Ages."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> When discussing this trend in diction, Green cites various translations of the *Trotula*, as well as a number of German and Dutch gynecological texts such as *Van heymeliken medicinen in vrouwen*, *Dit is van heimelicken medecinen der vrouwen uunde oeren gebrecken*, and *Verborgene Heilkünste: Geschichte der Frauenmedizin im Spätmittelalter*.

Ultimately, the premodern treatment of female blood harkens to the masculine desire to control women and their bodies (especially their sexuality); however, a study of early modern literature demonstrates how this same blood, which was used by men to disempower and endanger women, could then be reframed by women as a form of empowerment. Blood—that of Christ, that of women, and that of the other marginalized groups that this dissertation will examine—is saturated with dualities.

In her introduction to *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England*, Sara Read argues that:<sup>54</sup>

In early modern England, each new episode of vaginal bleeding was imbued with meaning which related not just to the physiological changes it announced in the female body but to cultural and social dimensions too. This was because each type of bleeding, from menarche to post-partum bleeding, marked a change in the way in which a woman was perceived by those around her. (1)

The duality of female bleeding, both physical and social, underscores the bifurcated nature of the female body itself, which was marked not only by its physical presence and physiological makeup but also by its social significance—especially as the female body related to the masculine order of things. In other words, the premodern female body as it bled was almost always of interest to men, because it marked the female's relationship with said men. For example, menarche was socially significant because it demonstrated that a girl had transitioned to a woman and was now sexually (whether or not she is mentally or emotionally ready was irrelevant) ready for a husband. Hymenal bleeding was important because it marked a woman's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Read, Sara. *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early-Modern England*. 1st ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

loss of purity, and its absence showed a husband that he possibly was not his wife's first lover.<sup>55</sup> Regular menstruation was of interest to men because it helped them to monitor their wife's fertility and any possible pregnancies. And postpartum bleeding denoted a woman's transition from wife to mother, the pinnacle of success for a woman's body. Thus, female-specific bleeding became a tangible way to demarcate women's social relationships to men.

For centuries before the late Middle Ages, the functions of the female body remained relegated to the woman herself as well as to female medical practitioners, namely midwives. However, with the emerging medicalization of female-related health issues such as pregnancy, menarche, and menstruation, men created a new—more visible, accessible, and agential—way to monitor and police female bodies: through their female specific bleeding. By the end of the medieval period, it was becoming increasingly common for women to refer to male physicians during pregnancy and childbirth, or during issues of infertility, rather than the previously popular female midwives. In addition, men began to more readily discuss, publicly and openly, the workings of female bodies in print and in lectures; however, while the medicalization of the female body enabled free discourse among men about the female body, this shift oppressed women, who were now often relegated to using code words and euphemism to discuss their own bodily functions.<sup>56</sup> In other words, the medicalization of female bleeding empowered men while simultaneously disempowering the very women whose bodies were being discussed; or, as Green

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> In chapter 6, "'The Flower of Virginity': Hymenal Bleeding and Becoming a Woman," Sara Read observes that hymenal bleeding was a phenomena that was up for debate both amongst medical professionals and society at large. Many agreed that hymenal bleeding on the wedding night was solid proof of a woman's purity before wedlock,but the absence of hymenal bleeding was not always proof of a woman's impurity (136). Because of its elusiveness, Read contends that hymenal bleeding became romanticized in early modern literature and widely discussed in medical treatises; hymenal blood's enigmatic nature worked to further prove to an early modern audience that the female body was one that would never be fully understood (137; 143-4).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Sara Read discusses this trend in depth in chapter 4 of *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England*.

remarks, "The adoption of the title *secrets of women*<sup>57</sup> did not enshroud women's bodies with a protective barrier to the male gaze; rather, it rendered women's bodies open for intellectual scrutiny in ways that, quite understandably, may have left certain observers with concern that medical discourse had more power to harm women than to help them" (7, emphasis original). Thus, medicalizing the female body and its natural functions works to concurrently enable men to monitor and control female bodies while at the same time subjugating said women and removing much of their own bodily autonomy. While a lack of female bodily autonomy was no new thing at this point in history, using medicine to achieve this coup was a new move in the game.

Medieval and early modern medicine intervenes in two ways to better understand, and ultimately to control, female bodies: first through dissections or "anatomies," and secondly through the observation of female-specific bleeding (i.e. menarche, hymenal, postpartum, etc.) While anatomies allowed groundbreaking discoveries about the female womb to take place, they were rare occurrences. As Katharine Park<sup>58</sup> notes, most female anatomies were performed domestically after a woman died during childbirth; so, although these anatomies helped practitioners to view female organs, it did little to help them understand the workings of reproduction since pregnant women with babies in utero were hardly ever available for dissections. Furthermore, public anatomies were often performed within universities, and these corpses were typically supplied after executions; thus, female bodies were rare, and pregnant female corpses practically non-existent (as pregnant criminals were typically allowed to give birth before being executed). Therefore, while anatomies did allow some, and only a select few

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> The term was widely used and adopted by male practitioners and medical texts written by these male practitioners.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> See Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection. Zone Books; Distributed by the MIT Press, 2006.

at that, to gain knowledge about the physical/visible anatomy of the female reproductive system, it did little to advance knowledge about its actual functions during reproduction and gestation itself. Moreover, dissections remained a highly unattainable avenue of knowledge for many. Therefore, female-specific bleeding became the most popular way through which to see and understand, and more importantly to police, the female body.

Because blood allowed easily accessible and visual "proof" of a woman's social relationship to men (namely either her father or her husband), it became a more popular method of discussing, discovering, and monitoring female reproduction than the observation of the womb itself, which even after the practice of anatomies began, remained highly inaccessible to the majority of people. The very visible nature of blood is why, I argue, it is so imbued with social and medical meaning, both in the premodern and modern worlds. So, to study blood, is to study a culture's fascination with self and with life itself. In her chapter on post-partum and lochial bleeding, Sara Read contends that blood during pregnancy and childbirth provoked fear as it was often a harbinger of miscarriage, stillbirth, or death for the mother.<sup>59</sup> I'd like to take this argument a step further and assert that *all* types of female blood provoke fear in either the woman herself, the attendant men in her life, or both—fear for her purity, her sexual independence, her bodily agency and/or her inability to control her own body. Moreover, as Read argues, these types of female bleeding were thought to require male observation and medical intervention, and this I contend, further advanced male dominance over the female body and its expression of sexuality (169). Ultimately, the male gaze invoked by the medicalization of female bleeding often led to (mis)understandings of female bleeding that put women's bodies in danger more than they worked to help save their lives. However, while female bleeding enabled

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> See chapter 7, "The 'Cleaning of the Flowers after the Birth': Managing Pregnancy and Post-Partum Bleeding"

dangerous and prohibitive male intervention on women's bodies, the female characters in this chapter's plays were able to recast the disempowering nature of female blood in order to gain agency through the very same vehicle used to subjugate them in the first place.

As I mentioned earlier, in this chapter I will argue that using blood as the method through which men, and society at large, can surveil and police the female body is dangerous because often, female bleeding and its symptoms were open to personal conjecture.<sup>60</sup> Thus, while medicalizing the female body grants a new type of authority to men to monitor and control women, early modern medicine presents an unstable, embryonic mode of observing and knowing the female reproductive system. Furthermore, because of the ambiguous and often misleading nature of female bleeding, its use as a way to monitor female purity had the potential to become deadly for any woman who wanted, or was perceived to want, to express any form of sexuality. Furthermore, cultural taboos made communication about the female body, especially among females themselves, vague and unclear, and thus engendered another way in which these bodies were open to conjecture and misinterpretation; meanwhile men, through the use of Latin, could speak about female bleeding more directly-which provided another avenue of autonomy over women's bodies for men.<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, blood represents many things, and its fluid nature presents real dangers to women of the premodern world, but also an opportunity to manipulate this same fluidity as a form of agency.

Blood, female sexuality, and fertility are all linked to one another in the three early modern plays that I will discuss in this chapter: Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, and John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*; in addition, not only are the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> We see the perfect example of this ability for conjecture in Ford's *Tis Pity She's a Whore* when Richardetto, disguised as a doctor, diagnoses Annabella with greensickness, or the virgin's disease, when in reality, she is pregnant; both conditions presented physiologically similar symptoms and thus could be confused for one another. <sup>61</sup> See also Read's conclusion chapter.

aforementioned entities inextricably connected to one another, they are all also both deadly signifiers and forms of agency for each of the female characters associated with them in these plays. To be female and to be sexually active is to be open to harm, and even deadly force, at the hands of men. Ultimately, in each of these plays, women's sexuality serves to silence them-for Lavinia, it does so quite literally with her mutilation, but for Annabella and the Duchess, the nature of their sexual encounters work to silence and disenfranchise them socially for fear of shame and degradation. Although sexuality, and its connection to blood, presents a threat to all of the female protagonists in these three plays, it does so in various ways, each of which provides a unique commentary on the social significance of female bleeding. In *Titus Andronicus*, blood signifies a loss of purity, and the sheer volume of the blood, represents the violent means through which this purity was wrenched from Lavinia at the behest of the only other female in the play: Tamora; throughout the play, sexuality and violence go hand in hand, and all of this is connected through the play's heavy emphasis on blood symbolism. Later in the play, the blood of Chiron and Demetrius, Lavinia's rapists, signifies Lavinia's reclamation of her body and her sexuality. In '*Tis Pity She's a Whore*,<sup>62</sup> blood plays two roles, both of which are central to conception. First, there is a repeated and evident focus throughout the play on blood as a signifier of a pure family line; in other words, blood represents the social anxiety about maintaining class ranks. Secondly, blood, and the absence thereof, marks Annabella's loss of purity and her impending pregnancy, a pregnancy which underscores the corruption of her family's bloodline through the production of an incestual heir. And lastly, in The Duchess of Malfi, we see blood play similar roles as it does in 'Tis Pity in that blood represents the desire to maintain class hegemony, and it also acts as a way for men to control female sexuality; the absence of blood, much like in 'Tis

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>62</sup> Henceforth, I will refer to Ford's play 'Tis Pity She's a Whore as 'Tis Pity.

*Pity*, demonstrates both the corruption of the familial line and the loss of female purity. All in all, while each of these works make particular use of blood symbolism, all of the plays demonstrate the fluid nature of blood which inhabits numerous dualities and identities all at once. With that said, it is crucial to note this same blood which silences these women is then transformed into a means of expression. As I will discuss in depth later, each of the women in these plays used blood specifically to speak out about the wrong done to their bodies. This reformation and reclamation then only further enforces the fluidity of blood symbolism in the premodern world and in these works of early modern drama.

One of the key dualities that this chapter will explore is that women's blood represents both a form of endangerment and a means of empowerment. The expression of female sexuality initially (and eventually definitively) silences all of the female protagonists in the three plays that I will be discussing in this chapter. For Lavinia, not only is her sexuality forcibly used against her, but she is also corporeally silenced when her tongue and hands are removed; for Tamora, the shame attached to her sexual desire threatens to end her life, and she in turn uses another woman's sexuality against her to negate this threat. For Annabella in 'Tis Pity, it is the incestuous and shameful nature of her sexual expression that forces her to secrecy both about her love for brother and her pregnancy. In The Duchess of Malfi, the Duchess is similarly silenced by her sexuality because of the nature of her relationship with a man of a lower class, and because of her brothers' overarching surveillance of her sexuality. No matter what the source of their silencing is, each of these women ultimately is then given a new that I've highlighted throughout my dissertation: for women, blood is both a threat and a means of expression. For Lavinia, it is her blood that points to the violent deeds done against her; and it is the reclamation of her rapists' blood that empowers her in the end. In 'Tis Pity, Annabella uses her own blood to write a

letter confessing her sexual misdeeds, while she is being imprisoned by her husband, who seeks to restrain her body and her sexual freedom. For the Duchess, her blood lives on through her children, who speak physically and metaphorically of her forbidden love for Antonio. While each woman's sexuality is suppressed and surveilled, largely through her own bleeding, they all also are able to regain bodily autonomy through this same blood—again, denoting the intricate, and often bifurcated, nature of blood symbolism.

The polyvalence of blood symbolism is monumental. It both enables and reflects the fluidity of cultural identity. For women, blood symbolism can lead to misinterpretation and danger, but it also can facilitate feminine agency. Much like Christ's blood, female blood welcomes diverse categories of meaning, which allows society to negotiate identities, especially those of marginalized groups. As popular thought about embodiment shifts in the premodern world, blood is always there, offering a way to both connect and dissect cultural meaning.

## Titus Andronicus and Murderous Mothers

Of the three early modern plays that I will analyze in this chapter, *Titus Andronicus* stands apart from the other two for several reasons. First and foremost, this play, and my discussion of it, will stand as a precursor for my later discussion of *'Tis Pity* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, largely because *Titus* ' blood symbolism does not focus as heavily on medical rhetoric as the latter two plays. Instead, my discussion of *Titus Andronicus* will serve as an introduction to the bifurcated nature of gendered bleeding: in that it can be used to both endanger and empower women. The majority of this section will focus on how the play's two female characters, Lavinia and Tamora, use their embodied sexuality, and the blood associated with it, in very different ways, but both ultimately meet an untimely, tragic end regardless. The end of this section on *Titus Andronicus* will point towards a burgeoning medicalization of women's bleeding, as I

argue that the murder of Chiron and Demetrius can be read as a subverted bloodletting scene, in which the practitioner rather than the patient receives the curative benefits of the practice. Secondly, the loss of female purity in *Titus Andronicus* centers around a sexual assault, rather than a consensual affair; because of the extremely violent nature of Lavinia's rape, her blood marks her loss of purity as a very public and a very gruesome event, while the other two plays focus on secret, but consensual, sexual encounters that the lovers try to hide. Secondly, because of the covert nature of these relationships, 'Tis Pity and The Duchess of Malfi both focus on the *lack* of menstrual blood and its subsequent implications (i.e. pregnancy), while the case of Lavinia's rape is copiously bloody. The streams of blood found throughout Titus Andronicus beckon for vengeance, and they lead Lavinia on a quest to reclaim her sexual autonomy and to subsume both her blood loss and her loss of purity through her own acts of violence. However, despite the divergent natures of female blood in these three plays, the message is the same: blood, especially female blood, both endangers and empowers the women of these plays. This notion once again points us to the duality of blood, which much like Christ's blood (which is both sacred and human, healing and harmful, etc.), embodies numerous junctions of identity simultaneously.

In my discussion of *Titus Andronicus* and female bleeding, I will focus on two scenes in particular: Lavinia's rape scene (especially its bloody aftermath), along with the bloody basin scene where Lavinia and her father Titus murder Lavinia's two rapists, Chiron and Demetrius. While the first scene marks a *loss* of sexual purity which is demonstrated by the sight of Lavinia's bloody body as well as the bloody pit in the forest, the latter scene underscores a *reclamation* of the purity and autonomy that was wrenched from Lavinia during her rape. Additionally, while the second scene is just as bloody as the first, the blood here works to bring

the play's theme of vengeance full circle, and thus the blood here connects to and erases the blood from the first instance—Lavinia's rape. Aside from these two scenes, I'd like to begin and end my analysis of *Titus Andronicus* with a discussion of Tamora in conjunction with my discussion of bloody wombs and bloody tombs; here, I will argue that she demonstrates a type of monstrous motherhood which incites her progeny to enact violence against other women, and which ultimately leads to her own physical consumption of her sons. In doing so, I aim to compare the two forms of female sexuality and female bleeding presented in this play, as I believe that they are doing both similar and dissimilar work—and ultimately, each woman represents different notions of sexuality and femininity demonstrated through the use of blood symbolism.

In 2.3, Tamora meets with her secret lover, Aaron, who is also her Moorish servant. Their affair is forbidden both because of their social and their racial differences; in addition, Tamora is already married to the emperor of Rome, Saturninus, which only exacerbates the taboo nature of her relationship with Aaron. When Lavinia and her betrothed, Bassianus, discover Tamora's amorous rendezvous with Aaron, they shame her for her adulterous affair. In this scene, we see blood working on several levels, especially as it relates to Tamora's sexuality and the dangers that it poses. First, Tamora and Lavinia incite the common love trope of hunting, a violent and bloody sport, to discuss Tamora's forbidden sexual encounters and this works to reverse traditional gender roles as it depicts Tamora as the sexual pursuer of Aaron. Secondly, Bassianus cites Aaron's race, another significant form of blood symbolism, as one of the major reasons for the shame that Tamora should feel. Thirdly, Bassianus describes Tamora's fallen honor as "spotted, detested, and abominable" and thus denotes her shame as something which is legible on her body, like Aaron's race (2.3.74). Each of these uses of blood symbolism in turn work to

shame Tamora for her sexual pursuits, and thus demonstrate the plasticity that blood symbolism provides when considering notions of embodiment and otherness. In addition, the scene questions Tamora's culpability in her later actions: If Bassianus and Lavinia use blood rhetoric to shame Tamora for being a sexually empowered woman who desires a Black man, to what degree should the audience pity their impending punishment for conforming to racial and sexual assumptions? The answer is unclear and certainly problematic. Although each of these representations of blood are significant, I'd like to underscore that, while Tamora has several motives for revenge against the Andronicus family, it is ultimately the discovery of her affair which incites her to persuade her sons to rape Lavinia; in other words, it is the discovery of Tamora's own sexuality, and the social and moral implications of its expression, which provokes her to lash out against another woman's purity and conjure bloody violence in doing so. Ultimately, female sexuality proves to be dangerous and deadly in a number of ways in this play—and all of this is linked back to the connection between female sexuality and blood.

Shortly after Bassianus and Lavinia berate Tamora for her affair, Tamora's sons, Demetrius and Chiron, join the scene and quickly notice that something is amiss. It's important to note here that it is Tamora's paleness which makes her distress visible to her sons. In other words, it is her blood loss, which symbolizes the loss of her purity, that physically demarcates her body. While Tamora is no blushing maiden, the discovery of her affair with Aaron marks her simultaneously as impure and in danger. Upon seeing their mother's distress, her sons ask for the cause, and Tamora accuses Bassianus and Lavinia of threatening to kill her because they claim she is a "foul adulteress" and "Lascivious Goth" (2.3.109-10). While Bassianus and Lavinia certainly have some choice words for Tamora, they never threaten to kill her; instead, Bassianus threatens to report her affair to his brother and Tamora's wife, Saturninus. However, this threat

of discovery, while not a direct threat on her life, is indeed a promise of death. After relaying this largely embellished story to her sons, Tamora then directly incites her bond of motherhood as an incentive for them to enact justice: "Revenge it as you love your mother's life,/ Or be ye not henceforth called my children" (2.3.114-5). I'd like to underscore here that her sexuality and femininity work as deadly weapons in this scene and throughout the play; it is her lust for Aaron that endangers her livelihood upon its discovery, and it is her maternal bond that persuades her sons both to believe her lies and then to act upon them in vengeance when they kill Bassianus and then rape and mutilate Lavinia. Both of these call to different forms of female bleeding, and both of them inevitably lead to violence. While Tamora uses her sexual experience, and its relation to blood symbolism to gain agency, Lavinia's own sexuality is used against her, first when her father assigns her to marriage without her consent, and shortly after when she is brutally assaulted by the Goth brothers.

After Tamora's maternal plea, Demetrius and Chiron stab and kill Bassianus. At this point, Tamora turns on Lavinia, asking her sons for their "poniard" in order to kill Lavinia (2.3.120). Read notes that both cultural norms and medical treatises often referred to the female's loss of virginity in terms of stabbing, violence, and warfare.<sup>63</sup> Thus, Tamora's invocation of the poniard presents a complexly layered instance of sexuality and violence—by asking for their phallic weapon, Tamora is metaphorically taking her sexuality into her own hands and demonstrating autonomy by taking on the physical anatomy of a man as well as a man's sovereignty over female bodies. Not only does this represent her reclamation of her own sexuality, it also represents her intent to despoil Lavinia's sexuality in the process, which she subsequently does by inciting her sons to violently wrench away Lavinia's purity and her

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> See Read's chapter 6, especially pp. 140-2.

virginity. So, here, we see blood work to both endanger and empower women. The ensuing bloody scene that unfolds marks not only Lavinia's loss of virginity but also the violent and nonconsensual nature of it. While some would argue that Tamora has already lost her virginity, in fact only the night before the rape scene, to her bethrothed Bassianus, I'd contend that even if this is the case, she has still maintained her honor and her purity, as this sexual encounter was within the confines of marriage. So, when Chiron and Demetrius rape her, they are stealing her virtue and her purity, whether or not they are actually taking her virginity.

When Lavinia begs her assailants for mercy, she does so by once again invoking their maternal connection to Tamora. However, while Tamora cites this bond to incite loyalty, Lavinia attempts to sever their allegiance by demonstrating the very non-maternal nature of Tamora:

When did the tiger's young ones teach the dam?

O, do not learn her wrath: she taught it thee.

The milk thou suckst from her did turn to marble;

Even at thy teat thou hadst thy tyranny. (2.3.142-5)

In Lavinia's plea for pity, we see blood at play in several ways. First, in the breast milk that Lavinia mentions, which according to early modern beliefs was made of the mother's blood. Here, by nurturing her sons with her breast milk, Tamora is also simultaneously transmitting her own treacherous traits to her sons. Not only is she doing this through her breast milk, one form of her blood, but also through the genetic bond that she shares with her sons, in which her blood and her traits were transferred to her sons through gestation—thus marking two bonds that mothers create with their offspring through their blood. So, not only are they cruel because their mother has fed them wickedness since birth, but also because she instilled hatred in them *before* they were even born. With this observation, Lavinia invokes both medical and social

assumptions about femininity and motherhood, while simultaneously disrupting popular thought about the gestational autonomy of women. Again, we see Tamora using her body, and its blood, to assert authority over the men in her life. Furthermore, by entreating Tamora's maternal sensibility, Lavinia is also trying to solicit feminine and maternal pity from Tamora—from one woman to another—an attempt which quickly proves wildly unsuccessful. Because, as Willbern argues, "Tamora... is the catastrophic enactment of maternal malevolence: the dreaded devouring mother" (166).<sup>64</sup> That is to say, that while the mother's duty was to nourish and protect her children, Tamora reverses these roles by endangering and eventually devouring her own progeny. In other words, Lavinia's appeal to Tamora's maternal sympathies is a fruitless endeavor since Tamora represents maternity turned evilly on its head.

Immediately thereafter, Chiron and Demetrius drag off Lavinia. Upon Tamora's exit, Aaron enters with two of Titus' sons, Quintus and Martius, and the three of them discover a bloody pit, which is described in pronounced anatomical language that quite unsubtly depicts Bassianus' site of murder as a womb, and one which, it is important to note, has recently witnessed violence:

... What subtle hole is this,

Whose mouth is covered with rude-growing briers

Upon whose leaves are drops of new-shed blood

As fresh as morning dew distilled on flowers?

A very fatal place it seems to me.<sup>65</sup>

com.libproxy.uncg.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=1978104429&site=ehost-live.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup>Willbern, David. "Rape and Revenge in Titus Andronicus." *English Literary Renaissance*, vol. 8, 1978, pp. 159–182. *EBSCOhost*, search-ebscohost-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> (2.3.198-202, emphasis added)

While this pit directly depicts the murder scene and the corpse of Bassinius, it indirectly and symbolically represents the rape and mutilation of Lavinia. Willbern underscores the implications of this symbolism when he argues that "It represents a detailed natural image of a violated vagina...This onstage symbolic event occurs simultaneously with the offstage rape of Lavinia by the other set of brothers. Any unconscious expectation of Lavinia's ravishment, frustrated to an extent by its apparent enactment offstage, is satisfied by its symbolic substitute" (170). So, while the audience is not permitted to view Lavinia's rape, the implications are clear: as the Andronici brothers view the bloody pit, their sister is being violated by another set of brothers not far off. Later, in my discussion of *The Duchess of Malfi*, I will argue that Antonio's nosebleed stands in for the Duchess' parturitional blood; so while women are rarely allowed to bleed directly on the stage, their blood is often represented through men's bleeding—another way in which female bodies are reclaimed by men, and on occasion, when men's bodies are shown to be in sympathy with female bodies.

While the pit in 2.3 simultaneously encapsulates masculine and feminine bleeding, the *blood* in this same scene is described in such a way that it points solely to feminine bleeding. In particular, the image of blood drops as dew drops on flowers represents the defloration, or loss of purity, of Lavinia, which has taken place off-stage. If the pit plausibly represents Lavinia's vagina, the image of bloodied flowers symbolizes her loss of purity. Read notes that the term *defloration* was a common medical and social word used to describe the loss of virginity, as the shape of the vagina was often thought to mirror that of a flower.<sup>66</sup> Here, medical terminology works to underscore the yonic imagery of the pit as well as the rape taking place offstage, making it abundantly clear for the audience that Lavinia is being violated. With the less-than-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> See specifically Read's chapter 6, "The Flower of Virginity': Hymenal Bleeding and Becoming a Woman"

subtle juxtaposition of a murder site with female anatomy, in conjuction with Quintus' description of the yonic pit as a "very fatal place," this play is once again underscoring the fatality of female sexuality—marking wombs as tombs. In fact, shortly after the discovery of the pit, Quintus and Martius fall (or are shoved) into the pit alongside Bassianus's corpse. Shortly before he falls in, Quintus describes the pit, in the same breath, as "the swallowing womb" and "poor Bassianus' grave" (2.3.239-40). Here, again, we see this pit juxtaposed with female sexuality and death, underscoring the play's theme of female sexuality as fatal as well as the duality that female blood repeatedly presents of that of both life and death (much like the blood of Christ).<sup>67</sup> Not long after, Tamora leads Saturninus to the pit, and the blood covering the Andronici brothers stands as supposed proof of their guilt in the murder of Bassianus. While Tamora uses her sexuality as a weapon towards others, especially other women (i.e. Lavinia), Lavinia's sexuality is used as a weapon against her own body. In fact, not only is Lavinia violently sexually assulted, she is also brutally mutilated. And this mutilation works further to disembody her sexuality as well as to remove any forms of social and physical autonomy.

In the following scene, a bloodied and mutilated Lavinia runs into her uncle, Marcus. While she cannot speak, her bloodied mouth and limbs speak for her and tell of the violent deeds she has experienced. It is important to note here that because men (i.e. Chiron and Demetrius) have removed her voice, now a man (i.e. Marcus) must speak for her. Gail Kern Paster contends that "Lavinia's inability to prevent her rape is equivalent to her inability to stop bleeding, is equivalent to her inability to speak her own bodily condition" (Paster 99). In this scene, Lavinia's blood serves to highlight her loss of bodily autonomy, but later, she will use blood to reclaim feminine agency. As Marcus views and describes Lavinia's bloody body, he catalogs her

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> See also: "She [Lavinia] presents a grim image of the dangers of sexuality, and a constant visual reminder of the bloody pit at the deepest core of this play" (Willbern 173).

wounds and repeatedly points towards the bloodiness of her body, which tells him of the violence that Lavinia has suffered and offers clues that she cannot herself say. In this scene, Marcus describes her blood in such terms: "a crimson river of warm blood," "a bubbling fountain," and "a conduit with three issuing spouts" (2.4.22,23,30). And images such as these underscore both the copious nature of the blood as well as its freshness, meaning that Lavinia has been severely brutalized, and it has just recently taken place. In addition to cataloging the severity of her physical wounds, Marcus also uses blood imagery to depict her social and emotional wounds as well—which represents yet another duality of blood as something that calls viscerally to our body and soul. For example, when he notes that Lavinia's cheeks "look red as Titan's face, / Blushing to be encountered with a cloud," he is pointing out a blush that would have been understood to depict a sexual act and even more so, a feeling of shame (2.4.31-32). So, not only does the blood issuing from her body mark her as sexually corrupted and physically mutilated, the blood lying under her skin, which produces a blush, does something similar. All in all, her blood works to underscore both her physical pain and her social shame.

Act 2 of *Titus Andronicus* especially relates to the blood and sexuality of Tamora and Lavinia. Towards the beginning of the act, Tamora is first shamed and disempowered by blood symbolism. She then subverts these feelings of powerlessness by stripping another woman of her sexual autonomy. In order to do so, Tamora cites the blood of her maternal bond to provoke her sons to sexual violence. Then, Lavinia uses the blood resulting from said violence to speak of her violation in ways that she cannot. Her wounded and bloodied body tells of its violation and illustrates Lavinia's loss of power—simultaneously marking her blood as an (dis)empowering entity. Later, Lavinia will use blood, that of her rapists, as a form of sexual reclamation. Additionally, Tamora and Lavinia's different uses of feminine blood underscore the polarity of

the two forms of femininity that they represent: one who uses her body for personal empowerment and one whose body is used against her will. Later, these roles will be subverted in the play, with Lavinia in control, and this subversion will be realized again through blood. Ultimately, blood speaks of life and death as well as sovereignty and impotence in this bloody scene.

Although Lavinia's mutilation is meant to silence her, Lavinia is able to reclaim physical and sexual autonomy through blood—both her own and that of her rapists. Lavinia's reclamation happens incrementally throughout the play, and each time, her agency is found through blood. First, the blood that remains after her rape and mutilation speaks for her when she encounters her uncle in act 2; although her voice has been taken from her, her blood proclaims the heinous acts she's endured. Then, later in the play in 4.1, Lavinia places a staff in her mouth in order to scratch her rapists' names in the sand for her uncle and father to see. It is important to note that the staff, a phallic symbol, and Lavinia's mouth, a yonic symbol, unite to overturn the sexual violence that has been performed against Lavinia. When she takes the staff into her mouth to write down her rapists' name, she is subverting the silencing effect that her rape and mutilation was intended to have; in addition, this scene marks the beginning of her reclamation of bodily agency. Once Titus and Marcus see her rapists' names, they immediately begin to plan for revenge, and in these plans, they are sure to note the bloody nature of their retribution with remarks from Marcus such as his description of the rapists as "performers of this heinous bloody deed," (1.80) and with details of his plans to seek "mortal revenge upon these traitorous Goths,/And see their blood, or die with this reproach" (ll. 93-94). Here, blood symbolism is used to depict the intent to bring justice to fruition; in other words, because Chiron and Demetrius have drawn the blood of Lavinia with their heinous acts, Titus and Marcus are now both incited

and justified in seeking to draw the brothers' blood in return. Furthermore, because Tamora uses her maternal bond to incite her sons to acts of violence, she will then be forced to do violence against her sons when she unknowingly eats their corpses, and thus subvert the life-giving force of maternity. Ultimately, the nature in which the blood of retribution is drawn is especially significant because it both demonstrates Lavinia's reclamation of her sexual and bodily autonomy and mimics, but ultimately subverts, the medical practice of bloodletting. These are both ideas that I will discuss in depth now.

In 5.3, Titus and Lavinia enact revenge on Chiron and Demetrius. First, the two brothers are bound and gagged, an action that mirrors the silencing effects of their own mutilation of Lavinia. Then, Titus stands before the brothers with a knife and Lavinia with a basin—phallic and yonic symbols respectively. The presence of the basin is especially significant because it symbolizes several things: for one, it recalls the image of a bloodletting scene, and secondly, it exemplifies Lavinia's own desecrated womb. While the earlier image of the bloodied pit represented Lavinia's sexual assault, here the bloody basin calls to a restoration of bodily autonomy. So, although Lavinia does not kill the two men herself, she is empowered when she collects their blood into her basin, because this both demonstrates on a physical level, the repossession of the blood that these men caused her to shed, and on a symbolic level, it signifies Lavinia's reclamation of her sexuality, or as Willbern argues, "revenge is both a substitute for sexuality and a defense against it: it is both threat and rescue" (166). By collecting her rapists' blood in a basin, Lavinia is recovering the blood, the purity, and the power they took from her. Furthermore, this scene both recalls but then ultimately subverts the traditional nature of bloodletting, because in this case, the practitioner, rather than the patient, is the one who is reaping the curative benefits of the practice. In other words, when Lavinia collects her rapists'

blood in a basin, she is using medicine, the same medicine which I will argue in later sections is used to subjugate female bodies, to reclaim agency while oppressing her oppressors. The blood she collects does not cleanse Chiron and Demetrius of their heinous deeds or their corrupt natures, but instead washes away (as the name Lavinia itself suggests) the shame attached to Lavinia by these others' deeds.

While this scene facilitates Lavinia's reclamation of bodily and sexual autonomy, it cannot fully erase the damage that has been done. For one, she still remains mutilated and violated, as is evident by her missing hands and tongue. For another, her individual sovereignty remains stunted because of the continued male intervention in her life, and in the lives of most other women at this time. In other words, while Lavinia is allowed to seek retribution, it is only with the aid of her father, both because the actions of Chiron and Demetrius have limited her physical ability to act of her own volition, and also because the social norms of the time view a woman's body as the property of men (either her father or husband). With her betrothed dead, it is now Titus' right to avenge the wrong done to his daughter's body, to his own property; Titus does so with a classic "honor killing" in which the father must destroy his "defiled" daughter in order to restore his own honor. Once again, men control women's bodies and the honor they attach to those bodies. While blood both first disempowers Lavinia and then enables a reclamation of autonomy, her blood ultimately cannot be washed away and stands as a reminder of the constant threat under which women live when their blood is both in and on the hands of men.

In the final scene of the play, Titus serves Tamora her sons "baked in [a] pie," and then promptly kills her once revealing his secret ingredient (5.3.59). Of this action, Willbern notes, "Titus' retaliation is fiendishly ingenious; he will return the villains to the womb which

engendered them, re-incorporating them into the dark and dangerous place from which they came. For the womb is also a tomb..." (178-9). In the end, Tamora's femininity, particularly as it is expressed through her motherhood, proves to be deadly. Throughout the play, Tamora reverses the typical role of motherhood by using her progeny to incite death rather than recreate life: it is at *her* insistence that her sons murder Bassianus, rape and mutilate Lavinia, and then frame Martius and Quintus. And all of this violence is motivated and created by Tamora's own sexuality—the discovery of her affair with the Moor Aaron. In fact, this affair produces a child, which Tamora coldly sends off to be killed in its first few hours of life (although Aaron quickly rescues it). Again, Tamora subverts the life-giving role of motherhood (as well as the blood inherent in this role), and uses her motherly bond to draw the blood of others. Ultimately, Tamora's carnivorous maternity incites incestual cannibalism, and this demonstrates the ultimate reversal of her motherly role—she feeds upon the sons who once fed upon her own breasts—breasts which fed her sons hatred and corruption, as Lavinia claims earlier in the play.<sup>68</sup>

The play ends with the death of most of the characters, including Tamora and Lavinia, both of which die at the hands of Titus. So, while Tamora and Lavinia both show sexual agency at various moments in the play, it is only for a brief period. Then, their sexuality ultimately leads to their deaths—at the hands of men, no less. This is all to say, that female bodies in this play, and largely in this time period, belonged to men, especially at it related to their expression of female sexuality, which was monitored through their blood, and which typically led to their deaths, another form of bloodshed. This play demonstrates that female bleeding can both endanger and empower women, but the difference between the two lies within a delicate vein

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> See also: "Being eaten by the mother symbolizes incestuous intercourse (entry into the mother's body) as well as death by dismemberment and dissolution. It is simultaneously a rape and the retaliatory punishment such rape requires. It enacts the threat of maternal malevolence at its most hyperbolic, but directed against the monster's own flesh" (Willbern 179).

that can be crushed at any moment; the same can be said for John Ford's '*Tis Pity She's a* Whore.

## 'Tis Pity She's a Whore and the Dangers of Misleading Medical Rhetoric

In John Ford's 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, blood is once again used to surveil the female body and its sexual expression. However, in this particular play we also see female bleeding complicated through the practice of incest, where female sexuality combines with a sister-brother love relationship to produce corrupted progeny—marking an especially complex use of blood symbolism and its implications in sexuality, maternity, and heredity in the play. Furthermore, *Tis Pity* is a prime example of the dangers of misinterpreting medical symptoms, particularly as it relates to female bleeding and sexuality, and this illustrates the deadly nature of female sexuality, especially when it is subject to men's surveillance. For my discussion of female bleeding in '*Tis Pity*, I'd like to focus on several instances in particular: for one, I want to analyze 3.4 where Richardetto, who is posing as a doctor, misinterprets Annabella's symptoms as indicative of greensickness rather than pregnancy; secondly, I'd like to talk about blushing as a sign of both purity and desire in women in this play; lastly, I want to examine Annabella's letter written in her own blood (which I argue is an instance where she uses her blood as a form of agency). In this section, I'd like to argue that not only is female sexuality deadly, but that the ambiguous and often misleading medical rhetoric/terminology used to describe the female body largely contributes to and amplifies the danger that the female body encapsulates. This is due in large part to the fact that it is often men who are both creating and consuming medical rhetoric about women; while some may use this rhetoric better to understand the female body, many use it as a way to monitor and control it. Lastly, this play, like *Titus Andronicus* demonstrates the

complicated duality of blood—which for women in each of the plays discussed in this chapter is at moments endangering and at other times empowering.

As I noted in the introduction of this chapter, Monica Green notes a shift in the medical rhetoric surrounding women's bodies, which towards the later Middle Ages began to describe the workings of women's reproductive organs as secrets.<sup>69</sup> Green contends that the title of secrets worked to harm women more than it helped them in that it depicted these women as mysterious, and thus possibly dangerous, to men and thus encouraged closer scrutiny (and often misinterpretation) of women's bodies (7). The harm that this imprecise language of "secrets" invites can be seen repeatedly throughout 'Tis Pity when characters either refuse to state explicitly what is happening to Annabella's body (i.e. she is pregnant), or when they misdiagnose her medical condition, as we will see shortly in my discussion of 3.4 with Richardetto. In addition, and most importantly, the medicalization of women's bleeding enables only men to speak openly about women's bodies. In fact, Green contends that women's bleeding became of special interest to men in the late medieval period, and it is with this shift that we begin to see the phrase women's secrets utilized;<sup>70</sup> before this time, texts about women's bodies were written for women to read, because women were the ones treating their own bodies and the bodies of other women. With the emergence of medical texts about women's secrets, men invited themselves to observe, understand, and ultimately control women's bodies, while excluding the female practitioners who had been attending to women for centuries prior, as well as the women

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> For examples of some of the specific texts that Green cites, see footnote 3 on page 2 of this chapter.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> See also: "...the introduction of the concept of 'secrecy' into gynecological discourses at this period may in part be due to a shift in audience: men are now presumed to constitute the principal audience for gynecological literature...and it is therefore *men*'s perspective on women's bodies that renders the topic 'secret'" (Green 12, emphasis original).

who were being treated themselves. This bifurcated rhetoric of the female body is seen explicitly in *'Tis Pity*.

Act 3 effectively elucidates the incongruencies between the male and female discourses of women's bleeding. For example, in 3.3 Annabella's tutoress, Putana, informs Giovanni of his sister's pregnancy. Upon receiving this news, Giovanni asks how Putana knows this is to be true, and Putana replies with a list of symptoms. While Putana openly lists a number of symptoms such as "changing of colours" and "pukings," she refrains from saying outright the symptom which speaks most boldly to the possibility of a pregnancy: the absence of menses. The rhetorical and medical shift which begins to describe women's bodies as "secrets," simultaneously marks female bleeding as a taboo topic for women to discuss, while also allowing men to more openly contemplate it. Sara Read analyzes the ambiguity of this exchange and argues:

So, when Putana...lists the signs of pregnancy and adds that they include 'another thing I could name' (III.3.13), but which she declines to say aloud, this precisely highlights the culture of unspeakability of menstruation in public in early modern England. That female bleeding held such significance in determining the life stages of a woman but remained something that it was difficult to speak about in public areas is one of the complexities of that society. The number of expressions and circumlocutions for these physiological events also acted to adversely affect clear communication about the matter, for key terminology often has other possible interpretations. (181)

While women are not invited to speak openly about their own bodies, men feel inclined to surveil women's bodies. More importantly, it is largely the medicalization of female bleeding that makes this unashamed male gaze possible. Through Putana's admissions, Giovanni is made

privy to the workings of Annabella's body, and he then fears allowing another man (i.e. a doctor) to do the same because he does not want his incestuous relationship to be discovered; here the only thing that Giovanni fears is being found out for his socially unacceptable actions, while Putana feels uncomfortable and unable to speak the truth plainly for fear of social impropriety. Although Giovanni worries that Annabella's pregnancy will be discovered, he does not consider that her symptoms may lead to a completely different diagnosis. In fact, many of the symptoms that Annabella displays also align with the symptoms of greensickness, and this is where the ambiguity and confusion ensues. While her pregnancy puts her at risk of social incrimination, the assumption of greensickness puts in her the danger of sexual and marital eligibility—either way, her fate is at the hands of men.

Shortly after this exchange in 3.3, the audience encounters Richardetto, who is posing as a doctor, discussing these same symptoms with Annabella's father, Florio in 3.4. The exchange between these two men is much more forthright than the earlier one between Putana and Giovanni, largely because their status as men allow them to speak more openly about the female body. This scene poses a number of questions for me, but namely: Is the fake doctor in *'Tis Pity* and his misdiagnosis of Annabella a commentary on the inefficacy of early modern medicine, especially regarding the female body? To which, I'd respond, yes. While this scene takes place after Annabella has already lost her virginity, a significant scene of female bleeding which I will revisit later, it is important to examine this scene first, because it encapsulates a number of issues that the play presents about the relationship between feminine bleeding and sexuality. For one, Richardetto mistakes Annabella's pregnancy symptoms for greensickness, and yet this conflation still presents the same outcome: female sexuality as deadly to the female. In other words, whether she's a virgin or she's pregnant, her female blood enables the male gaze and invites

danger. In an examination of *Romeo and Juliet*, Bonnie Lander Johnson comments on this duality of female sexuality, which represents simultaneously life and death:

"Green" signified earthly fertility but "greensickness" signified the failure to exploit a narrow window of fertility in young women for whom lateness, as much as earliness, could equal death. It is this capacity for green to signify both life and death that finds expression in more general early modern moral concerns about sexuality...sexuality is as fertile and productive as it is deadly. More specifically, early modern thinking on the "greenness" of the womb targeted the organ's duplicity (as the source of life and "deadly poison")—a duplicity it shared with nature. (138)

What's interesting here is not only the duplicity of the female womb—as an object that holds the capacity for both life and death—but also the multiplicity of the danger that it presents—both medical and social harm. While greensickness was thought to release deadly toxins into the womb, the surveillance of the womb presents just as much of a social danger, as it does an alleged physical one; in other words, the ambiguity of medical terminology and the easily conflated symptoms of pregnancy and greensickness could not only allow men to surveil women's body, but it also enabled them to interpret their bodies *incorrectly* and to *misread* these signs—all to the very real peril of women.

Another issue that this scene presents about female bleeding is that this bleeding almost always correlates to female sexuality, especially as it relates to the male subjugation of said sexuality. For example, the imagined disease of greensickness was really a guise, under the umbrella of medicine, to marry women off once they reached puberty; this demonstrated not only a social anxiety about female impurity, but also a masculine cupidity to use women's bodies to produce children for as long as they were physically able to do so. When the female body and

female specific conditions such as menstruation and pregnancy became increasingly medicalized, they entered more into the purview of male medical practitioners, and this medicalization enabled men to more readily assign social norms to female bodies. We see this not only when Richardetto misdiagnoses Annabella's pregnancy symptoms for greensickness, and prescribes marriage as the solution, but also through Annabella's father's repeated concern with his daughter's body and the social dangers and opportunities that it presents. With all of this in mind, it is crucial to note that in both scenes 3 and 4 of act 3, Annabella's body is being discussed, but Annabella is not present. In other words, once Annabella reaches an age where she is considered "ripe" for the picking, her body is no longer her own, and it becomes a concern of the men in her life. Sara Read comments on this phenomenon when she argues that female bleeding allowed men both to monitor and openly discuss female bodies, especially as they related to female sexuality. In addition, Read contends that representations of greensickness in drama were often used to represent "female disruption of patriarchal norms" (70). In other words, a father's surveillance of his daughter's bleeding becomes representative of his anxieties about her social standing; the physical becomes transcribed onto the social. Menarche in particular was of special interest to fathers, who watched for their daughter's first period as a sign of their readiness for marriage. Then, once they were married, female bleeding became a concern of a new man in their life: their husband. The husband was first responsible for monitoring hymenal bleeding as a sign of his bride's purity, and henceforth, her menstruation as a way to ensure conception and progeny. While women, such as Putana in 'Tis Pity were constrained by social norms to speak in ambiguity about their bodies, using phrases such as "another thing that I could name" (3.3.12-13), men were invited to speak openly about female bleeding, as demonstrated when Richardetto describes Annabella's sickness as "a fullness of her

blood" (3.4.8). Hence, medical language allows two things to take place: one, men are invited to speak openly about female blood, while women are expected to use euphemism and vague language; two, men make female bleeding public by consulting doctors, while women keep these issues private and something discussed among other women.<sup>71</sup> Ultimately, this removal of women in the medical discussion of their own bodies, leads to misdiagnosis, which then leads to danger for women—both physical and social. Richardetto and Florio assume that Annabella's symptoms are a result of greensickness, and thus consign her to marriage; however, this marriage leads to her death when her husband discovers her illegitimate pregnancy. Male involvement, and more specifically male usurpation of female bodies, sexuality, and health, leads to fatal miscommunications in a number of early modern plays, including here in *'Tis Pity*.

Next, I'd like to discuss the motif of blushing in *'Tis Pity* as well as its larger implications to an early modern audience. Early modern beliefs about blushing conflate shame with sexuality—an amalgamation which medical terminology did nothing to clarify, but rather obfuscated only further. In *Titus Adronicus*, Lavinia blushes after being raped, while Annabella blushes after willingly losing her virginity to her brother; here, the origins of the blush are clearly different, but could be read in the same way by a misinformed observer. If a woman blushed, it could show her purity *or* her sexual desire—a confusing dichotomy of the bodily expression of sexuality; it could also show her shame, as is the case with Lavinia. In *'Tis Pity*, Annabella's blushing comes to represent both her sexuality *and* her purity, and its interpretation depends largely upon which male gaze lands on her blushes at any given moment. According to premodern medical belief, when a woman suffered from greensickness, her face became pale, but intercourse could cure this by kickstarting her menses, which would bring the color back to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> See Sara Read "...while women talk among themselves, fathers seek medical assistance" (74).

her cheeks (Read 76). However, outside of medical terms, blushing could also present several social beliefs, which complicated the issue. For one, someone could blush out of shame, modesty, or embarrassment. But, which one could it be? Again, blood here can lead to misinterpretation, and then misinterpretation can lead to danger and even death.

Right after Annabella and Giovanni consummate their sexual relationship, blood comes into play in a number of ways. For one, the blood that Annabella sheds when she loses her virginity works to unite her to Giovanni as his lover, but this connection is complicated by the blood that already connects them biologically as siblings. The blood that I'd like to focus on in this scene for the moment is Annabella's blush. In 2.1, Giovanni calls attention to this blush by saying:

...Do not blush,

Beauty's sweet wonder, but be proud to know

That yielding thou hast conquered, and inflamed

A heart whose tribute is thy brother's life. (ll. 2-4)

Here, Annabella's blush represents two things to Giovanni: both her embarrassment/modesty/shame at the sexual act that has been committed, as well as the flame/heat/desire that this sexual encounter has engendered in both of them. So, all at once, Giovanni interprets Annabella's blush as a simultaneous sign of her purity and her sexuality—a dichotomy which presents not only complications, but very shortly, will invite danger into Annabella's life; this dichotomy of blood is much like her pregnancy which is shortly after confused for greensickness, marking simultaneously, like her blush, her inherent purity and sexuality. Directly after his entreaty, Annabella responds by describing her blush as "a modest crimson on my cheeks" (2.7), declaring her blush to be a result of her modesty rather than her sexual desire; whether this is true or just Annabella's attempt at feminine modesty is impossible to know.

Annabella's blush is not the only blood present in this scene. For one, in the aforementioned quote, Giovanni describes their sexual encounter using language of war, a common early modern love trope (and one we also see employed in *Titus Andronicus*). However, while there is no blood on the battlefield to be seen, this was not a bloodless entanglement; shortly after, Giovanni begins to speak of Annabella's maidenhead—a sure sign of her virginity—which would have possibly drawn blood. The hymenal blood drawn here leads to complications and danger for Annabella shortly thereafter. For one, the loss of her hymen prior to her marriage would lead her future husband to question her purity. Secondly, her sexual encounter leads to her pregnancy, and here it is the *absence* of blood which poses the biggest threat to Annabella in this play. Unlike *Titus*, where Lavinia's bloody body points to nightmares already realized, Annabella's bloodless state promises future endangerment.

Annabella's marriage to Soranzo is wrapped in danger from the beginning, or as Friar puts it: "I fear the event: that marriage seldom's good/ Where the bride banquet begins in blood" (4.1.107-8). At their wedding reception, the danger that female sexuality poses to women is put at the forefront and marked in blood when Vasques kills his lover Hippolita. Here, Hippolita's sexuality proves deadly for her, and with her dying breath she curses Richardetto, and inadvertently Annabella, by shouting: "mayst thou live/ to father bastards, may her womb bring forth/ monsters, and die together in your sins" (4.1.94-6). Here, again, we see bloody wombs and tombs, where the womb, which brings forth life, can also condemn women to death. With her curse, Hippolita foreshadows the impending doom that Annabella's womb, which carries her brother's child, will bring for many of the characters in the play.

Shortly after their marriage, this prophecy comes to fruition when Soranzo discovers Annabella's secret. How he makes this discovery, we are unsure, but we can assume that it has to do with her blood, or rather her lack of blood: either in her marriage bed and/or with her absence of menses. While here there is an absence of blood, it is still Annabella's blood which points to her guilt in Soranzo's mind. In fact, he remarks both upon the "blood that runs in [her] adulterous veins" as well as her "corrupted bastard-bearing womb"(4.3.2, 13). Here, not only is Annabella's blood corrupted by her licentious ways, the blood that flows to and feeds her womb will also corrupt her bastard child, whose blood is already corrupt because of its incestuous and adulterous origins. Blood is working on a number of levels here, and the danger that female bleeding can create is only exacerbated by its polyvalent nature.

In 4.5, we see Annabella's blood take on a new bifurcation, which is present in each of the three plays in this chapter: that of endangerment turned into empowerment. In this scene, Annabella uses her own blood, the very blood which has worked to condemn and imprison her, to write a letter. Like Lavinia's bloody basin, Annabella's bloody letter gives her a voice and helps her to reclaim her bodily agency. Interestingly enough, both women use writing as a way to reclaim their authority and revoke their shame. And, in both cases, their temporary assertions of power are quickly overshadowed by their male saviors. While Lavinia writes her rapists' names in the sand, and holds the bloody basin under their bodies, it is her father who kills them and then kills her. While Annabella writes a letter to her lover, it is Giovanni who audibly confesses their affair to Soranzo. In other words, although both women use their blood to reclaim bodily autonomy, this blood lands in the hands of men, underscoring the power that men hold over women's bodies, and the ways in which these same men use blood to monitor, police, and subjugate women's bodies. This all works to demonstrate that female bleeding and the cultural

meaning attached to it is largely assigned by men and thus disempowers women; while the women in each of these plays temporarily subvert this paradigm by reclaiming agency through the very blood that has worked to suppress them, they are ultimately relegated to their stunted roles as women in a society where men get the last say.

The blood of Annabella's letter, once read, causes Giovanni's blood to boil, inciting him to revenge, and transforming the feminine blood of independence into the masculine blood of vengeance and violence. Shortly after reading the letter, Giovanni is invited to dinner at Soranzo's house, and it is clear to Giovanni that Soranzo is out for his blood. Here, women's blood, both the loss of her hymenal blood and her bloody letter to Giovanni, works to promote the male usurption of the female body. Soranzo is furious not only because Giovanni has taken Annabella's virginity, but also because he has impregnated her with a bastard child that Soranzo must raise, and on top of all of that, it is a bastard bred through incest; there are many levels of blood at work in this final act of the play.

Just as Lavinia is killed at the hands of a man (and a family member at that), so is Annabella, when her brother stabs her. Shortly before killing her, he notes the blood running through her veins:

How sweetly doth life run

in these well-coloured veins! How constantly

these palms do promise health! But I could chide

With Nature for this cunning flattery. (5.5.74-75).

Here, we see Giovanni question a body's autonomy over fate. While he observes that Annabella's blood illustrates her bodily health, he chides nature for lying, because he knows that death, and a bloody death at that, awaits her fate. Again, we see blood, especially women's blood

(and Christ's blood, as discussed in chapter 1) encapsulate the dichotomy of life and death; the same blood that courses through her body imbuing vitality, will soon stream from it, promising her death. Shortly after this observation, Giovanni kisses Annabella and then kills her. It is significant that this act is done in Annabella's bed, and her bleeding body on her clean sheets mimics the hymenal blood she would have shed on her lover's bed with Giovanni—this works to connect her sexuality with its impending fatality. Once she is dead, Giovanni gazes at her corpse and laments:

She's dead. Alas, good soul. The hapless fruit

That in her womb received its life from me,

Hath had from me a cradle and a grave.

I must not dally. This sad marriage-bed,

In all her best, bore her alive and dead. (5.5.95-99)

With this mournful cry, Giovanni conflates her womb with a tomb, and her marriage bed with a coffin, and this marks her sexuality, as well as its resulting blood loss, as fatal. Their sexual deeds created a child of incest—a socially monstrous progeny of their sins—which in turn condemned them both to death. So, as Annabella lies in her marriage bed, she encapsulates both life and death, birth and murder—"a cradle and a grave"—as she bleeds out at the hands of her murderous brother/lover.

Soon after, Giovanni enters the banquet hall with Annabella's heart on his dagger. Upon discovering his children's incest and his son's act of murder, Florio dies of shock, which causes Giovanni to declare, "now survives/ None of our house but I, gilt in the blood/ Of a fair sister and a hapless father" (5.6.66-68). Here, we see blood work on a number of levels. First, Giovanni is the last of his bloodline; by killing his sister and their child, and then inadvertently

causing his father's death, he has ensured that the Florio family line will end with his death. Secondly, the blood that coats Giovanni or "gilt[s]" him, marks his guilt, and stands as evidence both of his violence and his incest. In the end, blood, Giovanni's blood loss in particular, works to reunite him with his love, Annabella. As he bleeds out, Giovanni "embrace[s] [death] and thy wounds" as they work to rejoin him with his sister (5.6.104-5). Again, blood marks sexuality and fatality and intermixes the two.

Ultimately, this play illustrates a number of issues related to female bleeding. For one, it demonstrates the danger that the ambiguity of medical terminology surrounding women presents, especially as it relates to misdiagnosis; numerous men in this play perceive Annabella's symptoms as a sign of greensickness and rush her to marriage, and this marriage in turn leads to the discovery of her incest and ultimately to her death. This play also depicts the early modern trope which conflates wombs with tombs, or in other words, life with death, and sexuality with fatality. Annabella's bleeding throughout the play stands, often simultaneously, as a sign of her youth and vigor as well as a harbinger of her impending doom. Her bleeding also enables the men in her life to surveil and control her body and her sexuality. Momentarily, this same blood allows Annabella to temporarily reclaim agency in her own life; however, this subversion is reversed shortly after. All in all, this play shows that female bleeding can embody a number of dualities, and that its interpretation is subject to the observer's whims, which makes it all the more dangerous for women.

## The Duchess of Malfi and the Problem of Paternity

John Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi* is one obsessed with family lineage and inheritance; it also examines the links between superstition and medicine, especially how the former affects the latter. This play shares a number of similarities with *'Tis Pity*, because of its

focus on blood both as it relates to family and progeny, as well as how beliefs about blood (mis)inform medical practices. Additionally, *The Duchess* relates to both of the previous plays in that it depicts the endangering and empowering abilities that blood presents to women. The Duchess of Malfi, who is newly widowed and in possession of a fortune and a title, is now the singular focus of her two greedy and power-hungry brothers. In particular, Ferdinand and the Cardinal are concerned with Duchess of Malfi's abstinence, not because they care about her chastity or purity, but because they care about who will inherit her fortune; they want her to remain chaste to ensure no progeny will rob them of their sister's fortune. The Duchess of Malfi not only ignores their wishes, she defies them when she marries and procreates with her steward, a man of inferior rank and blood. This means that not only is she writing her brothers out of her will with each child she births, she is also signing over her title, nobility, and power to creatures of less rank than her brothers—the ultimate insult.

In a play consumed with the surveillance of female sexuality, blood becomes an easily visible way to monitor such a secret, taboo, and often elusive entity. Blood in this play also represents a calibration of rank and worth. Throughout *The Duchess of Malfi*, medical rhetoric is used to depict social prejudice and instill long-established notions of social hierarchy. In my discussion of *The Duchess of Malfi*, I'd like to focus on two particular forms of bleeding/blood: nose bleeds (which I argue both demonstrate social inferiority and enable gender switching) and blood as a marker of rank (both class and gender). Blood is used to underscore the social notions of class, paternity, and gender that the play grapples with. In particular, I will argue that instances/discussions of bleeding are used to identify those who are presumed to be of inferior social status, specifically The Duchess of Malfi; her husband, Antonio; and the servant/spy, Bosola. All three of the characters are plethoric in their physiology, and thus also in their nature,

as is demonstrated by their excess of blood; this plethoric nature causes them then to act out in lust, anger, jealousy, and violence. However, the allegedly superior characters of Ferdinand and the Cardinal complicate these social and medical assumptions when they too act in the same deplorable ways as their inferiors. *The Duchess of Malfi* questions notions of blood as it applies to rank, and it underscores the role that female sexuality, bodies, and blood play in this social hierarchy. All of the play's social commentary is then further complicated by the repeated conflation of medicine and superstition. In other words, this play highlights how social beliefs influence, and ultimately taint, medical practices.

In *The Duchess of Malfi*, the brothers' obsession with their sister's sexuality mimics Giovanni's obsession with Annabella's sexuality in *'Tis Pity*. In other words, sexuality takes on an incestuous tone (one implied and the other blatant) in each of these plays. For Ferdinand and the Cardinal, they want to stop the Duchess from having sex with any one for fear of losing their claims to her fortune; for Giovanni, he just doesn't want Annabella to have sex with anyone else *but him*; whatever their motivation, these men seek to control these women's bodies, and they do so through their surveillance of blood. In both instances, blood, both the loss and absence of it, marks the females as sexually active and betray the secrets that their bodies wish to keep hidden.

In the first act of the play, we learn of Ferdinand and the Cardinal's plot to spy on their sister in an attempt to prevent the Duchess from remarrying. For this purpose, they hire the house's gentleman of the horse, Bosola. Bosola meets with Ferdinand, and they discuss the Cardinal's dislike for the former, upon which Ferdinand states: "Maybe some oblique character in your face/ Made him suspect you" (1.3.140-1). To which Bosola replies:

Doth he study physiognomy?

There's no more credit to be given to th' face

Than to a sick man's urine, which some call

The physician's whore, because she cozens him. (1.3.141-4)

This interaction is significant because it introduces a theme that I've argued each play presents: the idea that medicine is an uncertain, but often used, way to project social norms on the body. This play in particular is also interested in the ties between superstition and medicine. The connection between medicine and social belief is facilitated through the fluidity of blood symbolism. In 1.3, Bosola demeans two medical practices in one breath: physiognomy and piss prophets, both of which seek to use the body to underscore social beliefs, and both of which are unreliable and largely based on superstition. While the Cardinal mistrusts Bosola for the features of his face, Ferdinand believes it is Bosola's blood that speaks of his dishonorable character. When Ferdinand remarks upon Bosola's "inclination to shed blood," he speaks of both a physical trait and one of personality—Bosola's choleric temperament (1.3.156). This again calls attention to another popular contemporary medical practice: that of the humoral theory—another medical theory which Bosola again quickly dismisses. Shortly after, when he contends that it is "bounty/ which makes men truly noble," rather than blood or biology, Bosola repudiates the biological claim to nobility (1.3.176-7). This short interaction between the noble Ferdinand and his hired servant/spy speaks volumes about the tensions between medical and social beliefs, as well as the invalidity of them both; this is a theme that will reappear throughout the play as the Duchess marries a man of inferior rank with superior character, while her noble brothers of allegedly superior blood act corruptly time and again. So, throughout the play, we see that inherited nobility, and the quest to maintain it, can actually lead people to act in markedly ignoble ways.

In the next scene, Ferdinand and the Cardinal meet with the Duchess to persuade her to refrain from remarrying. Again, we see issues of the physical and social conflated when the

Cardinal begs the Duchess to not let anything "sway [her] high blood" and when Ferdinand remarks that those who marry twice have spotted livers (1.4.5-8).<sup>72</sup> Here, the brothers ask their sister to let her noble blood overrule her corrupted feminine blood; to them, the Duchess' body wages an internal war between the superiority of her nobility and the inferiority of her passionate, unpredictable female nature. Just as they believe Bosola's servile blood leads him to be violent and overly passionate, they believe the Duchess's blood belies her impractical and impetuous nature; in one instance, class outweighs gender, and in the other we see the opposite—in other words, unless you are a *man* and one of *noble status*, you cannot be trusted to possess wisdom nor discretion. However, as the play shows time and again with the actions of both Ferdinand and the Cardinal, this is often not the case. Additionally, the incongruencies in medical and social beliefs lead us back to the dangers of misinterpretation that 'Tis Pity presents repeatedly; our diagnosis of bodies, when they are dependent upon social bias, rather than empirical truth, can vary greatly depending both upon who is viewing the body and which body is being viewed. While the late medieval/early modern shift from religious to medical rhetoric about the body, and more specifically about blood, seemed like a move towards empiricism at the time, these three plays demonstrate that epistemologies of embodiment were constantly in flux. The key is the fluidity that blood symbolism engenders, and this is why blood is seen time and again at the crossroads of negotiating tenets of identity.

Immediately upon her brothers' departure, the Duchess calls for Antonio, and asks him to draw up a will for her since she is now a widow. What follows in this scene is a tête-à-tête rife with puns and innuendos. As they speak of marriage and children, the Duchess notes that one of Antonio's eyes is bloodshot and offers him her wedding ring, which she claims "'tis very

 $<sup>^{72}</sup>$  The liver was thought to be the seat of the passion, and a spotted liver was thought to be an indication of disease, and thus corrupted desires.

sovereign," a declaration which plays both on her superior rank and the healing powers of her ring; when she offers Antonio her ring, she is not only offering to heal his bloodshot eye, she is also inviting him to marry her and thus join her in rank (1.3.112). The ring, and its circular shape, also implies that the Duchess is offering Antonio her body and her sexuality in the process. The Duchess' forward invitation and her proposal of marriage works to invert their gender roles, an occurrence, which I argue happens repeatedly throughout the play; the Duchess's title and rank allow her to be the assertive one in the relationship, despite her gender, and this leads to a recurrent gender reversal trope with these two characters.

At her proposal, Antonio repeatedly denies his right to her hand because of his unworthiness; to which, the Duchess repeatedly contends that Antonio is fit to rise to her rank. In their interaction, we see both the roles of gender and of class called into question. After Antonio rejects the marriage proposal numerous times, the Duchess begs him to look beyond her noble rank and to see her as simply a woman who wants to marry him. She reminds him of this by saying,

... This is flesh and blood, sir;

'Tis not the figure cut in alabaster

Kneels at my husband's tomb. Awake, awake, man!

I do here put off all vain ceremony,

And only do appear to you a young widow

That claims you for her husband, and like a widow,

I use but half a blush in 't. (1.3.156-62)

In her plea, we see blood at work in several ways. First, she implores Antonio to recognize her for her humanity through her corporeality, and for her sex, while ignoring her rank, when she calls to attention that she is made of "flesh and blood," the same as him. She also invites him to consider her sexuality when she notes that, as a widow, she can only offer him "half a blush." As I discussed in my *'Tis Pity* section, a blush indicates both modesty and sexual desire; as a widow, the Duchess acknowledges that she can only blush half as much as a maiden, since her virginity has already been claimed by another man; despite this, the blush still remains as she offers Antonio both her hand in marriage and her body in their marriage bed. As soon as Antonio resolves to marry the Duchess, they are wed secretly in her chamber, with only her servant Cariola as the witness. When they speak their vows, images of conception appear in their dialogue with words such as "quickening" and "fruit" (1.3.183, 187). These puns are quickly underscored when immediately upon their marriage, they join one another in the Duchess's bed. While the Duchess claims that they will remain chaste and only discuss a plan to appease her brothers, the implications are clear: their union will lead to progeny, and soon.

In act 2, we learn not only that the Duchess is with child, but that she is also actively in labor. Upon this discovery, references to nosebleeds become noticeably present. This is significant because nosebleeds were commonly believed to be a sign of pregnancy. In their article "Rethinking Nosebleeds: Gendering Spontaneous Bleedings in Medieval and Early Modern Medicine," Gabriella Zuccolin and Helen King, contend that nosebleeds were often gendered as female because of the uncontrollable nature of the bleed as well as the superfluity of blood associated with women. Because of this, bloody noses were often associated with menstruation; when women were pregnant, bloody noses were not uncommon, and were even thought to be healthy, as the woman was no longer menstruating and needed a way to evacuate the extra blood which was leftover after the baby got the nourishment it needed.<sup>73</sup> Moreover,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> See also: "...the link between menstrual blood and nosebleed was implicitly for medieval and early modern medical practitioners and was so obvious to them that they did not feel any need to explain why cases of severe

nosebleeds were also believed to be an omen of bad things to come. So, again we see superstition (as Bosola illustrates) conflated with medical belief. And, we see the intermingling of the two in the various nosebleed scenes of act 2 of the play.

Nosebleeds are first mentioned in this act when Antonio confesses his fears to Delio about the Duchess being in labor, to which Delio responds:

'Tis but the shadow of your fear, no more;

How superstitiously we mind our evils!

The throwing down salt, or crossing of a hare,

Bleeding at nose...(2.2.62-5)

Here, we see both the medical and the social beliefs surrounding nosebleeds converge. When Delio mentions them, it is only as an example of various superstitions that should be dismissed; however, Delio is simultaneously dismissing Antonio's fear about the Duchess's pregnancy, another instance where nosebleeds would have been expected. Shortly thereafter, we see an actual instance of a nosebleed with Antonio. In the next scene, Antonio and Bosola both hear the Duchess scream (presumably from labor pains), and they venture out into the dark hallway to investigate further, upon which they encounter one another. During their exchange, Antonio's nose begins to bleed inexplicably. Antonio's nosebleed here is significant and complex. When his nose bleeds, it acts as a portent of ill future events, a sign of his regendering as female, and evidence of his inferior and superfluous nature as a man of lower social rank. At the sight of his blood, Antonio first notes its ominous significance, especially as the blood falls onto his initials on his handkerchief. This particular image holds two interpretations: for one, it foreshadows his doomed future as well as that of his progeny, who would presumably carry on his name (i.e. his

blood loss from the womb could be found within the sections of their work dedicated to the nose" (Zuccolin and King 90).

initials); secondly, the bloodied cloth symbolizes bloody sheets, a marker of both sexuality and childbirth, and this point is made explicit when Antonio remarks "Tis that must color/ her lyingin" (2.3.47-8). In other words, not only is Antonio's nosebleed a sign of the cursed fate of his lineage, it also symbolizes the bloodloss of the Duchess offstage as she actively labors. While the audience is allowed to view a man's nosebleed, it is prohibited from seeing the blood at a scene of parturition, and thus Antonio's blood must stand in to signify the Duchess's; once again the Duchess and Antonio's genders are reversed. Thus, Antonio's nosebleed works to feminize him in that it not only marks him as a representation of the Duchess's blood loss, but it also recalls more general images of superfluity, a trait which was thought to be common to women and people of lower class alike—thus, as a feminized membre of the servant class, Antonio is doubly inferior. The fluidity of blood symbolism allows medical and social beliefs to coexist, and it also conflates Antonio's inferiority of class with the Duchess' inferiority of gender. All at once, blood can stand for many things.

Shortly after his nose begins to bleed, Antonio exits, but accidentally leaves behind a note, which contains the horoscope for his child. Bosola picks this up and realizes that he now possesses a key piece of evidence that will prove not only the Duchess's pregnancy but the paternity of her child as well. According to Antonio's horoscope, the child will live a "short life" and die a "violent death" (2.3.60-2). The occurrence of Antonio's nosebleed in conjunction with the lost horoscope further conflates the medical and superstitious, as well as the physical and social, once again in this play. A few scenes later, Bosola shares the letter with Ferdinand and the Cardinal, and in this scene, the Duchess's blood is repeatedly brought up. In 2.5, the Duchess' brothers discover the existence of their sister's secret children, and here they repeatedly cite blood symbolism in two ways: their royal blood and the Duchess' whorish, corrupt blood. Thus,

blood is used to differentiate the characters by moral character, class, and gender, with the assumption that men of nobility come out at the top of this hierarchy. Upon discovering the Duchess's secret, the Cardinal cries out, "Shall our blood,/ The royal blood of Aragon and Castile,/ Be thus attained?"<sup>74</sup> to which Ferdinand brusquely replies:

Apply desperate physic:

We must not now use balsamum, but fire,

The smarting cupping glass for that's the mean

To purge infected blood, such blood as hers. (2.5.23-6)

A number of fascinating factors are at work here. For one, Ferdinand employs medical rhetoric to discuss the moral failings of his sister; he runs through a number of possible procedures namely medicine, balm, cautery, blistering, and bloodletting—to help cleanse his family of the Duchess's misdeeds. This underscores the brothers' belief that the Duchess's actions are a result of her internal corruption, something which must be purged, just as a disease or infection might be (this recalls the basin scene in *Titus Andronicus*). However, they are not concerned for her own wellbeing, but rather for their reputation, which is another form of blood at play in this dialogue. The brothers are upset with the Duchess, because they believe that her actions will sully their noble name, and ultimately will dirty their noble blood. What follows these laments is a diatribe against women and their lustful, untrustworthy natures. So, even though the Duchess has noble blood, her female blood has betrayed and corrupted both her and her family's name. Ultimately, the Duchess' betrayal leads Ferdinand to seek a new type of blood: that of vengeance. Once Ferdinand discovers that the Duchess is married to Antonio, he and the Cardinal imprison their sister; much as in *'Tis Pity*, we see a woman literally imprisoned for her sexuality, and again, here as in *'Tis Pity*, her blood itself works to metaphorically imprison her in a body that repeatedly betrays her by displaying her deepest secrets to the men around here. While imprisoned, the Duchess cries out in anguish: "Go howl them this, and say, I long to bleed;/ It is some mercy when men kill with speed" (4.1.108-9). In this utterance, we see blood as a form of release, and an assertion of freedom; the Duchess knows that her life is no longer her own, and so she wishes for her own speedy death in order to escape the control of her brothers. Much like Lavinia and Annabella, she hopes to use her blood to assert her independence and personal autonomy. And thus, female blood is again used to present the duality of empowerment and endangerment present within the premodern feminine body.

Shortly thereafter, Ferdinand tells Bosola "Damn her! That body of hers,/ While that my blood ran pure in 't, was more worth/ Than that which thou wouldst comfort, called a soul" (4.1.119-21). This statement highlights a number of complex notions about any particular human's value, based upon their class, gender, and moral character. Here, Ferdinand asserts that the Duchess only held eminence because of her noble blood, but that her corrupt soul has diminished any value her body once held. Ferdinand's assertion questions concepts of the connection between the body and the soul and how they impart worth to someone. If the Duchess's noble blood supposedly bespoke her superior nature, then why has she acted out in such a morally reprehensible way (reprehensible, according to her brothers)? More importantly, why do her brothers act so abhorrently throughout the play, often engaging in behaviors that are far more corrupt than their allegedly fallen sister, and yet still claim their superiority to everyone

else in the play? This play repeatedly calls to question the biological claim to noble status and it does so through an exploration of blood symbolism.

Shortly after this interaction, the brothers send an executioner to kill the Duchess. Once again, as in *Titus Andronicus* and *'Tis Pity*, we see our female protagonist die at the hands of men—thus marking the ultimate assertion of gendered bodily autonomy, especially as it is present within blood. However, unlike the former two plays, the murders extend here to not only the Duchess, but to her maid, Cariola, and to several of the Duchess and Antonio's children as well. This underscores the brother's notion that the Duchess' tainted blood has corrupted their family line, so much so that her children hold no value to them. Here, we see the Duchess' womb, the place that once engendered life, become a tomb for not only herself, but also her progeny (in a similar manner as Tamora and her children).

Upon revealing her corpse to Ferdinand, Bosola and the latter get into an argument, and Bosola exclaims,

Your brother and your self are worthy men:

You have a pair of hearts are rotten graves, Rotten, and rotting others; and your vengeance, Like two chained bullets, still goes arm in arm. You may be brothers, for treason, like the plague, Doth take much in a blood. (4.2.295-300)

Here, we see Bosola, once again, call into question a long-established social notion: that of the superiority of both noble blood and men's blood. Just as Bosola debunked medical practices influenced by superstitions, and later the value of noble blood, we see him again challenging widely held beliefs. Here, and throughout the play, blood serves as a means to negotiate the

social and biological at a moment in time when people are starting to understand how bodies signify differently. Bosola repeatedly voices the disjunction between beliefs about class and gender through this rhetoric of blood symbolism. While Ferdinand and the Cardinal like to think of themselves as superior to everyone else in the play, both because of their noble status and their gender, Bosola does not buy into their claims to superiority. In fact, he argues that although they suppose themselves to be worthy, the only things they are really worthy of are death and derision. He goes on to claim that their rotten cores have contaminated those around them, much like a plague; this contention reverses Ferdinand's earlier claim in 2.5 that the Duchess' misdeeds have contaminated their royal blood. Ultimately, here Bosola is saying that the only thing that runs through the brothers' blood is depravity.

In the final act of the play, Bosola fights the Cardinal and Ferdinand, and in the chaos, they all kill one another, and lie dead on the stage as one—their blood intermingling. This final death scene demonstrates how the perverted desires of the brothers, who were so obsessed with maintaining their power and status, actually corrupted their family's blood in the end; in other words, it was their very actions to preserve their name that have muddied it the most. In the end, they die alongside someone they supposed to be their inferior, and their blood, noble or not, all looks the same to the audience as it fuses together on the stage. Finally, as their corpses lie bleeding out on the stage, Antonio and the Duchess' eldest son, the last remaining heir of their line, enters to gaze upon the treachery. Their surviving heir stands as testament to the true lineage of nobility—that of noble character and deeds—the lineage which always remains after corruption has wasted away the rest. More importantly, their son's survival shows that not only does his "inferior" blood live on and trump the alleged superiority of his uncles, his ascension to dukedom stands as the Duchess' final assertion of agency, through blood, the blood of her son.

Ultimately, this play, more so than the other two I've discussed in this chapter, directly and openly questions social claims about blood, especially as they relate to class and gender. While the Cardinal and Ferdinand, as men of noble status, stand at the top of the social hierarchy and should have the most pure blood, they are the most degenerate characters in the play. In the end, it is their quest to keep their bloodline pure and their pockets full which demolishes their entire lineage, leaving only the child of their sister and her servant husband to carry on their name and claim their title. Like all of the other plays in this chapter, *The Duchess* ' use of blood symbolism enables the characters of the play to negotiate fluctuating and often contradictory notions of selfhood.

## Conclusion

In each of these three plays, blood represents a number of beliefs and ideas about the body and its value, but the main thing that it calls into question is the value of a woman's blood, especially as it pertains to the blood she passes down to her children. Women's blood also creates a means of surveillance and suppression for female sexuality, while simultaneously enabling an avenue for feminine empowerment. For Lavinia, blood speaks to the unimaginable violence she has suffered at the hands of men; she then regains control when she takes her attackers' blood and collects it in a basin, which is emblematic of her womb, and which stands for a reclamation of her own body. For Annabella, blood represents an intimate connection with her brother, a relationship which transcends both familial and romantic ties; she, like Lavinia, also uses blood as a way to assert authority, when she writes a letter in her own blood to Giovanni. For the Duchess, blood represents a lineage of nobility, as well as a portent of impending ruin; she uses blood to reclaim her authority, both when she cries out for her own death, and when her heritage lives on through her son, a line which her own brothers sought to

destroy. For each of these women, blood embodies a life-giving and a life-threatening force much like their wombs and their bodies. I have entitled this chapter "Bloody Wombs, Bloody Tombs," because in these plays, female sexuality can create life, but it can also stand for the death of the women who express this very same sexuality.

## CHAPTER III: AFFLICTION OR INFECTION? PREMODERN CONCEPTS OF DISABILITY AND BLOOD

Blood is the conduit through which many things flow in the pre-modern period. It is the source of bodily life itself. It is the vector of disease, both infectious and hereditary. It is the vessel that contains sin and moral depravity. It is the origin of disability, and the carrier of honor and strength. In this chapter, when I discuss infection versus affliction, I will be discussing the idea of medical versus spiritual rhetorics of disability, especially as they relate to blood. While infection (medical) points to the idea that disability originates in the body/biology, with no higher purpose beyond itself, affliction (spiritual) underscores an inferiority that begins in the soul, testing or punishing the subject of its suffering. I will argue that late medieval and early modern concepts of disability are in constant negotiation between these two rhetorics, and that blood becomes the mediator between these two notions of disability.

The definition of disability, much like that of blood, is fluid as well as a bit nebulous at times, especially in the premodern world. The word *disability* is first recorded in 1545 to describe one's inability to perform a task (to learn something, in this specific case).<sup>75</sup> Since then,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary cites Roger Ascham's Toxophilus, the schole of shootinge as the first recorded use of the word disability: "It be more thorough his owne negligence for bicause he wyll not learne, than any disabilitie, bicause he can not lerne."

this term has continued to transform. Disability can be characterized in numerous ways—both cognitively and physically; for example, while some define a certain condition (such as pregnancy) as a disability, others may not; for some, such as medieval saints, disabilities (e.g. scars, stigmata, etc.) may actually be desirable as they are a sign of faithful conviction and devotion. Definitions of disability also change over time as technology and medicine advance and make some disabilities (such as poor eyesight), well, less disabling. Additionally, disability is also separated and categorized differently by numerous scholars and various models of disability theory; for example, Allison P. Hobgood and David Houston Wood discuss the constructivist model's delineation between disability and impairment,<sup>76</sup> while Katherine Schaap Williams marks a difference between disability and deformity.<sup>77</sup> When it comes to the difference between impairment and disability, it is important to delve more deeply into the scholarly discussion of disability; Hobgood and Wood do just this when they define for the reader "two of the most dominant critical perspectives in New Disability Studies [which] are the social and cultural models of disability" (5, "Ethical"). They go on to explain that the social model separates impairment and disability, while the cultural model joins the two. What is key here is that each model looks differently at "the reciprocity between body and culture,"<sup>78</sup> with the social model seeing them as two separate entities that interact with each other, while the cultural model views the body and culture as inextricably linked. It is not my purpose here to side with one perspective over the other, but rather to provide a brief background in disability studies, much in the same way that Hobgood and Wood do in their introduction to *Recovering Disability in Early* 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> See "Ethical Staring: Disabling the English Renaissance," where Hobgood and Wood discuss the constructivist models, social and cultural, of disability. Joshua R. Eyler discusses these models at length as well in his introduction to *Disability in the Middle Ages*.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Williams, Katherine Schaap. "Enabling Richard: The Rhetoric of Disability in Richard III." *Disability Studies Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 4, 2009. *EBSCOhost*, https://doi-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.18061/dsq.v29i4.997.
 <sup>78</sup> (5, "Ethical")

*Modern England*. With that said, the social and cultural models are only two of many models of conception about the notions of disability.

When it comes to medieval and early modern concepts of disability, it is important to explore both the medical and religious models. To simplify it greatly: the medical model of disability pathologizes disability and sees it as something which must be treated and/or cured, while the religious model views disability as a metaphor for sin.<sup>79</sup> While these certainly were not the only two ways of considering disability in the pre-modern world,<sup>80</sup> these two models will be the focus of my discussion in this chapter, because I argue that blood symbolism bridges the gap between these two and allows medieval and early modern notions of disability to oscillate between these two dominant models of the period. Additionally, while it's certainly not a completely linear progression, we begin to see ideas of disability become more medicalized as we go further into the early modern period and towards the Scientific Revolution, and this progression is again facilitated through blood rhetoric. Either way, for the premodern mind, disability fell within a range extending from "welcome exception to notable deficiency to radical deviancy" (Hobgood & Wood 34-5, "Early"). In other words, disability in the premodern world was not just a happenstance of biological variation; disability always stood as a symbol for something else-it always marked the sufferers' supposed inferiority, physical and/or moral-or their unique spiritual blessing. So, while their social deficiency was not a matter for debate, the origins of their disability were, and this is where a sort of "nature vs. nurture" debate comes into play. In the two works that I'll discuss in this chapter, the medieval poem Amis and Amiloun and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Hobgood and Wood discuss these two models at length in both "Early Modern Literature and Disability Studies" and "Ethical Staring: Disabling the English Renaissance."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> In fact, Eyler notes that "while it is certainly accurate to say that *some* people in the Middle Ages believed disability to be God's punishment for sin, this way of understanding medieval disability has only a limited viability. In truth, there were many lenses through which medieval societies viewed disability..." (3).

the early modern play *Richard III*, I will argue that these two models of disability, religious and medical, are constantly being debated and negotiated, and it is almost always through the rhetoric of blood that this negotiation is taking place.

In addition to focusing on the medical and religious models of disability, I will also be comparing how these models (and their associations with blood rhetoric) are affected by two other categories of disability: congenital vs. acquired. The character of Richard III provides an example of congenital disability, whereas in the character of Amiloun, we will see someone with an acquired disability. The difference between these two forms of disability is significant in two key ways: the discussions of the origins and the possible eradications of disability. In other words, in these past eras, someone with a congenital disability is unlikely to be healed, while someone with an acquired disability, which is often thought to be a result of their sins, can be healed, often through the forgiveness of God; additionally, while the origins of acquired disability are often marked as a result of sin, the cause for congenital disability is less clear. More specifically, while Amiloun's leprosy is a direct result of his sin,<sup>81</sup> or rather his complicity in his friend's sin (and thus can be reversed through forgiveness of this sin), Richard's physical deformity is blamed throughout Shakespeare's play on a number of causes, including his mother, and is something that is a core part of his biology. The congenital nature of Richard's disability also leads to a nature vs. nurture debate, or as Walker describes it: "The play suggests both that deformity is an external sign of evil and that his deformity has caused him to become evil" (155).<sup>82</sup> In other words, *Richard III* repeatedly asks its audience to consider how much of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> Later in this chapter, I will argue that disability, while a result of sin, is not a punishment for any sin on Amiloun's part, but is rather a blessing for his purity and loyalty, which draws him closer to God.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> Walker, Jessica. "As Crooked in Thy Manners as Thy Shape': Reshaping Deformity in Loncraine's *Richard III.*" *The Journal of the Wooden O*, vol. 11, 2011, pp. 155–71. *EBSCOhost*, https://search-ebscohost-com.libproxy.uncg.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2012583181&site=ehost-live.

Richard's disability, especially how others perceive him because of his deformity, leads him to embody the evil that has been attributed to him since birth. Furthermore, when discussing the congenital nature of Richard's disability, the debate about his mother's responsibility for said deformity will be key; here, we see a connection to the bloody wombs/tombs of chapter 2, where women's blood is a pollutant. In other words, women's blood is almost always socially connected to impurity and has the ability to contaminate offspring in the womb, and this contamination can lead to deformity and disability. Ultimately, I will argue that in these two works, acquired disability points to the person's culpability, which begins in sin (through blood) and ends in redemption (again, through blood), while congenital disability is less clear because it forces the reader to ask whether persons are disabled because evil runs through their veins, or whether they've become evil because society has always assumed them to be so.

This chapter will also seek to understand the differences between medieval versus early modern conceptions of disability, which are never clear cut, nor do they follow any precise chronological pattern. With that said, I will argue, through my examination of both a medieval and an early modern text, that we begin to see more medicalization of disability as the time periods progress. That's not to say that the religious model of disability becomes eradicated once the medical model emerges, but rather that ideas about blood allow the two to exist simultaneously—sometimes harmoniously, sometimes acrimoniously. In their discussion of the implications of the religious model of disability, Hobgood and Wood contend:

While medieval theological doctrine initially integrated disabled individuals into a mutually beneficial exchange with able-bodied people, Protestant doctrinal focus upon human inner depravity and secularizing theological systems of charity led to a remarkable

hierarchical disempowerment of disabled individuals over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. (15, "Ethical")

In other words, the religious model begins to shift as new doctrinal values take form during the Protestant Reformation, and with this shift, those with disabilities receive less charity and more chastisement.<sup>83</sup> Additionally, in the phases between the medieval and early modern periods, not only is the religious model itself experiencing internal displacement, but this model is also being supplanted, at least partially, with the emerging medical model of disability. With the medicalization of disability, the disabled person becomes less of a soul to be saved—or cherished—and more of a body to be poked, prodded, diagnosed, and then cured. So, the pre-modern period encapsulates a significant time in disability studies in that there is an ongoing debate about the source of disability and its implications about the disabled person(s); however, whether one employed the religious model, the medical model, or a combination of the two, it is crucial to note that it was a matter of general consensus at this time that disability oftentimes pointed to some sort of spiritual or ethical deficiency in the disabled person.<sup>84</sup>

This idea of moral deficiency leads me to a discussion of the concept of disability as monstrosity. This is a notion which repeatedly appears in the discussion of Richard's physical (and moral) deformity. In his article "Monsters, Saints, and Sinners: Disability in Medieval Literature," Edward Wheatley asserts that medieval literary notions of disability typically place the disabled person in one of the three aforementioned (in the title of the article) categories. And, I'd like to use these three categories for the purpose of this chapter, in that I will argue that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> This gradual transformation is based on the indirect effects of the Reformation, which displaced medieval beliefs and practices, rather than any specific Protestant teaching or theological writing.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> It's key to note that this can be true, even with saints, where disability is often desirable as it is a test of their patience and spiritual endurance—or an outward sign of their particular sanctity. Here, the saint is deficient in that they must rely on God for mental fortitude and physical healing.

Richard's disability depicts him as a monstrous (and sometimes even a Satanic) character, while Amiloun's disability marks him as a saintly figure (many scholars argue that his disability portrays him as a sinner, rather than a saint, but I disagree with this assertion and will explore it further later in this chapter). A large part of the distinction, I will argue, between Richard's monstrous character and Amiloun's saintly one is the nature of their disabilities: congenital versus acquired, which leads them to have disparate childhoods and also causes their disabilities to be viewed differently by society. Ultimately, the nature of Richard's disability points to an innate, inescapable moral deficiency that marks him as a monster, while Amiloun's leprosy draws him closer to God and turns him into a saintly figure.

In my discussion of *Amis and Amiloun*, I will contend that Amiloun's disability casts him as a saint/Christ figure, and that this likeness is depicted through various forms of blood symbolism in the poem. I will focus on four types of blood symbolism to illustrate this point: the repeated phrase "blood and bone" used to describe both Amis and Amiloun, the bloody imagery in the fight scene, the friends' golden cups, and the murder scene of Amis' children. Ultimately, the acquired nature of Amiloun's disability, which I argue (against popular scholarly belief) is a blessing from God rather than a punishment, allows the characters of the play to atone for their innately sinful nature all while experiencing the mercy of God.

In my section on *Richard III*, I will argue that the description of Richard's disability repeatedly oscillates between the religious and medical models, and this demonstrates the tricky contemporary negotiation of how to view and treat persons with disabilities. I will illustrate this argument by examining blood symbolism in the play which at turns points the blame for Richard's congenital disability towards his mother, especially her womb (i.e. the medical model), and at times points the blame at Richard's own deformed inner nature (i.e. the religious model). I

will also examine how Richard's misshapen body mirrors the chaotic political period in which he lives. Fundamentally, I will contend that Richard's disability, and the characters' (both his own and the other characters) negotiation of it, mirror the contemporary debate over the origins of congenital physical disabilities; additionally, Richard is aware of these complexities of embodiment and thus repeatedly uses his body as a rhetorical tool to manipulate others and achieve his often nefarious goals.

Thus, this chapter on blood and disability will seek to do two things: First, I will explore the different literary perceptions of congenital versus acquired disability; secondly, I will examine the epistemological variations between the religious and medical models of disability within this literature. And, most importantly, all of this will be done through an extensive analysis of the blood symbolism in each of these works, because as I argue here, and have continued to argue in my earlier chapters, blood is the nexus at which competing concepts of marginalization, embodiment, and prejudice converge.

## Saint or Sinner? Disability as Divine Gift in Amis and Amiloun

This chapter seeks to examine the core question surrounding disability at this time: affliction or infection? In other words, is one's disability understood as a result of religious reasons or is it of a medical origin? When it comes to examining disability in the medieval poem, *Amis and Amiloun*, the question isn't whether this is a discussion of disability based on the religious or the medical models. Here, it is clear that the religious model takes precedence when considering disability in this poem. And it is interesting to note that Amiloun's disability mirrors that of both an infection and an affliction because he contracts it due to the sin of Amis (like a contagious disease), a point I will revisit later. The key question in this poem is whether Amiloun's leprosy is a blessing or a curse. While numerous scholars contend that Amiloun's

infection is an infliction, or in other words a punishment for his sin, Ju Ok Yoon argues that "Amiloun's leprosy can be translated as a blessing, not a punishment, because, by suffering the disease and the entailing hardships, the knight and other characters learn to acknowledge God as their final recourse" (52).<sup>85</sup> I agree with Yoon's contention here: that Amiloun's leprosy is a gift from God, which portrays Amiloun both as a saintly and Christ-like figure, who sacrifices himself for the greater good. This isn't to say that Amilous is a completely morally righteous character, as morality is a complex, and often convoluted, subject in this poem; however, it's rather to say that Amiloun's disability is more of a reflection of his good intentions rather than his innately flawed human nature.

As previously mentioned, this section will examine the poem's use of blood symbolism to argue that Amiloun is in fact a Saint/Christ figure and that his disability should be read as a gift rather than punishment. To do this, I will analyze in particular these four aspects of blood symbolism in the poem: the repeated phrasing of "boon and blood" used to describe the brotherly similitude and connection between Amis and Amiloun, the bleeding wounds described in the fight scene, the Eucharistic imagery of the identical golden cups, and the Paschal Lamb/Eucharistic imagery present in the scene of Amis' filicide. I will argue that these four particular uses of blood symbolism both demonstrate the religious model of disability and depict disability, in this instance, as a divine gift rather than a wrathful curse. Ultimately, blood helps us negotiate between the cultural and the physical.

First, let's start with the recurrent epithet used to describe Amis and Amiloun throughout the poem: "bone and blood." This phrase is used both to underscore the fraternal connection

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> Yoon, Ju Ok. "Leprosy, Miracles, and Morality in Amis and Amiloun." *Medieval and Early Modern English Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1, Feb. 2010, pp. 29–56. *EBSCOhost*, https://doi-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.17054/memes.2010.18.1.29.

between the two friends and to draw attention to their exceptional physical and spiritual makeup. We first encounter this phrase early on in the poem, when the poet describes them at twelve years old: "In al the londe was ther non hold / So faire of boon and blood" (II. 59-60). Here, the fairness of their bone and blood reflects both an external and internal superiority; or in other words, their fine complexion stands as a physical beacon of their moral excellence. Additionally, this description works to illustrate the likeness of the two boys, who stand apart from all others, except one another—thus simultaneously connecting them to one another while separating them from all others (working similarly to Christ's blood). The phrase is then repeated (albeit slightly altered) soon after in the poem, again to describe them as children:

So wele tho children loved hem tho,

Nas never children loved hem so,

Neither in word no in dede;

Bituix hem tuai, of blod and bon,

Trewer love nas never non... (ll. 139-42)

This use of the phrase here particularly underscores the unbreakable connection between the two friends, whose bond marks them as closer than comrades, and more like brothers, even twins. Here, they are connected by a bond deeper than mutual love—it is something almost innately biological—it is something that runs through their blood and fills their bones.

The next time that we encounter this phrase, the friends have reached adulthood and are now separating for the first time in their lives, as Amiloun's parents have died and he must return home. Here, the phrase (1. 344) is employed to describe only Amis, whose innate goodness leads those at court to treat him kindly, but also stirs jealousy in the steward, who will quickly become the rival of both Amis and Amiloun. While descriptions of blood are certainly not absent from this point on, it is a while before we encounter this particular phrase again (1. 1420), and this time it is used to describe Amiloun, after he has fought the steward in Amis' stead. The large gap, of over a thousand lines, between the use of these phrases is significant because it marks the separation, both physical and spiritual, of the two friends. While the phrase "blood and bone" is used earlier on in the poem to signify both the fraternal and moral similitude between the friends, it is significantly absent once they part ways. And while they are living separately, they also become distant morally; during this time, Amiloun is living an upright life, married and taking care of his duties, while Amis has fallen to temptation and lust. Thus, during both the narrative lapse between the use of these phrases, the moral superiority, signified by the specific phrase "blood and bone," is no longer used collectively, and even more significantly is transferred from describing Amis earlier in the play (before he falls to temptation) to now depicting only Amiloun. This is also significant because the transfer from the repeated collective to the singular use of this phrase to describe only Amiloun works to underscore his status as a Christ figure. Much like Adam and God, at the beginning of the poem (and the outset of the Earth), Amis and Amiloun are alike in morality, but once they are separated by sin (Adam/Amis), the other (God/Amiloun) must take on the sins of his loved one in order to cleanse him—thus marking Amiloun as a "second Adam," or a Christ figure.<sup>86</sup> Once this transfer is made, the phrase is never again used throughout the poem, because the connection between the two friends has been severed—while one is still human, the other is now otherworldly. This connection and later separation of the two friends is accomplished through a rhetoric of blood; and much like the blood of Christ, blood is used to bind together the comrades who have been torn apart by sin.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> See 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 and Romans 5:12-15

The next type of blood symbolism in the poem is that of the wounds/bleeding which occur in the fight scene between Amiloun and the evil steward. This particular instance of blood symbolism most markedly depicts Amiloun as a Christ figure, and thus marks his impending disability as a gift rather than a punishment. The particular bloodiness of the battle between Amiloun and the steward is repeatedly underscored to highlight the ardor and intensity of the fight. However, although both fighters seem to be bleeding profusely throughout the fight, one wound in particular is especially significant. In the middle of the fight, Amiloun receives:

On his schulder a gret wounde

With his grisly gare,

That church that wounde, as ye may here,

He was knowen with reweli chere (ll.1352-56)

This wound is of particular importance because it becomes a trademark for Amiloun's identity one which Amis later uses to recognize his long lost friend. This wound aligns Amiloun with Christ, who shows the holes in his hands to the doubting disciple Thomas in order to prove his identity after his resurrection.<sup>87</sup> So, not only does the blood shed by Amiloun, to atone for his friend's sins, underscore Amiloun's Christ-like status, the wound that results from this bloodshed remains as an everlasting reminder of his sacrificial status and further serves as a way to reconnect the friends who have been separated by sin.

Not only does Amiloun's wound become a visible marker of his identity, it also highlights his transformation from a human to a saint/Christ figure. As Johnson and Decamp note in their introduction to the book *Blood Matters: Studies in European Literature and Thought, 1400-1700*: "Wounds were capable of determining where one form of selfhood ends

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> See John 20

and another begins...wounds suggest that the eruption of blood from the body could initiate the emergence of new states of being altogether" (5). This self-transformation is further underscored by the poem's description of Amiloun after he is injured: "his amour ran o blode,/ That ere was white so swan" (II. 1358-9). The use of color symbolism here marks the contaminating effects of blood, which represent Amis' sins which Amiloun has taken on as his own, just as he has put on his friend's armor (much like Christ puts on the armor in *Piers Plowman* as a sign of his connection to humanity and the transference of sin). Once the armor, which was once white as a swan, becomes muddied with red blood, it is no longer clear or pure, and the same can be said for Amiloun. Thus, the wound which Amiloun receives, as well as the blood from this wound, which stains Amis' armor, works to signify Amiloun's transformation from a human to a saint, as he willingly takes on the sins of his friend.

Shortly after receiving this wound, Amiloun deals the deadly blow to the steward, piercing him in his heart. This heart wound is foreshadowed earlier in the poem when Amis tells Amiloun about his dilemma with the steward, and Amiloun then promises his friend that "Y schal sen his hert blode!" (l. 1116) To promise to draw not only blood, but the heart's blood, is to swear to instantaneously and definitively end the steward's life; however, it is also a promise to completely and absolutely avenge his friend. The location of the steward's wound is culturally significant. In fact, Galen believed that blood was of two types: arterial and venous. Arterial blood was created in the heart and then moved throughout the rest of the body, giving vitality to all of the other organs. Thus, arterial blood, or heart's blood, was "vital, life-giving blood."<sup>88</sup> So, to wound the steward in the heart, was to drain him of all vitality, both body and soul.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>88</sup> This is a quote from Andrew Wear's introduction to *Circulation of the Blood* (viii), which Margaret Healy references and quotes in her chapter, "Was the Heart 'Dethroned'? Harvey's Discoveries and the Politics of Blood, Heart, and Circulation" (18-19).

Additionally, the poem's description of the steward's wound underscores Amiloun's victory, and more importantly, his moral claim to victory over the amoral steward. The wound, which begins in the shoulder blade, then continues on until it pierces the heart. Like Amiloun, the steward is initially wounded in the shoulder. However, his wound does not stop there, because his sin, like his wound, is not superficial, it runs to the core of him—to his heart. Once Amiloun pierces the steward in his heart, the cycle of vengeance is complete, but the course of redemption has just begun, as Amiloun must now take on (like an infection, but also like an affliction) both the steward's and Amis' sins through his acquired disability.

After the battle is won, all of the townspeople celebrate Amiloun's victory. But, even among the description of all of these festivities, the poet takes the time to note the dressing of Amiloun's wounds:

Leches swithe thai han yfounde,

That gun to tasty his wounde

And made him hole ogain (ll. 1399-1401)

This scene is key, because it notes that once they dress Amiloun's wounds, he is made whole again. However, we know that not to be the case. And this is underscored shortly after, when the earlier phrase "of blod and bon" (1. 1420) is repeated. As I discussed earlier, in this instance this phrase is used to describe only Amiloun, and it marks the disconnection between the friends as well as the shift of righteousness between the two. While Amiloun's wounds have been dressed and healed, his soul must now take on the work of repairing the sinfulness of his friend, and his body will again reflect that battle through his disability. However, the temporary reparation of his wounds here, does foreshadow the ultimate redemption of the titular characters in the poem.

Blood points to both pain and healing. In the end, we can rest assured that all will be healed, and all will be well.

Aside from the repetition of the "blood and bone" phrase, and the description of both Amiloun and the steward's wounds during the battle, another key facet of blood symbolism in this poem is found in the golden cups that the two friends share as a token of their loyalty to one another. These cups are introduced towards the beginning of the poem on the cusp of Amis' and Amiloun's impending separation. As a token of remembrance, Amis hires a goldsmith to make two opulent golden cups. In his instructions to the goldsmith, Amis notes that the cups should be of the same weight and style—identical in all facets, just like Amiloun and himself. The indistinguishable nature of the cups, as well as their richness, point to the commensurate characteristics of Amis and Amiloun-who both at this point in the poem stand alike in superior physical and moral quality. Much like the repeated phrase of "blood and bone," which is used to describe the two friends, the cups underscore their similitude and their unbreakable connection. Additionally, these golden cups later work to reunite the two friends. In fact, when Amiloun is cast out from his own kingdom by his wicked wife, he must sell all of his possessions in order to survive, but he refuses to part with the cup. Later, the cup serves as an identifiable mark of Amiloun's connection to Amis, even after his physical likeness to the former is no longer intelligible due to his leprosy. As Amiloun and Owen beg outside of the Amis' gates, Amis sends his squire to them with his golden cup full of wine. The cup at this moment becomes not just a marker of the connection between Amis and Amiloun, but also a kind of grail—a symbol of the Eucharist and the impending redemption that they will share. This is underscored when Amiloun pulls forth his cup, which is identical to Amis' cup, and which, more importantly, contains an equal share of the wine—the wine, of course, suggesting the blood of Christ, and thus the

invitation to Christ's grace. Thus, while the phrase "blood and bone" earlier denoted their connection in moral purity and rectitude, the golden cups, and especially the wine they contain, now underscore their equal lowliness and need for sacred intervention. When Amiloun drinks Amis' wine, the blood Amiloun shed for his dear friend is offered back to him symbolically, and this foreshadows the literal blood sacrifice that is to come.

This leads us to the last form of blood symbolism that I will be discussing in this section: the blood of Amis' children. While the blood that Amiloun sheds in the stead of his friend enables him to take on the sins of his friend, it does not allow him to remove these sins. And so, Amiloun is forced to walk around as a leper, with his wounds as a visible marker of the impurity that he embodies. And even though his disability casts him as a Christ figure, he is a complicated Messiah of sorts, because Amiloun is not himself without sin. Thus, someone who is completely pure and innocent must intervene in order to cleanse Amis and Amiloun of their respective moral and physical deficiencies; in the end, the pure blood of the two children replaces and repairs the tainted blood of the two adults. The deficiency of Amiloun's sacrificial blood underscores his humanity just as profoundly as his bloodshed in the earlier fight marks him as something divine. Much like Christ's blood labels him as simultaneously human and divine and allows these complexities of identity to coagulate, here we see Amiloun's blood doing similar symbolic work.

Thus far in this poem, blood has done multivalent tasks, and one of these key tasks is to reunite the friends. The matching golden cups mark the connection between the leper and the duke, and when Amiloun's shoulder wound further establishes his identity, the two friends are reunited and Amiloun is welcomed into Amis' home and introduced to his wife and children. Amiloun lives with Amis and his family for a full year, and while he is fed well and treated royally, his leprosy remains. That is until an angel visits Amis in his sleep and tells him how to

cure Amiloun of his leprosy: by killing his two children on Christmas morning and then pouring their blood on Amiloun. Shortly after, Amiloun is also visited in a dream and told the same thing. Some of the particular diction and imagery used here is key in drawing the connection between the children's murder, the Annunciation to Joseph and Mary, the Eucharist, the crucifixion of God's Son Christ, and Abraham's call to sacrifice his son Isaac in Genesis 22. First, Amis is instructed to kill his children on Christmas morning, even at the same exact time that Christ was born; the timing of the death draws the connection between the children's murder as a sacrifice that will eventually give new life. Secondly, Amis is then instructed to *anoint* Amiloun with his children's blood; this particular choice of words carries significance which points to the holy connotations of the process—as the shepherd anoints the lamb, as the priest anoints the repentant, so will Amis anoint Amiloun. Thus, the murder of his children is presented as an act of sacrifice and worship rather than one of violence. Later, when Amiloun is also visited in a dream, he is told that the children's "hert blood" (1. 2225) will work to cleanse him of his leprosy (as well as the sin that this disability represents). The fact that it is the children's heart's blood is crucial, because it is the blood which contains their essence and their spirit. In addition, the image of their heart's blood also brings Amiloun's sacrificial cycle to its conclusion— as he shed the steward's heart's blood and took on the sin of both the steward and Amis, thus the clean and pure heart's blood of the children will wipe away these sins. The specific diction and imagery in these dreams is key in drawing the connection between Amis' filicide and God the Father's sacrifice of his Son Jesus, both on the cross and as it is represented in the Eucharist.

Once the sacrifice is complete, Amis brings his children's blood to Amiloun. Here, the poet notes the brightness of the blood, which underscores both its purity and its vitality as their heart's blood. This description of the children's *heart's blood* makes a direct connection back to

the heart's blood of the steward shed earlier in the poem and completes the cycle of redemption. That is to say, the steward's heart's blood stands to demarcate Amiloun's acceptance of Amis' sins, while the children's hearts' blood works to reconcile and cleanse this same sin. Amis then anoints Amiloun with the blood, and this diction again underscores the sanctity of his moment as something religiously cleansing.<sup>89</sup> Once this is done, Amis wraps Amiloun in rich, warm clothing and gently lays him down in a bed, and this imagery connects Amiloun to Christ in the tomb and foreshadows the transformation that is about to take place. After he prays in solitude, Amis informs his wife of what he's done. Shockingly, she accepts this deed and goes with him to the children's room to view the children. Upon doing so, they find both of the children alive, "without wemme and wound/ Hool and sound" (ll. 2419-20). And, a few lines later, we see that Amiloun is also "hool and fere" (1. 2425). Here, the wholeness refers both to physical well-being and spiritual redemption. This is in contrast to the earlier description of Amiloun as "whole" after his wounds have been dressed after his battle with the steward—in this case, Amiloun was only temporarily and superficially made well. Whereas, after the sacrifice of Amis' children, which represents the sacrifice of Christ, everyone is healed and redeemed-both body and soul. Blood completes the cycle of redemption.

Ultimately, disability in the medieval poem *Amis and Amiloun* focuses on the religious model, which points to disability as a sign of sin. However, unlike the more popular argument that Amiloun's leprosy is merely punishment for his own sinful nature, I have argued here that it is rather a reflection of Amis and the steward's sins, and that his disability casts Amiloun as a saint, rather than a sinner. The saintliness of Amiloun's disability is reflected through four key uses of blood symbolism in the poem: the repeated use of the phrase "blood and bone," which is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> See lines 2341-2

first used to depict Amis and Amiloun's similitude in both moral and physical character, but is then later used to underscore their physical and moral separation as the poem progresses; the depictions of both Amiloun and the steward's wounds in the battle scene, which represents Amiloun's transformation from human friend to Christ-like saint as he takes on the fight (and the sins) of Amis; the golden cup which, like the "blood and bone" phrase connects the two friends, but also serves as an Eucharistic symbol that foreshadows the friends' equal portions of redemption; and, the blood of Amis' children, which represents the blood of Christ and is used to anoint Amiloun, cleansing him of his leprosy and atoning for the sins of Amis. All in all, blood creates a conduit through which Amiloun can take on the sins of his friend, and then through which his friend can cleanse himself and his friend of those sins. Blood works both to separate the friends and then to reunite them. Blood stands as a sign of humanity and divinity, impurity and redemption. Blood is the pivot point at which nebulous ideas of identity can converge and consolidate.

## Disability and Monstrosity in Richard III

While Amiloun's disability is acquired later in life, and is described using the religious model of disability, the nature of Richard's disability, which is congenital, obfuscates conceptions of Richard in relation to this disability. In the premodern period, congenital diseases, such as Richard's physical deformity, were thought to have numerous sources; however, the mother often received the brunt of the blame for any deficiency in her offspring, and this is often the case in *Richard III*. While acquired disability was generally viewed as a result of one's sin(s), congenital disability was a topic of more debate, and these discussions often led to the question

of whether the congenital condition reflected the person's inner depravity, or whether their assumed defective morality was a result of their disability—a nature vs. nurture debate, if you will. When it comes to the characters' negotiations of Richard, including his own selfassessment, this question is always lurking in the shadows. Who is to blame for Richard's deplorable behavior? His mother who has rejected him from birth? The society that has always repudiated and ridiculed him? Or is Richard evil at the core, with no one to blame but himself? Although the origins of Richard's disability are never clearly decided in the play, it is a question that the audience and the characters are repeatedly asked to consider, and also one that I plan to explore in this section. Through an examination of the play's use of blood symbolism, I will analyze two competing epistemologies about disability: both the medical versus religious models, and the nature versus nurture debate. I will do so in order to argue that blood allows opposing ideologies about self, and specifically about disability here, to coexist, not only within the same society, but even within the same individual mindset.

Before I analyze specific instances of blood symbolism in the play, I want to first consider the theatricality of Richard's disability. When it comes to premodern disability studies, Richard is commonly chosen for analysis, and his dramatic representation seems to be especially of interest to scholars. Jessica Walker says this about Richard's stageability:

Any production must establish what Richard's deformity is supposed to signify to the audience—a clear sign of innate evil, the cause of an inferiority complex that results in murderous rage, a metaphorical representation of the diseased state—and then reconcile the need to display that meaning to the audience with the need to conceal it from the other characters. (156)

Walker asserts that a key decision that any director must make when staging this play is the degree to which, and the way in which, Richard enacts his disability. This is a labyrinthine directorial decision because Richard's disability is presented differently throughout the play by Richard himself. Sometimes, Richard places his disability at the forefront to garner sympathy or to appear weak, while at other times, he portrays himself as a physically able and morally sound leader; in other words, Richard uses his disability to his advantage—he uses it as a rhetorical device to manipulate his enemies and win them over to his side. Thus, any director who stages this play must make a conscious decision about disability and its connection to morality—both that of Richard as well as the other characters. In other words, because disability is so closely intertwined with moral substance in the premodern world, the extent to which Richard's disability is enacted on the stage affects the audience's perception not only of Richard's physicality but his morality as well.

In the same way, the fact that Shakespeare portrays Richard's deformity as something indefinite and adaptable inextricably ties the character's disability to his personality. Richard is, if nothing else, persuasive: He can get almost anyone to do, say, or think what he wants them to. And, I argue that it is not only his rhetorical persuasiveness which enables this, but also his disability, which Richard employs as a rhetorical tool throughout the play. Richard uses his disability, and the blood symbolism connected to this disability, to get people to see him how he wants them to see him, either as weak or powerful, in order to manipulate and destroy those who stand in his way. So, while Richard is clearly an evil character who often uses his disability to enact this evil, we must ask ourselves (just as any director preparing a production of this play must): who or what made Richard so bad? While Shakespeare never clearly answers this

question, the play does consider it repeatedly, and it does so through a fluctuating rhetoric of blood, which mirrors the oscillating portrayal of Richard's disability itself.

When considering the origins of Richard's disability, it is paramount to start at the outset of the play, where the audience is immediately met by the solitary, soliloquizing Richard. The titular character begins his soliloquy by describing the tumultuous state of the nation (which is at the moment experiencing a brief interlude of peace after much conflict), as it is embodied by his brother, the king; however, this chronicle quickly shifts to a narration of Richard's own disabled body. It is key to note that the nation of England, and the king who stands as a synecdoche of the nation, is often embodied, and this embodiment becomes muddied when Richard, a disabled person, becomes the leader. This early embodiment of nation, as first illustrated through a description of the king and then quickly thereafter through a description of Richard, demonstrates from the outset that Richard's deformed body reflects the moral deformity of his own society, and this is a point that I will visit in much more depth when I discuss act 3, scene 7 of the play later.

Once Richard begins to describe himself, he enacts a motif, which he will revisit through the play, that his deformity is a sign of incompleteness, not only in the nation, but also in himself. He first characterizes himself as "rudely stamped" (1.1.16) and then shortly thereafter as cheated of feature by dissembling nature,

Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time

Into this breathing world scarce half made up  $\dots$  (1.1.19-21)

By comparing his deformity to an imperfect coin, he implies that he holds no currency, no worth in his society because of his disability. However, ironically, like a misstamped coin, Richard still maintains individual agency, despite his flawed appearance, and this is something he will

repeatedly prove. From there, Richard alludes to the fault of nature, and more subtly his mother (who will bear the brunt of the blame throughout the play), for pushing him forth into the world before he was fully formed. This paucity on his part makes him unattractive and an unlikely lover, and therefore he chooses "to prove a villain" instead, as if his disability allows him no other option (1.1.30). And, as a part of his villainy, he has put into motion a plot to turn his brothers against one another. Here, in this opening soliloquy, although we see no direct mention of blood, there are two forms of blood at play: first, the blood of his mother's womb, which has failed him, as it incompletely knit him together in conception; second, the blood of his brothers, for whom he feels no familial (or blood) loyalty, and against whom he plans to draw blood in order to gain more power. Ultimately, in the play, a key type of blood is the blood of the family, which traditionally should create a bond (thicker than water), but for Richard—who is half-formed, incomplete—has never taken hold. Later, I will argue that Richard's deformity mirrors the discordant government that he seeks to upend and overrule. This opening soliloquy lays the foundation for both of these connections.

While blood is physically absent (although very much symbolically implied) in the first scene of the play, it floods the lines of the very next scene. Here, Lady Anne mourns the recent loss of her husband and her father-in-law, Edward Prince of Wales and King Henry VI. Upon Richard's entrance, Anne immediately begins to spew invectives toward the man whom she calls a devil, and she cries out that the corpse of Henry has begun to "bleed afresh" at the presence of his murderer (1.2.54). Lady Anne's accusation/observation demonstrates an example of cruentation, "also known as the ordeal of touch or bier rite, in which the victim's wounds bleed spontaneously in the presence of the murderer, [which] was seen as vital form of evidence in

early modern Europe" (Dawson 152).<sup>90</sup> In her article on early modern cruentation beliefs, Lesel Dawson surveys the common notions about the origins of cruentation, one of which was the belief that cruentation was a divine intervention, in which "blood cries out" for justice/vengeance (156). This idea of blood crying out is not uncommon, and it begins with the Biblical story of Cain and Abel, but is then used fairly frequently in literary realms; for example, as I will discuss in Chapter Four, the blood of the child in "The Prioress' Tale" cries out against the Jewish people that killed him, marking them with the ancient sign of murderers. In the same way, Henry's corpse bleeds, or cries out, when Richard enters the room, thus marking not only Richard's culpability in his death, but also his evil nature as a murderer. So, if Jews are innately evil and aligned with the devil, a curse which is passed down from generation to generation, then Richard similarly has evil running through his veins, not because of his race, but because of his disability—either way, blood symbolism is used to marginalize these two groups and mark them as inherently evil through a biological standard with clear cultural implications. This would point towards the nature side of the nature versus nurture debate when it comes to Richard's congenital disability; however, Shakespeare will continue to provide evidence for both sides of the argument throughout the play.

Dawson also provides another possible explanation for cruentation: the idea that blood has a memory. In this case, "the victim's hatred of the murderer is encoded in the blood through *spiritus*, a highly refined and invisible vapor of blood that connects the body and soul" (158). If this is the reason for Henry's cruentation, then that means that Richard, through his evil deeds, has created an eternal bond between himself and Henry, as well as his numerous other victims.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> Dawson, Lesel. "In Every Wound There Is a Bloody Tongue': Cruentation in Early Modern Literature and Psychology." *Blood Matters: Studies in European Literature and Thought, 1400-1700*, University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 151–66.

This can be corroborated by the fact that Richard is later visited/haunted by his victims. So, if blood has a memory, and this memory connects Richard to his victims, then blood also connects him to his mother and her womb. The maternal connection formed during gestation, then perhaps could have transferred the evil of the mother to the son, and this innate evil is thus marked with Richard's disability. Ultimately, this scene of cruentation stands to mark Richard as one with blood on his hands from the outset of the play, and it also serves inextricably to tie this guilt with his disability—a move that will continue to be made throughout the play.

Richard's disability and his evil deeds are both equally undeniable in this play. Although Henry's cruentation indicts Richard, with blood, from the onset, it does not clearly tell us the origins of his moral depravity. However, there are numerous instances in the play, where the audience is given a possible source: Richard's mother, the Duchess of York. Repeatedly, the Duchess, and especially her womb, are blamed for both Richard's deformed body and his depraved soul. The womb as the site of creation and formation, where blood is knit together to form a human, has seemed to fail Richard before he was even born, and this idea works to continuously conflate the medical model of disability with that of the religious model. That is to say, Richard is deformed because he did not fully complete the gestational process, and this haphazard gestational period is the sign of both the failures of biology and his religious creation—and his mother is to blame in both instances.

One such example of maternal blame can be found in act 1, scene 3 in a conversation between the widowed Queen Margaret, the current Queen Elizabeth, and Richard. While the scene begins with tension between Elizabeth and Richard, Margaret soon enters and all animosity is turned towards her. As a result, she curses all those present with short, unhappy

lives; upon which, Richard retorts: "Have done thy charm, thou hateful withered hag" (1.3.211), and it is at this insult that Margaret spews acidity towards Richard directly, crying out:

Thou elvish-marked, abortive, rooting hob,

Thou that wast sealed in thy nativity

The slave of nature and the son of hell;

Thou slander of thy mother's heavy womb,

Thou loathed issue of thy father's loins (1.3.224-8)

Margaret's insults reemphasize the connection between Richard's deformity as a form of incompletion. Here, she also ties his disability to evil, and this is an evil formed in gestation: "sealed in thy nativity." For Margaret, Richard has not become evil because of his deformity, but instead, he is deformed because he is innately evil. Furthermore, interestingly enough, Margaret simultaneously indicts and abdicates Richard's parents when it comes to their part in Richard's disability. Margaret directly connects Richard to his "mother's heavy womb" and his "father's loins," but she does so in a way that at the same time distances him from his parents as a mistake or a source of shame: he is a form of "slander" and a "loathed issue." This concurrent blame and absolution is mediated through blood—the blood of the mother's womb, and the blood of the father's semen (which in the premodern world was thought to be a form of blood)—and here, *both* parents share causal power, not just the mother. If Richard's mother's womb formed and fed such a loathsome issue, the father's sperm created it in the first place—yet, it is implied, we should not "slander" them as deliberately causing this evil.

Later in the play, Margaret again connects Richard's disability to his parentage. While in the earlier instance, Margaret holds both parents, in part, responsible for the despicability of their progeny, here the deed—and in this case the fault—is solely the mother's. In act 4, scene 4

Queen Margaret bewails the legion of wicked deeds committed by Richard. In a particularly searing speech, Margaret ascribes the weight of Richard's guilt to his mother:

From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept A hell-hound that doth hunt us all to death. That dog that had his teeth before his eyes, To worry lambs and lap their gentle blood, That foul defacer of God's handiwork,

Thy womb let loose to chase us to our graves. (ll. 44-49)

There are a number of specific phrases that I'd like to examine more closely here. The first is "the kennel of thy womb," which works to simultaneously assign monstrosity to both Richard and the Duchess, because if the Duchess' womb is a kennel, then her son is a dog and she is both his creator and his captor. This dog/beast/monster imagery continues throughout this passage, as Queen Margaret calls Richard a "hell-hound," and "dog." The idea that the Duchess' womb has generated a human-animal-monster hybrid relates to premodern notions about conception, which contended that if a child was conceived while a woman was menstruating, she would give birth to a monstrous figure. So, as the play repeatedly blames Richard's mother for his disability and locates the origins of this disability in her womb specifically, both Richard and the Duchess are tainted with the pollution of her female blood, and with it this gendered bleeding carries the weight of female culpability in the original sin (much like the polluted, gendered blood I discussed in chapter 2). This imagery again conflates the medical and religious models of disability, as it connects Richard's deformity both to his menstrual conception, but also to his mother's sinful nature. Queen Margaret furthers this monstrous imagery by depicting Richard not only as a dog, but as one who laps up the innocent blood of lambs. Here, he has been

transformed from a generalized dog to a predatory wolf who preys on the innocent. It is also significant here that this wolf is depicted as drinking the blood in particular of its prey, which suggests that the deficiency in Richard's own blood leads him to seek out the blood of others. Richard as a blood-thirsty dog confuses the nature vs. nurture debate surrounding disability, because it marks him as someone who laps up blood to feed a natural deficiency, and yet marks him as a monstrous predator in doing so.

The final two lines of the above passage illustrate two dichotomies that Richard embodies: first, Richard's simultaneous encompassing of Godlike and satanic qualities, and second, the life and death forces inherently present within the womb and within blood itself. While Richard, as a human, is a creation of God, and while he should be a glorified depiction of "God's handiwork," he instead "deface[s]" it with his deformity. And, while a womb is the home of the origins of life, the Duchess's womb here incubates a harbinger of death. A deformed person is not a reflection of God, but rather that of Satan; a disabled baby being born is not a celebration of life, but rather a portent of damnation. Thus, Richard with his deformity embodies at once the beauty of Christ and the shamefulness of Satan, and Richard continues to use and manipulate his nebulous existence to get what he wants. And all of these contradictory complexities that Richard and his deformity embody are negotiated through his repeated association with images of bloodiness. If blood is fluid, so is the identity that Richard creates through it.

It's also key to note that here and throughout the play, a woman is blamed for the shortcomings of a man. However, when Richard is praised, his father is given credit for Richard's character and achievements. Blood ties mothers and fathers to their offspring in complicated and often contradictory ways. While premodern medical thought proposed that

fathers gave children their spirit and mother's only the raw materials, mothers were often blamed for any shortcoming, physical or spiritual in the child. This seems to be the case in *Richard III*. In fact, in act 3, scene 7, Richard and Buckingham discuss their plot to upbraid Edward's heirs and nullify their claim to the throne by claiming bastardy. And in doing so, Buckingham praises Richard to the people of England, saying,

Withal, I did infer your lineaments,

Being the right idea of your father,

Both in your form and nobleness of mind (3.7.8-10)

Here, as Richard is depicted as being both morally and physically untarnished, his disability seems to disappear altogether. Meanwhile, in this image of Richard's perfection, he is compared to his father, and his admirable qualities are attributed solely to paternal origins. In other words, when Richard is seen as morally corrupt and physically deformed, his mother is often to blame, but when he is praised, his father gets all of the credit. Blood is a discourse which enables cultural and religious mores to attach themselves to biological entities—such as when women are blamed for the failings of their offspring; blood is also a fluid through which often contradictory ideas can coexist.

For the next portion of this discussion, I'd like to stay in act 3, scene 7 in order to explore another possible signification of Richard's disability: that of social and political metaphor. That is, if a leader of a nation represents the nation itself, what is to be said of a nation with a leader who is deformed, both physically and morally? Much as I stated in my earlier discussion of Richard's opening soliloquy, here I will argue that not only does Richard's deformity represent his own inner depravity, but also that of the nation as a whole. In fact, numerous scholars<sup>91</sup> have

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> See also Williams and Comber articles for discussions of Richard's disability as a social/political metaphor.

noted the metaphorical significance of Richard's deformity, including Jessica Walker, who states,

Although Richard is clearly the play's focus... his deformity and the internal evil that deformity implies stand more as a metaphorical representation of a deformed civil state, a nation that has not developed out of its violent past just as Richard's body has not fully developed. Rather than a lone tyrant, his actions reflect the evils of many characters, including his victims, who in the context of the War of the Roses, have their own sins to account for. (160)

While Richard is certainly the lead villain in this play, he's not the only one with questionable morals. And, while his deformity marks him visibly and metaphorically as the most corrupt character, the play continues to question this assertion by placing the blame for Richard's descent into evil on various sources, including his mother and the English court at large. So, if Richard's disability brands him as morally inferior, it largely serves as a reflection of the corrupt nation that he seeks to rule.

In this particular scene, Buckingham and Richard put on a show for the Lord Mayor and some of his citizens, in which Buckingham praises Richard and begs him to take the throne, while Richard pretends to humbly decline the position. Here, while Richard's moral character and physical body are on display, his deformity, and also therefore his vices, are noticeably absent; in Buckingham's account, Richard appears to be made of pure moral and physical fortitude—the ideal leader. When Richard repeatedly rejects the request to take the throne, Buckingham exclaims,

Then know, it is your fault that you resign

The supreme seat, the throne majestical,

The sceptered office of your ancestors,

To the corruption of a blemished stock,

... This noble isle doth want her proper limbs,

Her face defaced with scars of infamy (ll. 109-117)

Here you can see that it is not Richard who is deformed, but the nation of England itself, and this disability is the cause of faulty leadership, which Richard can correct if he agrees to become king. Buckingham makes this case through a rhetoric of blood. First, he argues in this speech, at numerous points, that the throne belongs to Richard by birthright, and thus his blood biologically ties him to his station; second, he contends that England has been polluted and deformed by the tainted bastard blood of his brother Edward's line. Throughout most of the play, Richard's disability, and thus his corrupted blood, have cast him as a Machivellian character, but here his noble lineage is highlighted while his deformity is diminished in order to argue that Richard is the rightful heir to the throne. In a culture where leadership and national identity are inextricably linked, and in a society in which claims to the throne are hereditary, the blood of the leader becomes the blood of the nation. If Richard's blood is corrupt, so is England's, and in order to negotiate his rise to power, his disability, and thus his tainted blood, must be conveniently ignored. The fluidity of blood symbolism enables Richard and his compatriots to use it rhetorically as needed—to both depict superiority and inferiority of biology and morality.

This connection between the body of Richard and the body of England is revisited in act 5, scene 2. Here, Richmond spurs his soldiers to battle Richard and his men by employing two rhetorical methods: first, he depicts Richard as a bloodthirsty bestial character—a move that is made repeatedly by numerous characters throughout the play, and which strips Richard of any seeming humanity; secondly, Richmond spurs anger by describing the ways in which Richard's

leadership has desecrated the land and thus the nation of England. I'd like to examine in particular this portion of Richmond's speech:

The wretched, bloody, and usurping boar, That spoiled your summer fields and fruitful vines, Swills your warm blood like wash, and makes his trough In your emboweled bosoms—this foul swine Lies now even in the center of this isle, ....In God's name, cheerly on, courageous friends, To reap the harvest of perpetual peace

By this one bloody trial of sharp war. (ll. 8-16)

Here, the religious model of disability is used to portray Richard not only as a bestial character but also as an evil one. In other words, Richmond uses blood to invert the argument used by Buckingham earlier in the play. While Buckingham ignores Richard's disability and instead focuses on his biological claim to the throne, Richmond highlights Richard's disability, and the religious implications of this deformity, and uses it as a reason to throw him from his throne. In the first line of this passage, Richmond depicts Richard as a boar, which does two interesting things with blood in that it characterizes Richard as less than human because of his deformity while simultaneously dismissing any claims Richard may have to the throne through his familial connections, as the boar represents his family's heraldry. All in one fell swoop, Richmond rejects Buckingham's earlier arguments that Richard is deserving of the crown, while adding a moral layer to the argument—the soldiers should usurp Richard both because he has no hereditary claim to the throne and because he is morally unfit for such a role. While Buckingham uses

blood to mark Richard's suitability for the role of king, Richmond uses blood to deny these very same claims. The fluidity of blood once again enables competing rhetorics of identity to coexist.

From there, Richmond describes the ways in which Richard has wronged the English people and their land by rutting through their harvest and destroying their bounty like a greedy pig. While Buckingham's earlier portrayal of Richard painted him as a king who would heal the wounds of England, Richmond depicts Richard as the leader who inflicted and then further infected those very same wounds. Additionally, Richmond's image of Richard as a destructive boar once again works to associate Richard with death and evil, just like Margaret's earlier depiction of the womb of the Duchess of York. Richard, who is simultaneously bestial and pernicious, is the opposite of the beneficent leader that Buckingham has described to England. Furthermore, not only does Richard the boar desecrate the English land, he also ravages English bodies, "swill[ing their] warm blood like wash and mak[ing] his trough/ In [their] emboweled bosoms" (ll. 9-10). In other words, Richard is not a despot who is satisfied with just subjugating their lands and seizing their power, he is a monster who wants to consume their very beings; this imagery again points the idea that Richard's own deficiencies in physical and moral character, which are depicted through his flawed blood, propel him greedily to devour those of superior fiber. All in all, blood marks Richard as something other than human, something evil and incomplete—something sinister.

At the end of the play, after Richmond has killed Richard and ascended to the crown, we once again see blood imagery employed. However, instead of Richard's polluted blood, we now see a cleansing blood evoked, one that will wash away the sin and corruption of the England that Richard represented (much like the cleansing, salvific nature of Christ's blood). While Richard's blood aligns him with Satan, the blood of Richmond recalls images of Christ:

And then, as we have ta'en the sacrament,

We will unite the white rose and the red.

Smile heaven upon this fair conjunction,

That long have frowned upon their enmity.

What traitor hears me and says not "Amen?" (5.5.18-22)

Richmond's invocation of the sacrament directly unites him with Christ and marks his ascension as a rebirth for the nation of England. The bloodshed from the war, which once stood as a signifier of corruption of England, has now been repurposed as absolution for that same nation's sins, much like the blood of Christ represented in the Eucharist. In fact, Richmond implies that his leadership is so divinely appointed that heaven smiles and even traitors will rejoice at it. Richmond then revisits the bloody land imagery that he used in 5.2 to rile his soldiers to battle:

England hath long been mad and scarred herself:

The brother blindly shed the brother's blood...

Abate the edge of traitors, gracious Lord,

That would reduce these bloody days again

And make poor England weep in streams of blood.

Let them not live to taste this land's increase

That would with treason wound this fair land's peace.

Now civil wounds are stopped, peace lives again.

That she may long live here, God say "Amen." (5.5.23-41)

Here, the blood that seeps into England's soil represents the blood of civil discontent, where families fight families—where blood turns against blood. Richmond, as the connection between the York and Lancaster lines, has stopped this bloody, familial dispute by once and for all uniting the feuding groups. In other words, his biological blood has cleansed England of the bloody hatred that has caused turmoil in the nation for so long. By killing Richard, whose polluted blood has poisoned England, Richmond offers a remedy of peace and protection: no more bloodshed.

In conclusion, Richard's disability is something that marks the leader as evil throughout the play. If the connection between his moral character and his disability is not questioned in this play, then the origins of Richard's moral depravity certainly are. Through the use of blood symbolism, the play repeatedly oscillates between the religious and medical models of disability—at times, blaming Richard's biology, and mainly his mother, for his incomplete frame and his incomplete conscience, while at other times, Richard is seen as a Satanic character, whose deformity merely reveals his innate corruption. No matter what the cause, it is clear that Richard has stained himself with the blood of many others, Richard is indeed "a bloody tyrant and a homicide; / One raised in blood, and one in blood established."<sup>92</sup>

## Conclusion

So we see that disability in the premodern European world was not something clearly defined. During this period, two models began to coexist, and at times compete: the religious model and the medical model. This emergence of two epistemological modes aligns with the concurrence of other contemporary models of embodiment, including those of sacred, gendered, and racialized bodies, which I've discussed in previous chapters. The element that all of these models have in common is blood—blood is the red thread that binds them all together and enables the somewhat complicated, somewhat contradictory coevality of social thought about the body and marginalization.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> (5.3. 244-5)

In this chapter, I've explored the implications of both the religious versus the medical models of disability as well as the differences between social theories of congenital versus acquired disabilities. The medieval poem *Amis and Amiloun* examines an example of acquired disability, and while many scholars argue that Amiloun's leprosy is punishment for his sin of deceit, I have sided with Yoon and contended that it is instead a blessing and a path to saintliness. In this poem, blood *cleanses*, much like the blood of Christ.

In the early modern play *Richard III*, blood pollutes, much like the blood of Cain and Abel. Here, Richard's own blood is infected with villainy, and he thus furthers his turpitude by spilling the blood of others. Here, blood marks those who are to blame, rather than cleansing those who seek to be forgiven. Richard's case is an example of congenital disability, and this mode of embodiment comes with its own complications. Here, a number of rhetorics are in play— both those of the religious and medical models of disability, as well as those in the debate about the origins of Richard's deformity (i.e. nature versus nurture). While the play offers no clear answers about any of these debates, it allows the audience to experience all of them through actions saturated with the connecting rhetoric of blood.

Whether disability makes you a saint or a sinner, whether you view disability as an affliction or an infection, all of these veins can be probed through an examination of these works' use of blood symbolism. Blood marks and divides; it is fluid and complex, just like the humans through whom it flows.

## CHAPTER V: MEN WHO MENSTRUATE: PREMODERN BELIEFS ABOUT JEWS AND BLOOD

This dissertation began with a discussion of the sacred blood of Christ, which is cited to both set Jesus apart from *and* above all others; I'd like to end my dissertation with another type of sacred, or rather, sacrilegious, blood: Jewish blood. These two entities are connected by one strain of blood: that of Christ; for, it is the blood of Christ which stains the hands of Jews for generations to come and marks them as social pariahs. This Jewish social ostracization is then increasingly located in somatic differences as the premodern era progresses. So, much like the blood of Christ, which I argue is starting to become medicalized during this period, the blood of Jews is also encountering a new biologically-centered definition. While the move from social to somatic difference is largely made, I argue, to better comprehend the complex nature of the embodiment/incarnation of Christ, this same move is used to racialize Jewish difference, in order to cement their inferiority to Christians.

Much like the blood of the other ostracized groups discussed in this dissertation, Jewish blood is another entity that defies strict boundaries and binary classification. That is to say: othered groups are those whose identity is in flux and/or exists in a liminal space; because they don't fit neatly into one category or another, they aren't allowed to take residence in *any* socially accepted space. Interestingly enough, the beliefs surrounding Jewish blood connect it in numerous veins to the thoughts about the embodiment of Christ, the Jew's very arch-nemesis— both represent bodies that are simultaneously masculine and feminine, human and other-worldly (i.e. divine or monstrous respectively), as well as socially and physically constructed. So, like Christ's blood, Jewish blood represents a pivot point, at which identity can be negotiated by coexisting in various dichotomies of identity. Through the beliefs surrounding Jewish blood, the Jew stood simultaneously as both masculine and feminine, making him doubly dangerous, as a figure who was excessively lascivious and equally volatile. In addition, the Jew was one who

obtained his identity not only through his religion, but also through his race. This meant that to convert from Judaism to Christianity was not to erase one's Jewishness, for the very physical traits of the Jew still lay deeply embedded within a Jewish person's body, regardless of which religious building he entered. However, despite this, Jewish people were not easily distinguishable from their Christian counterparts, and this is where I believe some of the myths about Jewish blood originated—from a desire to separate the two seemingly similar groups. Because of this, Jewish blood was freely and openly acknowledged as a marker of his social and physical ostracism during the medieval and early modern periods.

I propose that of all the othered identities I discuss in this dissertation, the othered Jewish body poses the greatest threat to English hegemonic, heteronormative identity. The sacred body, the gendered body, and the disabled body all distinguish themselves through readily visible markers; however, the Jewish body can easily be mislabeled as a Christian one, and because of this, it is a constant threat to Anglo-Saxon dominance. The Jewish body is one whose identity, both physical and social, in the premodern world is the most in flux and thus the most dangerous to social order; it is an identity based not only upon religious delineations, but more increasingly upon burgeoning, and therefore often ill-defined, notions of race and nationality. Christians were so eager to ostracize and define Jews because the instability of Jewish identity highlighted the instability of *Christian* identity, especially under the Tudor dynasty—where one could change from Protestant to Catholic several times over within a lifetime (Shapiro 26).<sup>93</sup> So, in order to demarcate a social difference in a physical body that looked only slightly different from that of the English Christian, blood became the representative of this separation as well as the tie between the physical and the social.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup>Shapiro, James. *Shakespeare and the Jews*. Columbia University Press, 1996.

Blood is the very thing which separates Christians and Jews most decidedly. While blood stands as something that often distances the Jew from God, it is the blood of Christ which most fervently draws Christians closer to divinity. In other words, the blood of the Old Testament, of the Jew, frequently marks the believer unclean: the Levitical laws urge menstruating women to seclude themselves lest they taint others; the Jew is instructed to abstain from shedding and consuming the blood of certain unclean animals; the Jew is commanded to avoid the unclean bodies of the dead. And, as Leviticus 17:11 directs, "The life of the flesh is in the blood." However, as the latter half of this verse states, "and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul," blood in relation to Jewish theology can also cleanse. Nevertheless, in order to convert this substance from contaminating to cleansing, it must be purified through sacrifice; thus blood atonement is the antidote to blood contamination, but this only can be achieved through repeated divine intervention. Indeed, this verse is foundational to understanding the Christian notion of Christ's atonement as he is "the Lamb of God," who will serve as the atoning, cleansing sacrifice for all who believe. The key distinction between the cleansing powers of Old and New Testament blood is that the former must be offered up time and again in order to be purified, while the latter is irrevocably and eternally redeemed once and for all through the blood shed by Christ at the cross:"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."9495 Ultimately, the blood of the Old Testament, the blood of the Jewish Tanakh, especially the Torah, is something which the Jews must typically avoid (unless sanctified through the altar or religious officials/practices) in order

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> See 1 John 1:7; see also Hebrews 9: 9-15, Matthew 26:28, Romans 3:25, among many other scriptures, in both the Old and the New Testament, which illustrate the blood of Christ as a cleansing mechanism/mediation for the solled sinner.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>95</sup> Emphasis added

to remain clean, both physically and spiritually; meanwhile, the blood of the New Testament, encourages Christians not only to embrace blood, specifically the blood of Christ, but also to consume and revere it. Through the crucifixion of Christ, blood becomes the most substantial cornerstone of separation between Christians and Jews.

In this chapter, I will argue that notions surrounding Jewish blood marginalize this group in four key ways: the blood of blood libel and host desecration; the blood of supposed Jewish male menstruation; the blood of circumcision; and most importantly, the blood of race. Furthermore, I will contend that the first type of Jewish blood, that of blood libel and host desecration, demonstrates a focus on Jewish social identity, as it is defined through their religion. While the second and third types of Jewish blood, male menstruation and circumcision, begin to show an amalgamation of beliefs about Jewish social identity and Jewish biology. However, it is the final type of blood, the blood of race, which most definitively marks the Jew as *biologically*,<sup>96</sup> and not just socially, different.<sup>97</sup> M. Lindsay Kaplan notes that the interconnection between religion and medicine worked to create a discourse which underscored Jewish somatic difference as something inherently present:

While medieval "scientific" thinking distinguished itself from theology, Christianity pervaded the culture of the period; the clergy staffed and attended university courses in natural philosophy and medicine. The production of the bleeding Jewish body out of exegetical texts serves as evidence for Loomba's argument that cultural assumptions influence the shape of scientific knowledge. The theological trope of Jewish servitude

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> I must note that I am using an anachronistic term here, since "biology" was not used in its modern sense until the late 18th century. However, the concept of biology as we know it, as a branch of science dealing with living systems, was present in the premodern world. In this case, the thing/concept predates the word that I will be using here.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> It is key to note here that these biological differences were socially defined. So, Jewish race, while rooted in the rhetoric of biology, was largely a social construct.

powerfully influences medieval attempts to imagine a Jewish physical difference that would materialize the inferior status already denoted in spiritual and legal discourses. (Kaplan 118)<sup>98</sup>

As I've argued throughout this dissertation, I contend that blood creates a nexus point between the two rhetorics of religion and medicine. It is through the discourse of Jewish *blood* specifically that Jews are somatically and racially ostracized in alignment with their longestablished social and religious marginalization. In fact, the repositioning of religious to medical rhetoric cements the marginalization of the Jewish body, a body which before the rhetoric of Jewish race becomes popular, is one which can easily be disguised as a Christian one. With the notions of race, Jewishness gains biological immutability. Ultimately, it is the widely believed notions of the first three aforementioned types of Jewish blood, which originate in the Middle Ages, that contribute to the early modern understanding of Jewishness as a race.

Through an exploration of three key literary works—Chaucer's "The Prioress' Tale," Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, and Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*—I will closely examine each of these four aforementioned types of Jewish blood. While each work individually does not encompass all four of these blood symbolisms, the three works collectively do. Furthermore, through my analysis I will demonstrate the connection that blood draws between the physical and social, as well as the medical and the religious, as I've also illustrated in the previous chapters. Much like the beliefs surrounding sacred blood, and especially the blood of Jesus, the ideas about Jewish blood are a complex conglomeration of often seemingly contradictory beliefs about embodiment. The beliefs about Jewish blood simultaneously mark the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup>Kaplan, M. Lindsay. "'His Blood Be on Us and on Our Children': Medieval Theology and the Demise of Jewish Somatic Inferiority in Early Modern England." *The Cultural Politics of Blood*, *1500-1900*, edited by Kimberly Anne Coles et al., Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 107–26.

Jew as one who vehemently dismisses the sacred sovereignty of Christ, and yet continuously and unintentionally upholds its miraculous qualities. The blood of the Jewish male marks him both as masculine (through circumcision) and feminine (through supposed menstruation). These types of Jewish blood collectively place them irrevocably in a liminal and ill-defined space, where their identity is ascertained through their blood, but the meaning and origin of their blood is repeatedly contested. Fundamentally, the blood of the Jew asks us to examine how the premodern world defined identity: through biology, social codes, or both?

As I mentioned before, this chapter will examine four specific types of blood as it relates to Jewishness. The first of these relates to medieval and early modern beliefs about blood libel and host desecration. While these beliefs persist, to an extent, into the early modern period, they were much more widespread in the Middle Ages. This pervasiveness can be demonstrated through the copious amount of literature discussing blood libel and host desecration found during this period, such as The Croxton Play of the Sacrament, which I discussed in chapter 1, and "The Prioress' Tale" which I will discuss in this chapter. Both belief in blood libel, which is the notion that Jews killed Christians in order to use their blood for rituals, potions, and medicine, as well as belief in host desecration, which is the idea that Jews stole the Eucharist in order to perform experiments on it and/or vandalize it, rely on the notion that Jews believed in the sacred potency of Christian blood and especially that of the blood of Christ. This, in and of itself, is a contradiction: that Jews, whose very rejection of Christ as the Messiah sets them apart from Christians, would endanger their own lives and the lives of others in order to obtain relics in which they put no faith. Despite their antithetical nature, these myths about Jewish practice persisted throughout much of the medieval and early modern periods, and as we will see, they formed the basis for popular literature such as "The Prioress's Tale." These particular beliefs

about Jews and blood were rooted largely in social notions of blood, as myths of blood libel and host desecration were dictated by religious contexts of blood symbolism; however, as I will argue, these myths also show the beginnings of a nod towards the racialization of Jews.

Aside from the beliefs about the Jewish thirst for Christian blood, the blood of circumcision is another way in which blood marginalizes the medieval and early modern Jew. The blood of circumcision, like the blood of libel, demonstrates a burgeoning cultural shift towards the racialization of Jews; or in other words, a biological naturalization of their social marginalization. In a physical sense, it is the blood of circumcision which most decidedly marks the embodied difference between Jews and Christians; however, while this blood is very much embodied, it is not inherited, for this blood is shed after birth during a religious rite. The embodied nature of circumcision means that while a Jewish male can socially convert to Christianity, his body will always mark him as a Jew. Meanwhile, it is much easier for a Jewish woman to convert, as she has no physical signs which demarcate her heritage. Either way, it is blood which both allows Jews and prevents Jews from converting to Christianity. For the Jewish male, it is the blood and mark of circumcision which prevent him from ever fully becoming a Christian. For the Jewish female, it is the blood of marriage (i.e. hymenal blood) which allows her to cast aside her Jewish lineage in exchange for the new title of Christian. In fact, in both of the plays that I will discuss in this chapter, we see the Jewish daughters convert to Chrisitianity both through marriage and through celibacy (i.e. joining a nunnery). While much of the feminine bleeding we discussed in chapter 2 put women at a disadvantage, and often even in danger, here female bleeding and all of its intimations are advantageous for Jewish women.

As I will argue later in this chapter in more depth, at the heart of the early modern fascination with Jewish circumcision is the anxiety both about physical delineation and religious

conversion. While the premodern male Jew cannot be physically distinguished from the Christian at first glance, his circumcision will always give him away; and in this way, circumcision forms a traverse between skin color and blood in terms of visibility. Even if a Jewish male converts to Christianity, he can never be fully Christian, because of this physical condition. Additionally, enmeshed in many of these myths about blood libel is the idea that Jews would circumcise their victims before they killed them. So, not only would they take Christian lives, they would mark them as Jewish before they did, and thus eternally damn them. Again, this belief is self-contradictory and falls apart easily under the slightest of scrutiny; nevertheless, it persisted. Thus, circumcision stood as a threat of forcible conversion, and this threat permeates almost tangibly throughout *The Merchant of Venice*. In my circumcision section of this chapter, I will discuss how Shylock's contract repeatedly stands as a threat not only to Antonio's body, but also to his faith.

While beliefs about blood libel and host desecration are bound up in ideas about ritual and superstition, and while notions about circumcision intersect the ritual with the physical, it is in assumptions about Jewish male menstruation that we begin to see a rhetoric that marks the Jew as *biologically*, not just spiritually or culturally, different from the Christian. In the medieval and early modern eras, there were various beliefs about the causes for Jewish male menstruation: some thought it was due to Jews having a superfluous and uncontrollable humoral nature (much like women), which led to an excess of blood; others believed that Jewish men menstruated each year around the time of the Passion as punishment for their role in the death of Christ; still, others contended that Jewish males were more prone to hemorrhoids because of their largely sedentary lives along with their fatty diets, and this led to anal bleeding, which was then misconstrued as menstruation. Regardless of the alleged causes of this supposed Jewish bleeding,

the myth of Jewish male menstruation served to not only feminize them, but even more so to liminalize them, as something that is not fully man or woman (interestingly enough, much like the body of Christ). In turn, by feminizing the Jewish man, society both weakened him and marginalized him. In contrast, the hybridization of Jesus's gender, which I discussed in chapter 1, does the opposite—it makes him comely, kind, nurturing, and simultaneously strong. At the heart of these two discourses, that of Jewish blood and that of Jesus' blood, we find many similarities; however, they are employed for very different means. While blood marginalizes both Jews and Jesus, it does so by setting Jesus above all others, and casting Jews beneath all others. The very ambiguity and malleability of blood rhetoric is what makes it so powerful—it can be used to whatever ends desired, and it can be put to contradictory uses by separating or unifying the physical and the social.

While the myth of Jewish male menstruation persisted culturally into the early modern period, characters who directly experience this phenomena are interestingly almost nonexistent in literature of this time. For my section on Jewish male menstruation, I will turn to a reading of "The Prioress's Tale," where I will focus on the Virgin Mary's lack of menstrual blood, rather than any existence of Jewish male menstruation. My point is doing this is to illustrate the theological and polemical notions at stake when it comes to menstruation and religious purity. Each group, both Christians and Jews, want to remove themselves from any of the pollution of menstruation. In the section on male menstruation, I will explore how Christians and Jews stake their claims differently and why this matters.

In *Shakespeare and the Jews*, James Shapiro thoroughly examines the ways in which Jewishness was defined in the early modern period in England. He contends that the English notions of Jewishness highlight English insecurities about their own identities, especially as

notions of race and nationhood are rapidly growing and changing. The Jews in particular presented a conundrum when defining their identity, largely because they were a nationless group. So, if they could not be defined by their nationality, how could they be defined? This is where the idea of race comes in.

Early modern scholars have debated whether or not *race* is an anachronistic term for this time period.<sup>99</sup> Many of those who do support the idea of race operating in the medieval and early modern time periods, limit these notions to cultural markers which grouped and segregated certain factions of people, such as the Jews; other scholars extend these racial markers to biological, and especially biopolitical, identifiers. While I agree with both notions that race was constituted of social and biological markers, I want to take my argument a step further and contend that conceptions of race, as it pertains to the Jews in this time period, became an amalgamation of the cultural and the physical through popular beliefs about blood. This does not mean that ideas about biological difference did not emerge before this time period, or that these ideas stayed stagnant once they were more finitely formed in the early modern period, but rather that this time period marks a key transition, once which I have been graphing throughout this work—a shift from the religious to the scientific, and from the cultural to the biological. The ideas surrounding Jewish identity greatly encapsulate this transition, as this chapter will contend. As the ideas of nationhood are being more clearly defined, so are the ideas about race, and Jews do not fit neatly into either classification—for the Jews are nationless, as well as a group defined both by religious beliefs and hereditary connections.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> Aside from these arguments about race, my key interest in the topic is its relation to beliefs about *Jewish blood*. Scholars such as Geraldine Heng, Emily C. Bartels, James Shapiro, Jean Feerick, Kim F. Hall, and M. Lindsay Kaplan have explored issues of medieval and early modern racial identity in depth, and I will use their expertise to help support my argument.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> See also: "...it is important to note that religion – the paramount source of authority in the Middle Ages – can function both socioculturally *and* biopolitically: subjecting peoples of a detested faith, for instance, to a political

For my discussion of Jewishness as a race, I will focus especially on *The Merchant of* Venice and The Jew of Malta, both of which are plays set in liminal spaces at this point in history—areas which were known for their international population and trading economy: Venice and Malta. These settings are apropos for plays featuring Jews, a nationless group, whose identity is as equally liminal as the spaces that they occupy. In each of these plays, the Jewish protagonist is cast as an alien/non-citizen in a city where foreigners are welcome, thus further underscoring his nationless status. In addition, while these Jewish characters are allowed to conduct business in these states, and are even forced to pay taxes from their profits, they are not afforded the legal representation/benefits of a citizen. I argue this is because of their Jewish race, which no matter where they go, will always cast them as alien. In addition, these two characters are racialized when they are depicted as having stereotypical Jewish traits, such as a large nose and a strong natural odor—traits which are allegedly biologically innate to the Jews. In my discussion of these two plays and their relation to the racialization of Jewishness, I will argue that while *The Jew of Malta* centralizes this racialization in exterior physical attributes, *The* Merchant of Venice internalizes it.

Ultimately, this chapter will argue that the confines of the Jewish identity shift from a focus on religious ritual to that of biological difference—and all of this can be seen through an examination of the particular rhetorics of Jewish blood and bleeding. In her discussion of racial theory and the history of race, Heng notes:

In the descriptions of modernity as racial time, a privileged status has been accorded to the Enlightenment and its spawn of racial technologies describing body and nature through pseudoscientific discourses pivoting on biology as the ground of essence,

hermeneutics of theology that can biologize, define, and essentialize, an entire community as fundamentally, and absolutely different in an inter-knotted cluster of ways" (Heng, "The Invention (pt. 2)", 332).

reference, and definition. So tenacious has been scientific racism's account of race, with its entrenchment of high modernist racism as the template of *all* racisms, that it is still routinely understood, in everyday life and much of scholarship, that *properly* racial logic and behavior *must* invoke biology and the body as their referent...  $(319)^{101}$ 

As Heng observes here, theories about race have often focused largely on biology as a marker of difference. While this is certainly a substantive part of racialization, I believe, like Heng, that notions of race originated with social markers of difference, which eventually progressed to more biologically-centered separations. However, unlike Heng, I do believe that the focus on biology is not solely a modernist specification of race, but rather one that was always present, and instead simply expressed through different discourses and lenses, such as religious dialects of difference. It is here that blood becomes key to our discussion of race—as blood bridges the gap between cultural and scientific notions of race, while simultaneously complicating the connection between these two epistemologies. In other words, with a historical examination of racial theory, and a focus on the transition from social to scientific, as well as the still-present intermingling of the two, I plan to analyze medieval and early modern literature in order to argue that blood is the key factor which helps to make this transition and connection between cultural and medical notions of embodied otherness.

## **Bloodthirsty Jews: Blood Libel Beliefs**

The first two sections of this chapter will examine religious and social Jewish rituals, especially as they relate to beliefs about blood. At the heart of these rituals is the fear *or* hope of conversion. That is to say: medieval and early modern beliefs surrounding ritual murder and circumcision demonstrates the Christian fear of forced conversion to Judaism; host desceration

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Found in Heng's "The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages I: Race Studies, Modernity, and the Middle Ages"

depicts the Christian hope for Jewish conversion at the sight of the miracles of the sacrament. Either way, the cultural mythology built around blood libel is predicated on the Christian belief in both the existence of Christ as the Messiah and in the sacred power of his blood; in order for these rituals to exist, these Christian beliefs must be circumscribed onto Jewish practice. Furthermore, superstitions about these rituals are depicted through a Christian lens in the works that we will explore, and these biases are clearly projected onto the Jewish characters as factual truth rather than conjecture. All of this is problematic, to say the least. Another complication about these blood libelisms is that these are beliefs which define the Jews and yet simultaneously uphold Christian ideals and values; in other words, it is the majority who are using their belief systems to impart a valuation upon a minority group of a different belief system.<sup>102</sup> In all of the other sections in this chapter, I will explore beliefs about blood that have to do with the Jew's own blood in particular. However, the myths of blood libel, both ritual murder and host desecration, are focused not on Jewish blood, but rather on the supposed Jewish obsession with Christian blood, and especially the blood of Christ. Because of this, I will call this section "Bloodthirsty Jews."

Not only do the beliefs, or largely urban myths, about blood libel mark the Jews as different, they also mark them as less than human—these beliefs make them appear monstrous—much like the beliefs about disability that I discussed in Chapter 3.<sup>103</sup> This application of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> See also: "Historians have long noticed the curious fact that the medieval blood libel is an accusation against the Jews for doing what is most abhorrent according to Jewish law. And not only does the blood libel involve the inversion of actual Jewish practices; it is seemingly also a projection onto the Jews of what Christians themselves do, namely, eat the body and blood of Christ in the form of the Eucharist. The blood libel, on this reading, would appear to be the result of an inner Christian dynamic that causes Christians to attribute to Jews the very opposite of what Jews believe" (Biale 82).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> See also: "The idea of horns, a supernatural stench and bodily oddities, disfigured the Jew beyond his alleged spiritual deviance. In a society in which only Chrisitian individuals were fully accepted, it followed that whoever did not conform to that requirement would be regarded as being less human than his Christian counterpart" (Matteoni 194).

monstrosity, made possible through the circulation of blood libel myths, cements the stance of Christian superiority, because it marks the Jews not only as sub-human, but also as amoral. Matteoni traces the origins of blood libel myths to two key events: the mass executions of the Jews in Fulda, Germany in 1235 and Belitz, Germany in 1243; this is where we see the first recorded instances of ritual murder and host desecration respectively (185-6).<sup>104</sup> In addition, Matteoni notes a number of alleged reasons why Jews so fervently thirsted for Christian blood: they used it as an ingredient in aphrodisiacs and magical potions; to treat epilepsy, the Jewish stench, and a number of skin diseases; to cure congenital defects specific to Jews such as blindness and horn-like growths; to treat Jewish bleeding such as hemorrhoids and excessive female menstruation; and during Jewish religious rites such as circumcision and Passover (190-1). While there were in reality only a few rare instances of ritual murder and host desecration, the myths of blood libel became a fascination for the English and an inextricable and infamous brand—much like the mark of Cain—for the Jews.

Late medieval literary works seem especially enthralled with this aspect of Jewishness, and a number of plays are dedicated to the topic of blood libel. For instance, the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, which was a part of the mystery play cycles of the Middle Ages, and which I discussed in my first chapter, centers its plot around a group of Jews who enlist a Christian to steal the Eucharist for them so that they can then repeatedly desecrate said host. While this play features mostly Jewish characters, I included it in my chapter about Christ, because I argue that it has more to say about Christian, and specifically medieval and Roman Catholic, theology and about the nature of the body of Christ and transubstantiation than it does about any actual Jewish

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> Matteoni, Francesca. "The Jew, the Blood and the Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe." *Folklore* (London, UK), vol. 119, no. 2, Aug. 2008, pp. 182–200. *EBSCOhost*, https://doi-org.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.1080/00155870802056985.

ritual or belief. In fact, many of the pieces of literature which do feature instances of blood libel serve as pulpits to espouse Christian doctrine rather than a vessel to show any Jewish doctrine based in reality. That's why, as I mentioned earlier, the beliefs about blood libel are, at their core, attached to the Christian hope for Jewish conversion: if the Jews are faced with the truth of the power of Christ, they will not be able to help but convert, in awe and reverence. In the literary depictions of Jewish ritual murder, the Jew simultaneously rejects the verity of the New Testament while still seeking the power not only of Christ's blood, but also of all Christian's blood as well. That is to say, Jews abhor Christians so much that they senselessly brutalize and murder them, and yet they deify their blood to the extent that they actively seek it out to use in a number of their magical and medicinal practices. Ultimately, it is easy to see that these blood libel myths are defined by medieval Christianity, and therefore problematic because they logically require that Jews would have to acknowledge the value/power of Christ's blood and body, all while simultaneously desecrating it.

Chaucer's "The Prioress' Tale" is an intriguing and unique depiction of Jewish ritual murder in that the Jews of the story want nothing to do with the Christian child's blood. In fact, as soon as they kill him, they dispose of his body in a cesspool. So, why do they kill this small, innocent child if not to use his powerful and pure blood? Again, like the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, this work points more so to the doctrine of the Christian audience than it does to the reality of the medieval Jew. The genre of this tale, a miracle story of the Virgin, was a popular genre at this time, and highlighted the miraculous nature of divine intervention, especially that of the Virgin Mary. In addition to underscoring the miraculous and sacred agency of Catholic saints, this tale also emphasizes the embodied power of Christ, as the young boy in this tale is arguably a Christ figure. So, while the Jews here do not kill the boy because they wish to use his

blood for some secret and ominous ritual, they kill him because they are an innately blood-thirsty race of people who seek to persecute Christians<sup>105</sup>—from the original crucifixion of Christ centuries before to this medieval representation of the cruel execution of an innocent. Ironically, while this tale and many others like it depict Jews as falsely persecuting and executing innocent Christians, it was often Jews who faced such treatment at the hand of Christians during this time because of the fear that these very same blood libel myths incited amongst English Christians in the Middle Ages.

At its core, I argue that the "Prioress' Tale" is about lineage (and thus ultimately about the racialization of Jews): the grace and innate goodness that is passed down from generation to generation among Christians versus the curse of inherent immorality of the Jewish race. In "Retelling the *Prioress's Tale*: Antisemitism, Racism, and Patience Agbabi's Telling Tales," Heather Blurton makes a compelling argument that the Jews of the story are repeatedly racialized<sup>106</sup>: "In the *Prioress's Tale*, Christ's blood becomes a racial marker, and it is a marker that is explicitly opposed to the Jews…In this tale, if Christians are a group that share blood ties, Jews are a group that are bound by a curse" (405). In other words, both Christians and Jews find their connections bound by blood, but not necessarily just the blood of biology; instead, Christians are connected and protected by the blood of Christ, while Jews are separated and persecuted *because* of the blood of Christ and their implied guilt in its shedding. If the Jews are creating any lineage for themselves, Blurton argues that is a cursed heritage that they pass on to their children in Chaucer's tale. In fact, Blurton notes that the Jews of the story are repeatedly

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>105</sup> See l. 492: "Hateful to Crist and to his compaignye"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> Blurton begins her article with a thorough explanation of her definition of race as it pertains to the Middle Ages. This is one helpful quotation from this section to demonstrate part of her argument about race: "*race* is a biopolitical rather than a biological construct" (400, emphasis original).

described as "cursed," as if this is a marked and fixed part of their identity.<sup>107</sup> Meanwhile, the Christian child in the tale is repeatedly described as little, young, innocent, and tender, and this is not just a state of his age, it is also because of this lineage as a Christian, which inherently imparts goodness on him.<sup>108</sup> With these competing descriptions of two races of people, we can see an example of racial biology imparting morality onto its descendents; the discourse of blood allows these two (i.e. the body and the soul) to converge, and it allows cultural mores and physical traits to meet as one.

Jews throughout the "Prioress' Tale" are repeatedly grouped together—both spatially and socially. At the outset of the tale, we learn that all of the Jews of this community live together on one street, which marks them as geographically set aside, or in other words segregated, from the rest of the community. However, their location is not the only way that they are separated from local Christians. The first stanza of the tale goes on to describe this Jewish ghetto as one plagued with usury, a trade relegated to the Jewish community and one that quickly became a marker, as well as a source of hatred, of their race since Jews were often accused of charging exorbitant interest rates and participating in unethical business practices. So, not only are the Jews labeled as pariahs by being cast to the outskirts of town, they are also seen as intrinsically greedy people because of their common profession (one of the few professions which they were allowed to practice freely in many medieval and early modern communities). Thus their physical and social standing work doubly to ostracize them and to underscore this very ostracism as an innate quality of the Jewish people.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> For examples, see ll. 570, 574, 599, 631, 685

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> For examples, see ll. 497,503, 509, 512, 516, 524, 538, 551-7, 556, 587, 635

In the second stanza of the tale, we encounter the Christian students who also inhabit this space, as they pass through the Jewish ghetto on their way to and from school. While the Jewish characters of this tale are repeatedly characterized, and ultimately racialized, as evil, the racialization of Christians is more positive. These Christian children are labeled as intrinsically good because they are "ycomen of Cristen blood" (I. 497). In other words, their biological heritage also circumscribes social mores onto their being. Immediately after this generalization about the Christian students, we then see a more specific description of the tale's protagonist: we learn that he is a widow's son, seven years old, and that he was an innocent and unwavering reverence for the Virgin Mary. The description that follows in the next several stanzas repeatedly underscores both the *innate* and the *learned* goodness and faith that the boy embodies—as something natural to his childlike, and more importantly his Christian, state and as something that he has been taught both in school and at home—thus his goodness is both physical/natural as well as social and spatial, and altogether a result of his "Cristen blood" cited in the second stanza of the tale.

As the young boy learns more Christian doctrine, he becomes increasingly enamored with the Virgin Mary and begins to sing Alma Redemptoris Mater on the way to and from school. Here, I'd like to take a moment to examine the notions of Christian blood implied through this liturgical hymn. First, there is the blood/biological connection between Jesus and his mother Mary. Secondly, there are the sacred implications of this connection, which are underscored in the lyrics of the hymn: "Thou who brought forth thy holy Creator, all creation wond'ring, Yet remainest ever Virgin," meaning that Jesus was conceived without sin (I'll speak more about the importance of this sinless conception in my menstruation section), calling towards his divine origins. This blood, the blood of Christ and its connection to the Virgin Mary,

is that which is at the core of the divide between the Jews and Christians in this tale; this blood ultimately poses a threat to the Jews, and implies guilt for an entire group of people through their connection to Jesus' crucifixion. Thus, the Christian faith of the child in this tale is directly juxtaposed with inherited and inherent guilt of the Jewish characters, indicating a hereditary path to either salvation or damnation respectively—Jews and Christians do not just inherit these futures because of a religious choice, but also because of a lineage passed down to them before they were even born. While the blood of Christ has redeemed Christians, it will condemn Jews. As you can see, several discourses of blood are at play here—both religious (i.e. the blood of Christ), social (i.e. the blood of social lineage), and medical (i.e. the blood of biological heredity). While the origins of blood libel myths draw heavily on cultural practice and social superstition, they also illustrate a subtle inclination towards lineage and ultimately biology. For the Jews, their guilt is an inherited trait akin to eye color—it is something unavoidable, inextricable—it runs in their veins.

In her article, "'His blood be on us and on our children': Medieval Theology and the Demise of Jewish Somatic Inferiority in Early Modern England," M. Lindsay Kaplan coins the phrase "congenital guilt"<sup>109</sup> in her discussion of Jewish inherited guilt, and this is a phrase that I feel is especially apt to "The Prioress' Tale" (114). It is because of this "congenital guilt," I argue, that the Jews in this tale kill the boy—because he indirectly indicts them as he recalls for them their heritage of culpability, which was brought on by their part in the crucifixion of Christ. That means that there are a number of symbols of blood at play here: the blood of Christ, the inherited guilt of the Jews (carried through their biology/blood), and the ensuing blood of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> It is significant to note that Kaplan does not make any connections between Jewish "congenital guilt" and the Christian doctrine of Original Sin, nor do the papal statements or contemporary theological texts that she cites. Perhaps, the blood of Christ wipes away original sin for Christians, while it marks/implicates Jews.

murdered young boy. More importantly, all of these forms of blood are ultimately connected back to Christian doctrine; that is to say that the Christian belief in the power of Christ's blood is what supposedly drives the Jews, out of hatred and guilt, to murder an innocent child, who both reveres the blood of Christ and simultaneously stands as a Christ figure himself. While the Jews are not interested in the young Christian's blood for their own rituals, they are interested in his blood because it calls (or "cries," in reference to Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:10) out to the blood on their hands, passed down by generations of guilt. Blood functions vastly differently for Christians and Jews; for Christians, the blood of Christ removes guilt, and for Jews, this same blood imbues guilt. Not only are the Jewish characters collectively guilty for something in which they had no direct connection (i.e. the crucifixion of Jesus), as Blurton argues, they also collectively act upon his inherited guilt: "In the *Prioress's Tale*, while the Christian characters are individuated—the *clergeon*, the mother, the abbot—the Jews are not; rather than being treated as individuals they are treated as a corporate entity: they all decide to murder the child, and they are punished en masse" (404-5, emphasis original). This demonstrates the beginnings of thinking of the Jews as a race of people, separate from their religious identity, or rather enmeshed with their religious identity; in other words, I argue, that when individual Jews are grouped together and then attributed certain traits, both social and physical, as a group, a racial ideology about Jews is beginning to form, and it is the various rhetorics of blood at play here which enable these notions of race to materialize. At this point, racialization is centered in social constructs more so than biology.

Back to the tale: After the boy travels through the Jewish ghetto singing for some time, Satan, who is cited as "oure [the Christians'] firste foe" and as one who "hath in Jues herte his waspes nest," calls out to the Jews as "Hebrayk peple" and encourages them to retaliate against

the young boy for singing of things that both contradict their beliefs and cause them shame (ll. 558-64). There are several levels of lineage at play here in this stanza: first, the Christian's innate opposition to Satan, and the Jews' inherent allegiance with him; secondly, the Jews' history and nationality as the Hebrew people, which not only ties them to a past and a location, but also inscribes them with the aforementioned congenital guilt. The Jews then comply with Satan's request and have the young boy murdered. Upon doing so, they incite a new level of cursedness, invoked through blood, as the tale's narrator states, "The blood out crieth on youre cursed dede" (1. 578). This phrase holds both biblical and legal resonance and stands as a powerful signifier of the polyvalance of blood. In Genesis 4, after Cain murders his brother Abel, God declares, "the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." Here, despite Cain's feigned ignorance of his brother's death, the blood of his deed indicts him. This scripture uses the same verbiage as "The Prioress's Tale," and thus recalls directly the undeniable guilt of Cain as depicted through the bloodshed he caused.<sup>110</sup> Additionally, as Bildhauer notes, "The idea that spilt blood cries to heaven comes from Genesis 4:10, which states that Abel's blood, shed by Cain, cries to God for vengeance. This notion of blood crying out thus suggests not only that it cannot be hidden, but also that it always has to be avenged" (46). So, not only does the cry of blood signify guilt, it also necessitates retribution—possibly through personal or legal avenues. In addition to the biblical implications, this quote also carries legal resonance, as it recalls the belief of cruentation, where a victim's corpse would bleed out in the presence of its murderer.<sup>111</sup> So, much like its biblical implications, here, blood cries out again, but perhaps for justice rather than vengeance. Again, blood both literal and figurative, biblical and legal, represents the Jews'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>110</sup> Genesis 4:10

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>111</sup> See also: "The idea that spilt blood cries to heaven comes from Genesis 4:10, which states that Abel's blood, shed by Cain, cries to God for vengeance. This notion of blood crying out thus suggests not only that it cannot be hidden, but also that it always has to be avenged" (Bildhauer 46).

inescapable connection to guilt. While they may try to evade any culpability, Kaplan's "congenital guilt" already runs in their veins.

At the end of the tale, the speaker recalls the murder of Hugh of Lincoln in order to remind her audience that her sad tale is based on actual history. This cited example is one of the most notorious cases of ritual murder, in which Jews were mistakenly blamed for this crime; this was also one of the incendiary tales that helped perpetuate the myth of widespread Jewish ritual murder, which were repeatedly retold in literary works such as this and Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*. The fact that stories of Jewish ritual murder circulated widely, not just in England, but throughout Europe at this time, with little to no substantiating evidence, demonstrates how tightly the Jew's lineage was already tied with the names of guilty and murderers in the Christians' mind. Both the blood in their veins and the blood on their hands (imagined or not) branded them with the infamous mark of Cain.

## Men Who Menstruate: Myths about Jewish Male Menstruation

The myth of Jewish male menstruation is interesting because it takes a physical state of humoral imbalance and mixes it with a cultural notion of the Jew's perpetual guilt; in other words, it commingles biology with cultural stereotypes. In "The Menstruant as 'Other' in Medieval Judaism and Christianity," Sharon Faye Koren describes this amalgamation of causation as such:

To depict a Jew as feminine made him weak. To describe a man as having a menstrual flow goes much further, emasculating him entirely and defining him as other. This Christian view of Jewish biology took the idea of menstruation as an allegory for moral impurity and literalized it. The notion of Jewish male flux, conceived as an

excessive blood flow from the anus, was justified in terms of humoral science and Christian theology. (45)<sup>112</sup>

That is to say, the Christian circulation of the myth of Jewish male menstruation marginalizes and shames Jewish men in a number of ways: it effeminizes them, it implicates them in Jesus' death, and it marks them as biologically unbalanced and thus physically (and socially) inferior. In addition, as I mentioned, it uses blood to combine two divergent rhetorics of embodied difference: medical and religious. The coupling of these two rhetorics was common, as religion was in many ways the developmental site of the burgeoning medical field at this time. However, as the two epistemologies began gradually to bifurcate, each adopted its own rhetoric of blood to underscore notions of otherness. Despite their attempts to distance themselves from one another, their simultaneous conversations about blood inextricably conjoined them. In other words, no matter what you cite as the origin of difference, whether it be cultural, religious, biological, etc, blood carves out avenues of thought upon which ideas can, *and will*, both intersect and diverge at various points in time.

As I mentioned in this chapter's introduction, there were a number of premodern beliefs, some somatic and some social, about the causes of male menstruation: some believed that Jewish men bled (it was typically believed that this was anal bleeding which occurred) each year on Good Friday as an implication of their guilt in Jesus' death; others believed that the Jewish lifestyle of a rich diet and a sedentary life led to excessive blood and a greater likelihood for hemorrhoids; still others marked Jewish male bleeding as a sure sign of their femininity—their physically and culturally excessive nature—and thus ultimately their inferiority. These beliefs

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup>Koren, Sharon Faye. "The Menstruant as 'Other' in Medieval Judaism and Christianity." *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues*, vol. 17, 2009, pp. 33–59. *EBSCOhost*, https://doiorg.libproxy.uncg.edu/10.2979/NAS.2009.-.17.33.

about Jewish male menstruation were not mutually exclusive, and it wasn't uncommon for multiple reasons to be simultaneously attributed to this occurrence. Additionally, while the circulation of this belief worked to feminize Jews, many notions of Jewish male menstruation were not actually about these men having a menstrual period in the same sense as women, but rather it was believed that they suffered from anal bleeding instead.<sup>113</sup> Either way, whether menstruation or anal bleeding, these myths worked to naturalize Jewish inferiority. Kaplan connects these various supposed origins of Jewish male menstruation as such: "...religious ideas conjure a chimerical Jewish difference that is articulated in terms of cultural and 'biological' phenomena, which in turn is explained in theological terms. This construction functions both as a projection onto and a lens for reading Jewish bodies as rendered inferior through the punishment and its attendant shame" (113).<sup>114</sup> In other words, the Jewish body became the locus, and in many ways *the reconciliation*, of numerous rhetorics of embodiment, especially those of religion and science. I'd like to amend Kaplan's statement by underscoring the idea that blood was the conduit through which these rhetorics were connected.

In her discussion of Jewish male menstruation, Kaplan also observes that "Theology inflects and promotes the importance of blood across a range of discourses in the culture of medieval Europe. Among them arises an association of blood with human difference in religious and medical texts that distinguishes male Jewish bodies less in terms of blood lineage...than in terms of a hereditary bleeding disease" (107). Kaplan's assertion here highlights the key role that

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> In "The Myth of Jewish Male Menses," Willis Johnson talks about the distinction between Jewish anal bleeding and Jewish male menstruation in depth; in fact, he argues that it wasn't until around the early modern period that the idea of Jewish male hemorrhoids/anal bleeding became feminized to represent an idea of Jewish male menstruation. <sup>114</sup> See also: "Th[e] nexus of ideas alleging a distinct hereditary physical infirmity functions to subordinate Jews to Christians. Its subsequent adoption by authors of texts on natural philosophy and medicine demonstrates the influence of theological concepts on the 'scientific' construction of the Jewish body" (Kaplan 110).

contemporary ideas about blood play in the notions of the origin of Jewish male menstruation. Both theology and science place blood as a focal point of their epistemologies—blood is given, in each of these respective fields, a position of power, and for both it is the site of both life and death. So, for the origins of Jewish male menstruation to point simultaneously to religious and medical implications of Jewish inferiority is significant, because in doing so it indicts the Jew of having a heritage of guilt, which is inescapable, not only because of their religion, but also because of their biological lineage. In other words, even if a Jew were to convert to Christianity and thus cleanse himself of the perpetual Jewish guilt, or the metaphorical blood on his hands, he would not be able to remove Jewish blood from his veins, which will continue to indict him, even after his conversion. This idea also aligns with the notion of inherited guilt that I explored in my blood libel section.

To advance this argument, it is key to note that blood, both religiously and biologically, makes the Jew unclean—except when offered as an atoning sacrifice by a priest on a consecrated altar. Many of the Levitical laws of Torah underscore the polluting nature of blood, both human and animal, and urge the believer to avoid touching and ingesting blood. In both Christian and Jewish practice, menstrual blood is also seen as unclean, and the Mosaic repeatedly warns against the moral dangers of having sex with a menstruating woman. However, although each religion agreed in theory that this practice was wrong, only the Jewish community seemed to uphold this belief in everyday practice. In fact, Koren contends that "Observance of menstrual laws thence became one of the defining criteria of Jewishness and an important element in Jewish anti-Christian polemic. Jews believed that they were pure and holy because they maintained Levitical purity laws, while Christians were impure and idolatrous because they engaged in sexual relations with menstruant women" (36). So, for Christians to circulate the

myth that Jewish men menstruate was to insult them doubly: first by feminizing Jewish men, and second by accusing them of embodying and then subverting the very practices which they believed made them holier and superior to their Christian counterparts. If Jewish culture viewed "menstruation as a metaphor for evil,"<sup>115</sup> then the accusation that both Jewish women and men menstruated was tantamount to labeling their entire race as evil incarnate.

While reviewing various primary literary works for this section, I was struck by the fact that I could not find any references to the myth of Jewish male menses in these particular texts. Upon further research,<sup>116</sup> I learned that much of this myth originated in Christian polemical texts, rather than literary sources, and that notions of Jewish male menstruation were often closely linked with ideas about ritual murder. In fact, it was a commonly held belief that Jews sought out Christians to kill them and use their blood to cure their own tainted blood and to stop male menstruation. With that in mind, it's useful to revisit Chaucer's "The Prioress' Tale," which seeks to fictionalize one of the most famous ritual murders of the time: that of Hugh of Lincoln. However, rather than using this text to argue that Jewish men menstruated, I will use it to argue that, according to Catholic theology, the Virgin Mary *did not menstruate*. So, why is this significant?

As David Biale notes in *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of Symbol Between Christians and Jews*, Jewish polemics, especially the Zohar, refuted the Christian's claim to Christ's divinity by contending that Mary conceived Jesus while she was menstruating. This claim works to both undermine the divinity of Christ and pollute his sanctity. In other words, if Christ were born of a woman who menstruated, then his conception was not pure and sinless, but indeed very

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> (Koren 34)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> Articles by both Willis Johnson and Irven M. Resnick were especially helpful in my research about the origins of the Jewish male menstruation myth.

human, and that in turn made Christ no different from any other human walking the earth. So, according to the Zohar, if Mary menstruated, then the foundation of Christianity was sullied and moot, because that means that the deification of Christ was insubstantive. So, for "The Prioress' Tale," a story dedicated to the Virgin Mary, to hold any authority both about its claims of Jewish blood libel and its claims of Christ's sacredness, then it must maintain that the Virgin Mary was the picture of purity, and thus it must inadvertently prove that she did not menstruate, as menstruation is seen as both a contaminating substance and as evidence of the sinful nature of humans. If done successfully, then the author could prove that Christian blood to cleanse themselves of pollution and rid themselves of their own bloody flux. So, while the tale never accuses Jews of male menstruation, which was commonly used as a way to subordinate Jewish men and naturalize their inferiority, it does use menstruation (albeit in a different manner) to place Christian hierarchically and biologically above Jews.

In the tale's prologue, the first description of Mary is that of "the white lylye flour/ which that the bar, and is a mayde alway" (ll. 461-2). This portrait of Mary underscores not only her moral purity, but also largely her *sexual purity*. Later in the prologue, Mary is referred to as "mooder Mayde" and "mayde Mooder," a title which seems to be contradictory, but in fact underscores the purity/sinlessness of Jesus' conception (1. 467). As the prologue continues, Mary's virtue and goodness and purity are repeatedly cited. All of these descriptions of Mary work to refute the Jewish polemical claim of Christian impurity as it pertains to the taint of menstruation. Then, later in the tale, the innocence of the Virgin Mary is tied to the innocence of the child martyr, who "nevere, flesshly, wommen they ne knewe" (l. 585). Both Mary and this child are innocent, not only because of their innate goodness, but also because of their sexual

purity. This seems to be a central focus of the tale. As I noted in my blood libel section of this chapter, the child is repeatedly described as "litel" and "innocent," while the Jews are persistently called "cursed." Blood permeates the descriptions of both the Jews and the Christians. For the Virgin Mary and the child martyr alike, they are innocent for their lack of blood—in that neither has come into contact with the pollution of menstrual or hymenal blood. However, the Jews are cursed by blood—the pure Christian blood which they continue to shed. Essentially, these juxtaposed descriptions work to refute the Jewish polemic about polluted Christian blood through the Virgin Mary, while also bolstering contemporary claims about Jewish blood libel. Here, again, we see blood as the pivot point that allows seeming contradictions to coexist.

While a number of Christian polemical texts, including historical accounts and scientific treatises, repeatedly and directly argue that Jewish men menstruated, it is very difficult to locate any specific instances of this in medieval or early modern literary texts. The seeming absence of Jewish male menstruation in these literary works begs the question about the pervasiveness and/or the believability in the social mind of the myth of Jewish male menstruation altogether. However, despite these incongruencies, an examination of a literary text that inadvertently discusses the menstruation of the Christian Virgin Mary has a similar effect as the myth of Jewish menstruation itself—it creates and then naturalizes a social hierarchy through blood.

## A Pound of Flesh: Circumcision

As I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, to the early modern Christian, circumcision is the threat of both physical and spiritual harm. Both James Shapiro<sup>117</sup> and Janet

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>117</sup> See chapter IV, "The Pound of Flesh," of Shakespeare and the Jews

Adelman<sup>118</sup> discuss the implied threat of circumcision in *The Merchant of Venice* at length in their respective publications; in fact, each devotes an entire chapter of their books on Shakespearean Jewishness to this particular topic. Their scholarly focus on circumcision both elucidates and reflects the early modern obsession with this rite. With that in mind, for this section I'll argue that early modern England was so fascinated with circumcision for these reasons: First, it was a permanent physical marker of the Jewish difference, one which could not be hidden or removed, even if a Jew converted to Christianity; secondly, it was a mark of the effeminization of the Jew, as circumcision was often equated with castration during this period. For Jews, whose heritage often did not mark them physically from Christians, circumcision stood as one more tangible method of identifying this marginalized group (the men, that is). However, even this was not without complications, as this was a mark not widely seen by the public and as circumcision did not prevent conversion, as Jew-turned-Christian Paul discusses at length in the New Testament. Even still, despite its contentions, of all of the types of Jewish blood, the seemingly small amount of blood drawn by the act of circumcision led to one of the most significant marks of difference. While myths of blood libel and male menstruation were often sensationalized, and rarely based in fact, circumcision was a regular, authenticated Jewish practice that undeniably marked, both physically and socially, Jewish men as different from Christians.

Throughout *The Jew of Malta*, circumcision is used as a physical signifier of both a spiritual and a cultural variation. In act 2, scene 3, Barabas delineates himself from the two Christian officers in this presence with this description: "these swine-eating Christians—/ Unchosen nation, never circumcised" (ll. 7-8). His less-than-flattering description of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> See chapter four, "Incising Antonio: The Jew Within" of *Blood Relations: Christian and Jew in The Merchant of Venice* 

Christians marks their difference from Jews in several ways, all of which are related in some way to a difference of blood: their cultural practices, their heritage, their physical bodies and spiritual rites. With this remark, Barabas turns the self-same reasons for despising Jews on their head by insulting the Christians. For one, Barabas sees the Christians as unclean because they eat porka practice which is expressly forbidden in Leviticus, where a number of dietary stipulations are laid out, including the handling and consumption of blood. For the Jew, Christians are the ones who eat and drink blood, both in their everyday food and in their consumption of the Eucharist. The Christian accusation that Jews drink Christian blood is ironic because it accuses the Jew of doing that which is most abhorrent to him—consuming that which will pollute, rather than cleanse, him.<sup>119</sup> Again, like much of the lore surrounding blood libel, we see Christian belief superimposed on alleged Jewish practice. The second blood difference that Barabas notes is the Christians' unsavory lineage as members of an "unchosen nation," and this again turns Christian contentions about Jewish inferiority on its head. While medieval and early modern Christians argued that Jews were a nationless tribe, and thus perpetually aliens in whatever space they inhabited, Barabas disparages Christians for not belonging to the nation expressly set apart by God. Lastly, Barabas notes a difference of blood marked by the Jewish body and the spiritual rites connected to it: circumcision. To Barabas, to be uncircumcised is, paradoxically, to be less than; in other words, circumcision is a mark of Jewish superiority, and this once again disputes Christian polemics. Ultimately, Barabas employs a number of bodily rhetorics to mark differences—social, religious, and biological. However, all of these rhetorics are connected by the same vein: blood. As I've argued and will continue to argue, blood is the nexus at which competing rhetorics of otherness converge.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>119</sup> See Biale, chapter 3: "Historians have long noticed the curious fact that the medieval blood libel is an accusation against the Jews for doing what is most abhorrent according to Jewish law" (82).

Later, in the same scene, Barabas uses the mark of circumcision to bind him to another character of the play, his Moorish slave Ithamore. While Ithamore is not a Jew like Barabas, he is something other than Christian, which in Barabas' eyes makes him an ally. However, while Barabas' earlier mention of circumcision marks him as superior to Christian and sets him apart from his peers, here he uses it to bind him to another, and not in superiority, but rather in infamy: "Make account of me/ As of thy fellow; we are villains both./ Both circumcised, we hate Christians both" (2.3.213-15). Here, like his earlier remarks, Barabas is using blood to separate himself from Christians, but as I mentioned, he is also using it in this instance to connect him to another who is also separated from Christians: Ithamore, the Moor. And this connection, which he creates through circumcision and the social otherness that this rite demarcates will be used to incite more blood: the violent blood loss of the Christians that he has in his sights. Thus, Barabas and Ithamore are alike in their circumcised bodies and in their villainy.

All of the texts I've discussed thus far use blood in distinct and varied ways: to create, sustain, and/or undermine difference in various contexts. For example, as I have discussed in this section, Barabas uses the blood of circumcision throughout the play as a mark of distinction—at times one of privilege, and in others one of iniquity. In both cases, Barabas adjusts the reading of his body to be appropriate for the circumstance at hand (much in the same way that Richard III uses his own disability). His maneuvering of bodily rhetoric, especially as it relates to Jewish blood and the blood of circumcision in particular, demonstrates the fluid, and often contradictory, nature of blood symbolism as it relates to embodied otherness. Much like Barabas's rhetorical maneuvers, the meanings of circumcision and Jewish blood are equally unstable in *The Merchant of Venice*. However, while the former reestablishes the meaning of

circumcision as is needed for Barabas' own personal gain, the latter relocates circumcision on the Christian and Jewish bodies in the play.

The rite of circumcision is to the Christian a threat of conversion, and this threat seeps through the plot of The Merchant of Venice. Although Shylock makes clear that he intends to cut a pound of flesh around Antonio's heart, there is a continued underlying threat that this incision will take place instead on Antonio's penis, and this heart/penis conflation works to underscore the inherent fear of forced conversion (from Christianity to Judaism, and vice versa) seen throughout the play; in other words, if Shylock cuts Antonio's heart, he brands Antonio's soul as Jewish, and if he cuts his penis, he marks Antonio's body as Jewish—either way, the result is social condemnation and spiritual damnation. Along with myths about ritual murder, there was also a common fear that Jews would forcibly circumcise Christians; in the premodern mind, circumcision and ritual murder were two rituals inextricably tied to one another as well as to the Jewish identity. So, when Shylock makes a deal with Antonio to cut an unspecified pound of his flesh, the unspoken, but heavily implied, agreement here is for Shylock to circumcise, and thus convert, Antonio if he defaults on his loan; additionally, there is the further implied threat that Shylock wishes to take Antonio's life in the process—thus consigning him to become a Jew for all eternity. As Shapiro notes "in the late sixteenth century the word *flesh* was consistently used, especially in the Bible, in place of *penis*" (122, emphasis original). Thus, Shylock's contract presents Antonio with a dual threat: that of physical harm and spiritual damnation, or as Shapiro contends: "Circumcision, then, was an extraordinarily powerful signifier, one that not only touched on issues of identity that ranged from the sexual to the theological but, often enough, on the intersection of the two. The threat of Shylock's cut was complex, resonant, and unusually terrifying" (120-1). Furthermore, Shapiro argues that the implication of Antonio's impending

circumcision lingers under the surface throughout the play, even after Shylock announces that he intends to cut out the flesh around Antonio's heart and not his penis, or as Shapiro puts it: "Shylock will cut his Christian adversary in that part of the body where the Christians believe themselves to be truly circumcised: the heart" (127). Shapiro draws from Paul's letter to the Romans to make this connection, where Paul discusses the "circumcision of the heart."<sup>120</sup> So, when Shylock's vague intentions to cut some unnamed "pound of flesh" become more clearly anatomized as the pound of flesh surrounding his heart, rather than a vague reference to his penis, the meaning remains the same to the early modern reader—Shylock intends to both harm and *convert* Antonio.<sup>121</sup> However, in a twist of fate, it is Shylock who is forced to convert to Christianity for his treatment of Antonio, which not only works as a cruel form of punishment, but also as a way of reorganizing the legal code to both demarcate and enforce racialized categories—a maneuver that I will discuss in more depth in my race section of this chapter.

The ubiquitous threat of harm, both physical and spiritual, underscores each of Shylock and Antonio's interactions. For example, when Antonio approaches Shylock to discuss the terms of his loan, Shylock remarks to himself that he hates Antonio, not only because he is a Christian, but also because Antonio undercuts his business and is a Christian who openly berates Jews. These secretive declarations alert the audience, but not the characters, that the impending agreement Shylock makes with Antonio is about blood: the blood of Shylock's "sacred nation" and "tribe," which has been besmirched by Antonio, as well as the blood which Shylock plans to claim from this anti-semite in the name of revenge (1.3.42-46). And underscoring both the blood

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>120</sup> See Romans 2:29

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> See also: "Simultaneously a wound in the genitals and nearest the heart, the incision that Shylock would make thus condenses circumcision with crucifixion, as in the ritual murders that sometimes allegedly combined the two. He thus offers economically to reenact, now, in full view of the audience, both the threat of adherence to the fleshly law and the crime that confirmed Jewish guilt—and Jewish difference—in perpetuity" (Adelman 111).

of the Jewish race and the blood of revenge is the blood of circumcision—the means through which Shylock intends to have his just desserts—by transforming Antonio into the very thing that he hates the most. When Shylock declares the stipulations of the loan, "an equal pound/ of your fair flesh," Antonio agrees readily, remarking that "The Hebrew will turn Christian; he grows kind" (1.3.142-3, 171). Here, we see that while Shylock's proposal drips with an underlying threat of conversion to Judaism, Antonio misinterprets this agreement as a sign of kindness and thus foresees Shylock's conversion to Christianity. Ultimately, conversion is an underlying threat—or hope for some—for both Christians and Jews alike throughout the play, and this thematic continuance is achieved through the repeated reference of blood in its various interpretations: that of lineage, religion, and violence.

While circumcision separated Jews from Gentiles, it also created a delineation within the Jewish culture itself. Circumcision was something which separated Jewish men from women while the men were physically, and permanently marked as Jews, the women were not. This created a number of conflicting ideas about gender and conversion between Jews and Christians. From the Jewish perspective, circumcision made Jewish males the spiritual superior of their group; for Christians, circumcision marked Jewish men as less than Christian men—as a feminized inferior since circumcision was often equated to castration. Additionally, circumcision, or rather the lack thereof made conversion easier for Jewish women. Ultimately, the practice of circumcision not only complicated ideas of race, but also those of gender, when it came to Jews.

The female Jews in both of these plays highlight this conundrum within the Jewish identity debate. If Jewishness is a culturally applied label, then one can convert from Judaism to Christianity. However, if Jewishness has biological tenets, then one can never fully convert. This

is more easily believed for the Jewish male, whose circumcision permanently and physically marks him as Jewish. However, the Jewish daughters of the play complicate this, and their conversions bring the rhetorics of Jewish race versus religion to the forefront by asking if one can ever fully convert and if this conversion is complicated by gender. Adelman contends that this complication of conversion, which is exacerbated by notions of gender, highlights the incongruencies between Judaism as a religion and a race: "Some have read the distinction between Shylock's immutable Jewishness and Jessica's apparent convertability [sic] (vexed as it is) as a sign of the tension between the officially universalizing doctrines of Christianity and the emerging discourses of race" ("Her Father's Blood," 13). Most markedly, it is key to note that both of these rhetorics of race and religion (while seemingly in opposition to one another) employ blood symbolism to make their argument. In other words, blood becomes the standard by which one is both religiously and racially denoted and it stands as the pivot point for both to coexist.

Jessica's conversion in *Merchant* in particular brings this debate to its head. In act 2, scene 3, when called a "most beautiful / page, most sweet Jew,"<sup>122</sup> by Lancelet, Jessica declares:

But though I am a daughter to his blood

I am not to his manners. O Lorenzo,

If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife—

Become a Christian and thy loving wife.  $(2.3.17-20)^{123}$ 

The implicit meaning of Jessica's statement here is that her Judaism is founded on culture, not biology. In other words, while her biological/blood connection to her Jewish father cannot be

<sup>122 (2.3.10-11)</sup> 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> This statement, in lines 19 and 20, echoes Paul's in Ephesians 2:14-16 about Christ's sacrifice "breaking down the wall of hostility" dividing Jews from Gentiles.

denied, her "manners" (i.e. her cultural and social actions) align her more closely with Christians<sup>124</sup>; in addition, her marriage—a social rite of passage (and one that will draw another sort of blood upon its consummation)-will cement her identity as a Christian. To Jessica, cultural assimilation supersedes biological connection. However, her own father sees Jewish identity as something embedded more deeply within one's identity. Upon learning of his daughter's deceit, Shylock repeatedly calls Jessica his "own flesh and blood" (3.1.29-31). At these remarks, Salerio quickly swoops in to defend Jessica and to distance her from Shylock. Here, he compares Shylock's flesh to "Jet" and Jessica's to "ivory," and Shylock's blood to "red wine" and Jessica's to "Rhenish" (3.1.32-34). Salerio's comparison between the color of both their skin and their blood here is an interesting one, because he employs the very same biological/racial rhetoric as Shylock, but he uses it to separate father from daughter rather than join them together; this is a rhetorical shift that I will discuss in more depth in the race section of this chapter. While this biological connection, between father and daughter, is something to be overcome and forgotten by Jessica, it is the core of their relationship in Shylock's eyes. The blood which connects people is the most sacred type of blood—it is the blood of family, it is the blood of the Jew. So, again for Jessica, her Jewish identity is tied up in cultural practice—it is a religion which she can easily leave behind for another; for Shylock, Jewishness is something which is inescapable and undeniable—it is a very part of our flesh and blood, our biology—it is a race.

Ultimately, circumcision invokes a type of bloody rhetoric that complicates the Jewish identity along social, racial, and gender lines. The rite of circumcision straddles the line between

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>124</sup> See also: "Jessica herself is represented as resisting assimilation both to the version of Jewishness Shylock represents and to Jewishness generally. To further the distinction she courts, she attempts to sift ethical or cultural Jewishness from genealogical Jewishness. She claims that the cultural breach between herself and Shylock defines her own identity and therefore makes genealogy less relevant..." (Bovilsky 53).

a cultural rite/religious practice and a physical marker of difference; it, like much of the beliefs surrounding Jewish blood, is murky and open to interpretation.

## **Red Wine and Rhenish: Racialization Through Blood**

The application of the term *race* to the early modern period is something which numerous scholars have debated. While some may argue that race is an anachronistic concept for this period, I disagree; to clarify, by this I mean that while the term *race* itself may not have been used in the same way in the premodern world, the concept of race (i.e. somatic traits particular to a certain set of people) as we know it today was being developed and defined at this point in history. In fact, I will contend that the concept of race is something that is being more clearly defined and more finitely attached to physicality at this *very* moment in history; in other words, it is during the late medieval and early modern periods that the notion of race as we know it today is first taking form. In addition, my conception of race during this time is closely aligned with many of Geraldine Heng's articulations on this topic, and I'd like to use her own words, from her article "Jews, Saracens, 'Black Men', Tartars: England in a World of Racial Difference" to define the conceptualization of early modern race upon which I will be largely basing this section of this chapter:

Were we to apply a fundamental working hypothesis of race as *differences that are conceptualized in a strategically invoked essentialism as absolute and fundamental*, and that are *used to distribute powers and positions differentially to human groups* in an historical period, we see that in medieval England the institution of the Jewish badge, the expulsion order and the legal execution of nineteen Jews all bear witness to the consolidation of a community of Christian English – otherwise internally fragmented and ranged along numerous divides – through the exercise of legislative and juridical violence

against a human group that has, on these historical occasions, spectacularly entered into race. (253-4, emphasis original)

While Heng's conceptualization of race here centers around social codes of difference applied to a particular group, I want to focus in particular on *physical* differences, especially as they pertain to *blood*, when it comes to the racialization of late medieval and early modern English Jews. In this sense, my work on race aligns, to some degree, with Jean Feerick's arguments about race: "If critics of race have tended to identify skin colour as the dominant marker of difference, I propose that its role in either blocking or enabling access to social powers should be seen as in relation, and even as subordinate, to the symbolics of blood that express this period's cosmology" (13).<sup>125</sup> While Feerick's overall analysis of early modern race does not align with my chapter's as closely as Heng's, I do find Feerick's argument that blood is the locus which "naturalizes" social standing by marking it as physical difference, particularly apt to my discussion of Jewishness as a race, whose differences, I will emphasize, are rooted in both cultural and scientific concepts of blood (6). As such, the distinctions in the quality of blood are manifested through physical differences (i.e. skin color, etc.). Ultimately, I want to use this section, and this chapter as a whole, to argue that the long-established social marginalization of Jews in England begins to become medicalized (and by this I mean described in biological terms) in the late medieval and early modern periods; furthermore, this medicalization of social rank can only be established through finding physical difference, real or imagined, between English Jews and Christians—and this is where blood plays a crucial role.

Before I begin my analysis of Jewish blood and race in literature, we must first consider all of the ways in which one can define race; it is especially apropos to do so since the definition

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> Found in the introduction to Feerick's Strangers in Blood: Relocating Race in the Renaissance

of race was something that was being negotiated in the early modern period. While our concepts of race today are largely grounded in ideas of biology, lineage, physical location, and physical difference,<sup>126</sup> this is an idea that was just beginning to form in the premodern world. As notions of race were being defined, so were ideas of nationhood and collective identity in England; in fact, I'd argue that the development of one contributed to the advancement of the other, and vice versa. In a time when the English were increasingly defining their identity as one tied to nationhood, the Jews, who were perpetually nationless, presented a problem, or as Shapiro puts it, "the Jews confound and deconstruct neat formulations about racial and national identity" (170).<sup>127</sup> In addition, the English Jews, who in large part physically resemble English Christians, do not fit neatly into definitions of race as physical difference, especially as it pertains to skin color. And, I argue that it is in this confoundment-both of the lack of nationality and of somatic markers—where Jewish inferiority finds itself naturalized and medicalized through beliefs surrounding Jewish blood.<sup>128</sup> And, most importantly, all of these complex beliefs about blood stem back to the Jewish connection to the crucifixion of Christ: beliefs about blood libel, host desecration, and Jewish male menstruation are all tied to Christ's death, and they all implicate through blood those of the Jewish race, both past and present.

As I have argued previously, it is through the beliefs about Jewish male menstruation especially, that we begin to see a connection between theological and scientific beliefs about blood, race, and the Jewish difference; in other words, the mythologized menstruation (whether it

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>126</sup> I'd like to note here, that while modern society tends to foreground race as a biological/scientific concept, it is still very much largely rooted in social notions of difference as well– just like in the early modern period.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> See also: "Renaissance plays situated the Jew in foreign worlds, not only to reproduce the historical alienation of Jews from England but also to enhance the otherness of the figure" (Bartels 5).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> Kaplan expresses a similar idea when she argues that early modern society used theological notions about the Jewish blood curse (i.e. through Christ, and the mark of Cain) as a way to naturalize the myth of Jewish menstruation.

be anal bleeding, bloody flux, etc) of Jewish men located a difference in the Jewish body that was both biological and social-this connection becomes more fully realized through the gradual emergence of the notion of Jews as a race of their own.<sup>129</sup> My key argument in this section is that because Jews are so physically similar to their Anglo-Saxon Christian counterparts, their ability to disguise themselves (and Barabas in The Jew of Malta uses this transformative ability to his nefarious advantage) creates anxiety within the English Christian mind, and this fear prompts a need for a more readily identifiable somatic difference—thus the gradual introduction of racial rhetoric surrounding the Jews of this time, or as Heng puts it, "race is a response to ambiguity" ("The Invention" (pt. 2), 338). This social need for readily discernible corporeal difference is reflected in the depiction of Jewish characters in early modern literature, whose physical attributes are repeatedly remarked upon within the plays, and often highlighted (and even exaggerated) on the stage. Through an analysis of The Merchant of Venice and The Jew of *Malta*, I will argue that we begin to see specific somatic attributes (e.g. larger noses, physical stench, horn-like growths, etc.) emphasized as cordons of Jewishness. I will also argue that we can locate ideas of Jewish lineage, and the Jewish bloodline, as key emblems of Jewish racial difference in these plays. While my earlier section on circumcision also discussed these two plays, this section will focus specifically on the two works' racialized blood symbolism; I have included the same two plays in two different sections to demonstrate the nonlinear and interconnected nature of the racialization of Jews, which gradually relocates its focus from religious to somatic difference, and I see circumcision largely as the bridge between these two rhetorics of embodiment. Ultimately, this section seeks to elucidate the medicalization of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>129</sup> This is not to say that one belief occurred chronologically before the other, as I believe various epistemologies about Jewish, race, blood, and the body as a whole, frequently happened concurrently.

Jewish social identity through the label of race, all of which is accomplished through the rhetoric of blood.

While *The Merchant of Venice* most centrally locates the dissimilitude between Christians and Jews in the interior-namely the blood-The Jew of Malta focuses more laboriously on the exterior disparities between the two groups; either way, both rhetorical moves work to racialize Jews through somatic means. During this time period, it can be argued that one of the main reasons which Jews caused Christians so much anxiety is because they were not easily physically distinguishable from Christians. Thus, we see literary representations of Jewish characters begin to more commonly display exaggerated physical features, which in turn make them more somatically identifiable as members of a group outside of Christians. Within *The Jew* of Malta, these physical markers are repeatedly noted both by Barabas himself and by his Christian counterparts. Some of these key corporeal traits include large noses, circumcision, and skin coloring. While Barabas is noted to have these distinctive Jewish qualities, his character repeatedly underscores the cultural anxiety which Jewish blendability caused in medieval and early modern Christian audiences through his continued use of disguise. In other words, Barabas's chameleon-like personality, which enables him to act, speak, and even look, in ways that accommodate his motives, intimates the Jews' inherent threat to Christians-they can look like Christians, they can act like Christians, and they can even convert and then worship like Christians...so then what makes Jews so different from Christians?

This is where physical difference becomes key. Certainly, Barabas can disguise himself for a time, and even convincingly portray himself as a Frenchman and several other aliases, but his somatic markers as Jew will always betray him. In other words, even if he can straddle numerous cultural lines, he is only of one race—the Jewish race, and he can never permanently

or irrevocably change that, no matter how convincing his disguise may be. However, just as Barabas complicates the notions of a fixed identity through his various disguises, he also complicates the ideas of race in this play; he does so by consistently intermixing social/cultural differences with biological disparities, effectively making the two inextricably linked. For instance, one of the key ways that Barabas repeatedly distinguishes himself from his Christian counterparts is by citing his own circumcision (as well as that of the presumably Islamic Ithamore).<sup>130</sup> While this is a physical mark that sets the Jew apart from the Christian, it is one which is rooted in cultural practice. However, by repeatedly citing Hebrew tribes and their origins within the same breath as his mentions of circumcision, he ties the religious with the racial, the social with the biological. Additionally, just somatic traits like large noses and circumcision are presented as irrefutable traits of the Jew, so are personality characteristics such as greed and thriftiness. If Jews are a race in this play (and I, of course, argue that they are), then they not only inherit distinct somatic qualities, but also distinguishable personality traits as well.

Barabas not only intertwines personality with biology when he speaks of Jews, but Christians as well. For example, in response to a knight who scorns Barabas for his sin of greed, Barabas responds:

Some Jews are wicked, as all Christians are;

But say the tribe that I descended of

Were all in general cast away for sin,

Shall I be tried by their transgression? (1.2.113-116)

Here, Barabas reverses and subverts the knight's racist commentary on Jewish greed by ascribing sinfulness to all of Christian kind but only some of those who are Jewish. In other words, while

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>130</sup> See especially 2.3 of *The Jew of Malta* 

the knight makes broad assumptions about the entire Jewish race, ascribing traits to the group as a whole, Barabas in turn individualizes Jews and points out that some are evil, but some are not—and in the same breath, he also racializes Christians as an entirely wicked breed. This reframes the racism that the knight invokes by turning his disdain for the Jews onto Christians instead. Here, Barabas also questions the connection between biological and social inheritance: if he is descended from sinners, must he be punished for their sins? Is sin passed down from generation to generation? Barabas argues that this might be the case for some Jews, and is certainly the case for all Christians, and thus contradicts himself, or rather points out the contradictory nature of the Christian characters' racial prejudice. In this brief quip, Barabas muddies the knight's claim to the congenital guilt that I discussed earlier in this chapter. However, as I pointed out earlier, he also repeatedly ascribes personality traits to his own Jewish race, and thus demonstrates both his knowledge of the slippery slope of contemporary racial rhetorics as well as his ability to manipulate this rhetoric to fit his momentary needs. Thus, Barabas' oscillating racial rhetoric, which at some turns argues against inherited personality traits and at others advocates for them, all while connecting personality to physical appearance, underscores the embryonic and nebulous notions of race at this time, which are just beginning to be defined not only through social qualifiers but somatic difference as well. Barabas, the man of many faces and aliases, is all too aware of the connection between physical appearance and social identity, and he uses this knowledge to his benefit as much as he can.

While *The Jew of Malta* is patently aware of the connection between physical appearance and social perception, *The Merchant of Venice* seeks more readily to locate this connection between physical and social—in blood. For my analysis of *The Merchant of Venice*, I want to focus on two key scenes in particular: Shylock's famous monologue in act 3, scene 1, along with

the trial scene in act 4, scene 1. In each of these scenes, the rhetoric of racialized somatic difference and connection is both incited and refuted by Portia and Shylock. While Shylock evokes his corporeality, especially his bleeding body, as a demonstration of his physical, human connection to Christians in 3.1, Portia then later uses Antonio's blood and the rhetoric of citizenship to show the disparity between the Jews and the Christians of Venice in 4.1. In addition, the question of racial difference here, and throughout the play, is encapsulated in cultural beliefs about blood. Both Morocco and Shylock invoke their blood, especially its red color, as a signal of their racial similarity to Christian Europeans—in other words, while their skin may be black, their blood is the same color of red as even the most admirable, pure Christian. Blood, in each of these scenes, and throughout the play, is invoked as a signifier of difference *or* similarity, because it is seen as an irrefutable and stable signifier of self; however, as I repeatedly contend throughout my dissertation—blood is anything but stable. Ultimately, all of the cultural beliefs about Jewish difference, both racial and religious, become subsumed in the trial scene of the play.

First, I'd like to revisit 3.1 and look at Shylock's monologue. In this scene, Shylock learns of his daughter Jessica's betrayal. Upon this discovery, he underscores the depth of her disloyalty by inciting their biological connection repeatedly: "My own flesh and blood to rebel!" (3.1.29). Here, their familial connection is illustrated by their *physical* connection—flesh and blood. However, upon hearing these heated invocations, Salerio retorts, as I have noted before, "There is more difference between thy flesh and hers/ than between jet and ivory; more between your bloods than/ there is between red wine and Rhenish" (3.1.32-34). Here, Salerio invokes the difference of color as synonymous with the difference of moral character: dark to light. Color of skin at this time was often associated with one's inward constitution, so Shylock's Jewishness,

and thus his association with the Devil and evil, marks both his body and his soul as black.<sup>131</sup> In addition, when Salerio imagines the difference in Jessica's and Shylock's blood color, he is working to create a disjunction in the biological connection that Shylock has just invoked.<sup>132</sup> Not only, according to Salerio, is Jessica's exterior dissimilar to her father's, so is her interior, and thus her soul. Already, we are seeing Shylock's and Jessica's impending religious differences (as she is on the cusp of converting to Christianity) racialized. While they are connected biologically, they are disparate morally, and this polarity is translated by Salerio as the physical attributes of skin and *blood* color; and it is precarious rhetorical maneuvering like this, facilitated through the nebulous vocabulary of blood, which allows Jewishness to vacillate between a social and a physical delineation.

From here, the conversation between Shylock and Salerio quickly shifts to a discussion about Antonio. When Salerio asks Shylock why he desires a literal, messy, bloody pound of Antonio's flesh, Shylock begins his famous monologue, in which he describes the origin of his hatred for Antonio and his desire for revenge: Antonio has mocked and scorned him because of his Jewishness. Thus, through his speech about Jewish corporality, Shylock is really examining the Jewish heart, which is just as likely to be hurt by harsh words as the Christian's. If Salerio uses physical/exterior difference to mark spiritual inferiority, Shylock uses exterior similitude to denote the incorporeal connection between Jews and Christians—and both use the rhetoric of blood to do so.

In his monologue, Shylock incites various examples of corporeality to evoke sympathy for his cause and to demonstrate the reason for his anger. While Antonio continues to disparage

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> See also Kim Hall's "Othello and the Problem of Blackness"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>132</sup> The difference in their color of blood also leads to the question about difference in skin color: would their physical appearance have differed if the makeup of their blood did? And, how would this difference be represented on stage?

Shylock because he is a Jew, Shylock argues that his body, and ultimately his soul, feels the same pain as a Christian. Shylock begins this comparison with a catalog of the Jew's body parts: eyes, hands, organs, and dimensions; however, he then moves towards a list of interior qualities and cognitive perceptions: senses, affections, passions (3.1.49-50). This shift from the exterior to the interior helps Shylock's move the focus of his speech to blood: the locus where the exterior and interior converge. More specifically, when Shylock asks, "If you prick us do we not bleed?" he is asking Salerio to acknowledge that both the interior (i.e. blood) and exterior (i.e. flesh/skin) form of the Jew matches that of the Christian (3.1.53-54). In other words, our bodies respond in the same way, with the same blood. While Salerio argues that blood is the racial point of difference between the Jew and Christian, which denotes both their physical and spiritual divergence from one another, Shylock uses this same image to illustrate their similarity.

In both the interaction between Shylock and Salerio in 3.1, and the legal debate between Shylock and Portia in 4.1, blood is invoked to cite both variation and connection between Jews and Christians.<sup>133</sup> The fact that both sides of these opposing social groups can use the same material to make such incompatible claims demonstrates the unstable nature of blood as a marker of self—one whose instability (as well as its fluidity) allows various groups to use blood rhetoric as a means to establish whatever claims they wish about whatever group they wish. Because beliefs about blood at this time were certainly unstable, they were also conveniently malleable.

Shortly after he calls for the humanization of Jews in 3.1, Shylock demands justice and equity in 4.1. However, what he does not realize is that the law works differently for different groups of people, and that as a Jew, he is not guaranteed justice, especially if that justice

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>133</sup> See also: "Shylock's speech stresses the common physical humanity of both Jews and gentiles: blood will flow from both bodies when pricked...But Portia knows that this is far from accepted wisdom. She points out to Shylock that, although he can have his pound of *flesh*, he cannot possess Antonio's Christian *blood*, for that blood is essentially different from the fluid that flows in Shylock's Jewish veins" (Katz 460, emphasis original).

threatens a Christian. Time and again throughout this scene, Shylock is painted by other characters as an unfeeling, inhumane beast (these epithets recall the repeated descriptions of the "cruel" Jews and the "innocent" Christian child in "The Prioress's Tale"), and this name-calling serves to continually contrast the Jews' depravity with the Christians' purity (and vice versa). For example, in a spurt of anger, Graziano cries out, calling Shylock "a damned inexecrable dog" and states that Shylock's "desires/ Are wolvish, bloody, starved, and ravenous" (4.1.128-38). And yet, while these comments work to dehumanize Shylock and undermine his appeals for justice, they also highlight the racist and inhumane rhetoric of many of the Christian characters in the play. In fact, Graziano's nasty anti-semitic outbursts, like those of Salerio, Solanio, and even Antonio, reveal (some) Christians to be anything but "pure." Thus the play itself seems designed to question the moral superiority that such characters assert. Nevertheless, while Shylock tries, and fails, to convince his Christian counterparts that his desire is no different than their own, that is to see the law carried out and to get his promised due, the Christians in this scene repeatedly mark this desire as corrupt and evil by describing Shylock as something less than human; to them, Shylock's thirst for justice to tantamount to a thirst for blood (and here this bloodthirst marks him as monstrous, much like Richard III, whom I discussed in chapter 3). While the Christians in this scene persistently beg Shylock to show mercy, some are unwilling to do the same, and again this questions the humanity and generosity of the Christians in this play almost as much as it does that of the Jews.

Once Portia appears, disguised as Balthazar, she promises Shylock the justice which he so ardently desires. However, this is a justice that does not apply to him—both as a Jew and as a non-citizen of Venice. Here, again, we see the plight of the itinerant, nationless Jew whose identity, and ultimately his race, cannot be founded on claims to any sort of national ties.

However, it is interesting to note here that just as Shylock inhabits a liminal identity, without a nation to call his own, Venice itself, as a nation, stands in a similar indistinct space as a city-state<sup>134</sup>: where Venice is not exactly a state, not exactly a nation, Shylock is not exactly a citizen, but also not exactly an alien. To bolster Antonio's claim to protection as a Venetian citizen, Portia *also* hinges it upon a connection to Christianity, or as Portia contends:

if thou dost shed

One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods

are by the laws of Venice confiscate

Unto the state of Venice. (4.1.307-9, emphasis added)

Consequently, it is when Antonio's Venetian citizenship is combined with his Christian identity, that the law moves to protect him against the claims of Shylock, a Jew and therefore also automatically an alien. All of this points back to the racialization of religion—if one's identity cannot be tied to nationality, as Venice stands in a liminal space and as Jews themselves are nationless, then religion stands as the quintessential means of naturalizing difference and social marginalization.

Additionally, it is crucial to note that it is Antonio's Christian *blood* which Shylock has no claim to as a Jew.<sup>135</sup> While Portia has no qualms with forfeiting Antonio's flesh to Shylock, she cannot permit Shylock to obtain any of Antonio's blood. Yes, this distinction is in part due to the loophole that Portia has found in the contract between Shylock and Antonio; however, even

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>134</sup> This is not to say that Venice is not independently sovereign, but rather as a setting for a play, demonstrates liminality more so than other spaces like England, France, Spain, etc.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> See also: "That scene famously worries the signs of difference between Christian and Jew: Portia's opening question—'Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?'—comes in response to the Duke's asking her if she is 'acquainted with the difference / That holds this present question in the court' (4.1.169, 166-67), a formulation that exceeds its application to the legal dispute between Shylock and Antonio, turning the difference between them itself into the question in the court. And if at the end the Duke can happily reify 'the difference of our spirit' (4.1.363), he can do so I think exactly because Portia has reinstated the blood difference that subtends all other differences in the play" (Adelman 125).

without this legal maneuvering, Antonio's blood holds more legal weight, because it is in the blood where we find the quintessential difference between the Christians and the Jews—or so this play would have us believe, just as Salerio compares Shylock's besmirched Jewish blood to the clear and pure blood of his converted daughter. While Shylock's flesh may look disturbingly similar to that of his Christian counterparts in the play, his blood will always speak the truth about his inferiority. In other words, Shylock can have a pound of Antonio's *flesh*, but he cannot have a drop of his *blood*—for blood, not skin, is the locus of incompatibility and disparity for the Christians and the Jews. Ultimately, this scene ends with anything but justice for Shylock, who is forced not only to forfeit his belongings to the state of Venice, but also to convert to Christianity. While Shylock's quest for a pound of Antonio's flesh threatens to both harm and convert Antonio, this threat is turned onto Shylock in the end.

Both of these plays work to mark Jewishness not just as a social difference, but as a physical one as well, by defining Jews not just as a social/religious group but also as a race. The rhetorics of race employed in these plays combine physical characteristics with cultural stereotypes to create a racialized group, and all of this is done through the rhetoric of blood. For *The Jew of Malta*, Jewish racial inferiority is demarcated with undesirable physical characteristics; for *The Merchant of Venice*, racial subordination is accomplished through a difference in blood. What these plays demonstrate is that the blood is ultimately the source of difference, which is then manifested through varying somatic traits—blood becomes the locus of physical *and* spiritual worth. While these approaches to racialization differ, the result is the same: Jews are a race that is not only culturally, but more importantly biologically, inferior to Christians.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, beliefs surrounding Jews and blood during the medieval and early modern periods worked to marginalize Jews in a number of ways—by marking them as both physically and morally inferior. Race, both then and now, is a combination of social and scientific notions about what makes one group of people distinct from another. There is no one particular point in time, where we can point and say, "Look, that's when Jews become a race," but rather we should look to the discourse of blood as a map of this gradual progression, and that is what I sought to do through my literary analysis in this chapter. The exploration of blood libel and male menstruation myths show a burgeoning social inclination to naturalize Jewish difference, and ultimately Jewish inferiority. This then becomes more physically realized in Jewish circumcision, which stands as a visibly physical marker of Jewish social difference. From there, I traced the trajectory of the racialization of Jewishness, as something located both in the exterior and interior make-up of Jews. For the Jewish race, what began as something more solidly rooted in social prejudice, increasingly became more centered around biology and science. In order for this transition to take place, a central locus had to be found, and that was blood.

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