

Stages of Blood: Transformations and Interpretations in Early Modern Drama

By
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Abstract

My thesis investigates the transformation of blood both as a physical substance and as a substance portrayed on the stage. During the 16th and early 17th Century, the scientific community moved further from considering blood as a substance of humoral significance and closer to understanding blood and its function in the scientific circulatory system. Examining drama written and performed between 1587 – 1606, I demonstrate that early modern drama also shifted its perception and performance of blood when attached to bodies and objects.

Previously, literary scholars focus on blood's singular connection with religion, gender, or the body politic in various early modern plays, or have investigated blood's significance in particular places. In contrast, my study is concerned with the multi-faceted ways in which blood is signified and blood signifies varying character qualities and concerns. By also emphasizing the liminal space of the theatre, I reveal the ways in which the changing signification of blood in the theatrical space works in tandem with the scientific modifications happening outside it.

Keywords: blood, early modern drama, liminality, metonymy, metaphor, medicine (history of)

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Introduction

Blood was a substance of multifarious significance in medieval and early modern England. From the era of Galenic medicine and humoral theory to modern medicine, blood has been the substance of utmost importance and intrigue for determining a person's temperament, physical health, and psychological well-being. In religious discourse, blood's connection with Christ had particular theological significance. A woman's menstrual bleeding marked her as socially inferior to her masculine counterparts. In battle, a man's bloody wound could be considered honorable or socially-damaging, depending on its source and placement. Commonly, one's bloodline signified social status. Blood transgressed many boundaries of early modernity. Given its symbolic power, blood was displayed in various cultural artifacts, but nowhere more visibly and materially than in early modern plays.

Because of blood's multi-disciplinary signifying power, visual representations of blood in drama shape character action and demonstrate blood's continuous and enigmatic cultural importance on the stage. In Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Faustus's use of his own blood in signing his contract to Mephistopheles indeed serves as the damning act for his soul, and therefore may be the direct reason Christ's blood cannot save him at the play's close. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, the presence of Horatio's dead and bloody body on stage constantly reminds Hieronimo of his vengeful plans. Similarly, the presentation of Orlando's bloody handkerchief in *As You Like It* prompts Rosalind's return to her female persona and, ultimately leads to the play's comedic end. While visible only to *Macbeth's* audience and title character, Banquo's bleeding ghost triggers the downfall of Macbeth's rule over Scotland. When considered with one another, these cases put blood's religious, psychological, economic, political, social, medical, and

physical significance on display for early modern culture and urge audiences to consider blood's role outside of the theatrical space.

In addition to its diverse presentations on the stage, blood also underwent a scientific transformation in the early modern period. Writing about the shifting semantics of "blood," Roland Greene claims that "the transformation of ['blood'] after 1500 has to do with its gaining a material story, an account of what it does as matter—toward the end of the century this story will become a theory of circulation—to put against its symbolic power, a becoming physical or material" (111). Studying four literary and dramatic works, Greene argues that fictional media of literature and drama participated in the transformation of blood from a primarily symbolic substance to one significant for its bodily function.¹ Instead of blood "of legend, of Christian sacrifice, and of Galenism," charged with symbolic power, blood becomes important because of its physical circulation within the body (Greene 111).

It is the juxtaposition of blood's transformation both in early modern medicine and on the stage that will be the focus of my study. Theatrical blood presented these phases Greene describes of blood's medical transformation in a perceivably visible and material way. Because of the liminal nature of the theatre at the boundary of reality and fiction, these plays invite examination of how events on the stage relate to historical experiences and knowledge concerning blood. I seek to investigate how shifting representations of blood within the liminal theatrical space reflect or aid the process of blood being fully recognized for its medical and physical function within the body.

Ultimately, my study focuses on the changing manner in which blood was signified and signifies. I am most interested in the ways that changing dramatic presentations of blood link

¹ Greene chooses works from a wide span of time and from various places in Europe to emphasize the breadth of this transformation throughout the 16th Century. I will go into more specifics concerning Greene's argument later.

with or coincide with the shifting medical considerations of blood. I am also interested in the different methods in which blood functions within the liminal space of the theater, simultaneously real and physically present and yet participating in a fiction. In these presentations, blood is linked with objects, characters, and ideologies in various ways. In interpreting the roles these moments play in understanding the function of blood, I link them to Roman Jakobson's semiotic terms metonymy and metaphor. Although both are used as a means for figuratively connecting concepts, images, and objects, metonymy is marked by its contiguity and metaphor is marked by similarity. This manner of categorizing signals when characters overdetermine the symbolic to equate with the literal (as is demonstrated when characters treat objects as metonymy, as will be seen in *Doctor Faustus*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, and others), or when characters recognize the symbolic as separate from the literal (as is presented when characters perceive objects as metaphor, as is seen in *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, and others). Not only does a character's interpretation of blood as metonymy or metaphor shape the individual scene, but, as my study will show, it also influences the way the play unfolds and how characters and their dramatic fates can be perceived. My study categorizes these events as "highly visible moments." Coined by Alan Dessen, "highly visible moments" are, "moments [that] do not stand alone but rather grow out of or relate to other themes, motifs, and actions in their plays" (*Elizabethan Drama* 83). Dessen urges contemporary scholars to recognize the subtle lessons Elizabethan drama teaches by examining moments traditionally considered obvious, and thus not worth discussing by early modern scholars. Blood is such a substance present in several highly visible moments that has been overlooked until recently.

I have selected *Doctor Faustus*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, *3 Henry VI*, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*. Unlike other plays in which blood is a constant presence either visibly on

the stage or theoretically through dialogue (such as *Titus Andronicus*, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, or *Merchant of Venice*), my choices depict a character's reaction to seeing a single bloodied object onstage and the object's lasting influence on characters and events throughout the rest of the play. The plays are not only connected through their similar use of blood, but also the manner in which they attach blood with an object emblematic of their dramatic goals. To link these items together more concretely, I will refer to them as *liminal objects*, which I define as items occupying the space "betwixt and between" inanimate object and character, between fictional theatricality and reality.² Even when an object is a character's dead body or ghost, these items all remain in some way outside and separate from the character(s) considering it, in some cases more ambiguously than others.³ The liminality of the objects reveals a new layer of signification and places these cases into further dialogue with one another. Published and first performed between 1587 and 1606, these English plays display what Ariane Balizet describes as, "a tangle of overdetermined metaphorical assumptions about bodies, families, nations, religion, and violence" (3). Because Greene chooses works from different times and places, he skillfully demonstrates the shift that occurs over the century, but does not focus on the minutiae of how these changes happen.⁴ In my study, I look to extend Greene's discussions and conclusions concerning blood's function to focus specifically in the theatrical space and in England. These plays span a smaller timeframe than Greene examines, which affords opportunities to refine Greene's conclusions and study more explicitly the theatre's role in blood's changing cultural

² Although it is first coined by Victor Turner in his article, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*" (1964), I expand the meaning of "liminal" to include the space between fiction and reality, as is enacted on the stage, as well as the space between inanimate object and character, between character and actor. This follows the approach Sarah Outterson-Murphy, N.M. Imbracsio, and Susan Zimmerman take in their respective projects, which I reference more specifically in Chapter 1.

³ This idea will be explained in more detail later in Chapter 1.

⁴ In his study, Greene focuses on works originally written in France, England, and Spain. He also focuses on different types of literature: one is a collection of prose fiction by Marguerite de Navarre in 1558, a longer prose fiction by George Gascoigne in 1572, a Shakespeare play first performed in 1605, and a Cervantes epic prose published in 1605. I will go into more detail about the specific works later in the introduction.

power. I argue that the theatrical space becomes an active participant in blood's cultural transformation. By shifting blood's signification from one primarily of metonymy to one predominantly of metaphor, the theatre mirrors the threshold early modern medicine approaches in distinguishing blood as important for its materiality in the body and throws purely symbolic interpretations into doubt. Even though blood's symbolic significance does not disappear by any means, the manner in which it is portrayed creates an ideological distance that encourages early modern audiences to separate blood's physical significance from its figurative.⁵

These plays participate in this cultural shift by presenting blood's different stages of representation. Just as blood was a liminal substance in early modern scientific inquiry, it was also liminal in its presentation on the stage, always in a state of transition and inciting character transformation. Following previous scholars, I will use semiotics—specifically that of Roman Jakobson's theories of signification concerning metaphor and metonymy—to investigate the dichotomy by which blood signifies and is signified. First examining the impetus for the liminal object's creation and the liminal object's initial presentation, I will interpret blood's semiotic function and investigate the manner in which those interpretations influence and shape the unfolding play. As my study progresses, my selections approach the dramatic threshold of understanding blood in different ways, shifting from equating blood metonymically to interpreting it metaphorically.

In Chapter One, I set forth my methodological principles and other important definitions, including specific discussions of stage properties, the *liminal object*, and the multi-disciplinary significance of early modern blood. I focus on blood's changing interpretations in early modern

⁵ In framing his argument, Greene similarly states, "To put it another way, over the sixteenth century blood gains a conceptual relation to the everyday that is not entirely dependent on either the theory of the humors or the other abstractions—Christian, chivalric, and heraldic among them—that drive its representation until well into this period" (111).

medicine from its medieval and Galenic predecessors. I also discuss blood's presence in early modern theatre and its combination with various stage properties and *liminal objects*, as well as examine more in-depth the semiotic distinctions between metaphor and metonymy and their function in the theatrical space and how this shift mirrors and participates in blood's transformation in early modern medicine.

Chapter Two investigates blood's significance in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Doctor Faustus* and their use of bloody objects as items connected by metonymy and specific properties common in Galenic medicine. The way that these plays use blood also helps to signal the cultural shift Greene discusses. Finally, this chapter foregrounds certain elements and ideas that might serve as templates for Shakespeare to alter in his plays in the shift from metonymy to metaphor.

The third chapter reveals how blood transgresses boundaries of genre in a study of blood-stained handkerchiefs in *3 Henry VI* and *As You Like It*.⁶ Although the word "blood" is used most often in Shakespeare's history plays, unexpected bloody objects (besides bodies and swords) are not.⁷ In rare examples, Shakespeare depicts a bloody handkerchief in *3 Henry VI* and *As You Like It*, using its representations in key moments that demonstrate characters' motivations and shape their subsequent responses. These selections display a mix between reading blood as metonymic and metaphoric, and serve as a helpful bridge between my early and final examples.

The final chapter examines Polonius's dead body in *Hamlet* and both Banquo's ghost and Lady Macbeth's "blood-stained" hands in *Macbeth*. Instead of following the central characters and their obsession with blood (as seen in *Doctor Faustus* and *The Spanish Tragedy*), these plays focus on the perception of those around them. Like their dramatic predecessors, these plays both

⁶ This links to my study of *The Spanish Tragedy*. While the Horatio's blood-stained handkerchief will not necessarily be my focus in Chapter Two, I argue that Shakespeare reappropriates Kyd's blood-stained handkerchief in *3 Henry VI* and *As You Like It*.

⁷ The word "blood" is used a total of 236 times in all of Shakespeare's history plays according to the Shakespeare Concordance, created by George Mason University. See www.opensourceshakespeare.org.

connect blood's visible presence to madness and encourage a primarily metaphoric interpretation of blood.

Blood has been of great interest in recent scholarship. Setting the groundwork for many scholars interested in blood's significance, Gail Kern Paster's book *The Body Embarrassed* (1993) utilizes Jakobson's semiotic approach to investigate various elements of humoral theory and how it was enacted in early modern drama.⁸ Paster briefly mentions blood's theological significance in post-Reformation England, and offers a helpful overview of the Galenic considerations of blood. In her discussion of blood, Paster is concerned with,

the large-scale correlation between the physical hierarchy of the blood in the discourse of nature and the social hierarchy of blood in the discourse of culture. In particular, the structure of values in which blood participates, by which it is conceptualized, judged, and treated medically, is conspicuously homologous to the structures of gender and other forms of difference in early modern European culture. (78)⁹

Adopting in part Paster's methodological approach, Balizet examines blood's significance in domestic spaces in her book *Blood and Home in Early Modern Drama* (2014). Balizet explores "the intersections of blood and home as expressions of *domestic identity*" and argues that this identity then "find[s] some resolution of these domestic crises in the thematic connection between the home and the state," thus connecting bloody events in the home to the larger

⁸ This methodology uses ideas of metaphor and metonymy. In short, Jakobson's methodology focuses on linguistics, specifically, the Saussurian ideas of the "signifier" and the "signified." According to Jakobson, the metaphor occurs when the "signifier" is similar to the "signified." In contrast, metonymy occurs when the "signifier" can take the place of the "signified."

⁹ In her chapter, Paster specifically focuses on the delineations of menstrual blood and its connections with other forms of bloodletting and phlebotomy. She argues, "The corruption of blood, the differential purity of blood, the sexual difference of blood, the superfluity of blood, the age of blood—such phrases describe some of the potential conditions under which the blood of a single body or of many bodies was thought to differ physically from itself. But these conditions, believed to occur and to have significance in the natural world, cannot be separated for purposes of analysis and historical recovery from the effect of cultural values operative in early modern England. They also helped to constitute the metaphysical properties of blood on which so many kinds of social and material transmission depended. As conditions of *physical* difference, they logically encompass blood's physiological production, classification, nosological significance, and methods of treatment. As conditions of *social* difference, as we will see, the control of blood and bleeding exemplified by the phlebotomist's art becomes a key determinant of agency and empowerment. In the dramatization of when, where, under what circumstances, and for whose benefit to bleed, the potential embarrassments of bleeding are realized" (Paster 84).

political sphere (emphasis original, 17-18). While Balizet limits her discussion to blood that is shed in domestic spaces,¹⁰ I focus my investigation on the theatricalization of blood spilled in “highly visible moments” and their lasting influence over character action and audience perception.

Much more directly, my research builds upon Greene’s book *Five Words* (2013). In his chapter concerning the semantic changes of “blood,” Greene uses literature and drama to examine blood’s cultural shift. Specifically, Greene is interested in particular moments in which “the humoral, historical, and Christian senses of blood are accommodating something that as yet has little discourse of its own... and in which we can see the becoming material of this already figurative and ideal substance” (117). With his focus on the everyday experience of individuals, Greene explores how various literary characters question and revise blood’s purpose both in broader social contexts and inside their individual bodies.¹¹ Greene observes,

Early modern readers become intrigued at seeing, between its contiguous but distinct planes, blood as simply itself—a substance, a liquid that has a reality apart from the allegories of religion, history, and medicine. Throughout the later sixteenth century, many of the central figures in blood’s revision share this attention to the liquid: they observe its motions and speculate over its invisible life; they notice its appearances in the phases of bodily life and history; they comment on its abundance, its vividness, its symbolic complexity. These observers often attribute to blood a kind of eloquence that stills the long-established allegorical conventions and clamors for new ways of situating the substance in its settings. (109)¹²

¹⁰ Balizet’s four chapters focus on the bleeding bride, husband, child, and patient. Balizet states, “While I am interested in the representation of blood within the domestic space—indeed, often as a *marker of domestic space*—I am similarly interested in ways in which concepts of home and domesticity adhere to individuals outside the material walls of the home” (emphasis original, 4-5). Each example she chooses investigates blood as a marker of the character’s domestic identity. She investigates blood’s presentation in the following: *As You Like It*, *Othello*, *Cymbeline*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Arden of Faversham*, *A Warning for Fair Women*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Henry VI*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The Maid’s Tragedy*, and *El medico de su honra*.

¹¹ Greene uses blood’s multi-faceted signifying power to examine this transformation by comparing four works: Marguerite de Navarre’s *L’Heptaméron des Nouvelles*, George Gascoigne’s *The Adventures of Master F.J.*, Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, and Cervantes’s *Don Quijote*. In his study, Greene both analyzes these works individually and in the context of their counterparts.

¹² In his descriptions of early modern medical texts, Greene also links the treatises that directly addressed blood’s role in the humors and body with early modern literature. He states, “literary works, closely responsive, to the conceptual shifts of the late sixteenth century, tell us what the treatises often cannot, that an alternative physiological

Like Greene's focus on the juxtaposition between blood's symbolic and material representation, my study investigates how drama presents, reappropriates, and/or modifies medieval blood for a transforming and dynamic audience.¹³ Similarly to my final chapter, Greene also ends blood's transformation as one that calls for blood as important for its material and circulating presence in an individual. As I also observe in Chapter 1, Greene traces the influence of early modern scholars preceding the acceptance of blood's circulation, stating that in the 16th Century, "Servetus revised Galen to conform to biblical passages about blood and *anima* (spirit) as well as his own anatomical observations. His turn to sheer material fact as a counterweight to outmoded allegory marks the reconception of blood in a liminal moment... this is an alternative *cri du sang*—a call for attention to blood as itself" (Greene 115).¹⁴ Greene concludes his chapter commenting on blood's liminality as its "conceptual envelope" continues to be reconceptualized even after blood's circulation is accepted in scientific and social communities.¹⁵

As I continue to build on Greene's conclusions, I examine blood's signifying power when attached to liminal objects made visible to characters onstage. Blood's materiality and physicality can be perceived, and thus problematize purely symbolic readings of blood as

model for blood is already available, even as the Christian and chivalric allegories of blood are under revision by the theological, economic, and social changes that are transforming European and transatlantic societies" (Greene 114).

¹³ Greene argues that "the literature of this moment recognizes the semantic shift under way, as older genres such as picaresque fiction become bloodier and new genres such as revenge tragedy make the display of blood essential to their projects. Conventions such as the bloody banquet, letters written in blood, and bloody maimings and killings are absorbed into works of all sorts. The fate of blood in the period belongs to a concept under revision and a word that exchanges allegorical for literal meanings, even as literalness itself gains a fresh cultural authority across a range of disciplines" (108). As both Greene and I will argue later, the transforming signification of blood is not complete, nor does it completely abandon medieval perceptions, but instead blood's signification is revised at varying intervals throughout this time period.

¹⁴ Earlier, Greene rightly remarks that Servetus, "first describes the lesser circulation through the lungs, completing the hemodynamic path through the entire body" (114). Servetus was also the first scientist to correctly describe blood's circulation, as I will discuss more specifically in Chapter 1.

¹⁵ Greene defines the "conceptual envelope" as, "a phenomenon of a sort that preoccupied the Renaissance, namely, a reality understood through allegory or an allegory founded on reality. The object of such an envelope—human complexions, the moon, weather—is something that early modern people saw with their own eyes, and yet necessarily saw through the eyes of allegory" (111).

characters respond in different ways. While blood remained a substance of symbolic influence both before and after the plays I selected, the transformation from primarily understanding blood as metonymy to considering blood as metaphor informed interpretations of drama, blood's connection to the body (although not a fully recognizing blood's anatomical circulation in the body), and blood's portrayal and recognition as a liquid important for its perceived physicality alone.

Chapter 1 – Cultural Background and Methodology: Blood, the Liminal Object, and Bloody Object on Stage

This chapter seeks to provide useful context, tracing the development of blood's significance throughout medieval and early modern period. It will also provide the framework for which I ground my discussion and argument. Even though many medical texts concerning blood discuss it in physical terms, other texts were primarily concerned with other culturally important information. Throughout the medieval and early modern periods, blood was understood as a substance that linked the physical body with politics, religion, mental status, and social status. In addition, items covered in blood likewise play a role in similarly charged discussions. As I will argue throughout my project, blood-stained or bloody objects play essential roles in both influencing character action onstage and shaping perception. These objects also manifest in different ways, prompting audiences to consider the relationships between these objects and the characters with whom they are connected. For this reason, I include a discussion of the various ways in which I identify and classify objects in the theatrical space. While the objects I examine do not manifest in the same manner, they are all inherently attached to the body and occupy liminal spaces. These selections also demonstrate a semiotic shift in the manner in which blood on the stage was interpreted.

Medieval Blood – Interdisciplinary Implications

Blood has been and always will be an object of vast importance. It was consistently important throughout the Middle Ages because of its significance in a religio-centric culture. Always at the focal point of any discussion concerning the spilling of blood in Medieval England was Christ's death on the Cross, centering blood's significance in particularly male terms. Anne

Kirkham and Cordeila Warr discuss the distinctions of these two ideologies concerning wounds.

They state,

Wounds were potent signifiers reaching across all aspects of life as experienced in Europe in the middle ages. At the heart of Christianity was the compelling narrative of the crucified Christ wounded in his hands, feet and side. In the secular sphere, the battlefield, personal vendettas, accidental injury or illness resulting in skin lesions meant that wounds were either suffered or witnessed by many and prompted treatment. (1)

While the narrative of Christ's crucifixion was present in many bloody wounds, secular implications also permeated medieval culture. Even though these distinctions were understood in medieval medicine, they were also not clearly delineated. In her discussion of medieval blood, Bettina Bildhauer notes, "the distinction between a material body and an immaterial mind, soul, spirit or consciousness has remained philosophically and scientifically problematic, and is undermined even by religious beliefs in the resurrection of the body. Most philosophers and scientists locate consciousness in the brain, and thus see body and mind as inextricably linked" (3). Depending on perspective, any wound in the Middle Ages could have secular or theological significance and was always the object of competing interpretations. And more so, blood was a specific component of contention. Bildhauer continues, "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, ... and, most fundamentally, the conception of the body as a bounded entity" (17). Blood was essential to determine the medical and theological significance of any physical trauma. Blood breached the boundaries of the body in ways other bodily substances could and did not, and, therefore, was of particular importance to medical practitioners, both secular and spiritual.¹⁶

¹⁶ Blood could be spilled from every location in the body, unlike tears, urine, vomit, or stool. With its ability to forego near every convention that ruled other substances that left the body, as well as Christianity's very direct

Most of what informed medieval practitioners came from the theories and practices described by Galen, an ancient practitioner, who also favored the theological/metaphysical over the secular.¹⁷ According to W.C. Aird, “Galen agreed with Hippocrates and Aristotle that the heat of the body is innate and inexorably linked to life and the soul... The innate heat derives from the heart (especially the left ventricle) and the arteries. Galen rejected Aristotle’s brain as a cooling device, claiming instead that it is the lungs that refrigerate the heat” (121). While Galen allows each of the organs a specific function, he places the center of the cardiovascular system in the liver. In Galen’s framework, “blood moves centrifugally from the center (the liver) to the periphery. This is an open-ended system designed to provide one-time distribution of food. Each part of the body attracts and retains only enough blood for its immediate requirements. Blood that is assimilated into tissue is ultimately lost th[r]ough invisible emanation” (Aird 121). Continuing his review, Aird recounts the main purpose of the lungs and heart, to heat and cool the blood. In closing his discussion of Galen, Aird comments, “Galen developed a system of remarkable internal coherence ... In short, the functions of the liver, veins and right heart were to deliver the products of a healthy diet to the various parts of the body, while the functions of the lung, left heart and arteries were to deliver fresh air and to cool the body” (122). Galen developed theories that blend all of the observations made during his time with Ancient Greek medicine.

In turn, medieval practitioners amalgamated Galen’s theories, modifying them to fit in with Christocentric ideologies. Nancy Siraisi notes, “The circumstances that would lead to a patient in antiquity to prefer either religious or secular healing in a given situation are far from clear, but recourse to secular healing carried no religious stigma; and medical practitioners

connection of blood with Christ’s spilled blood, many practitioners looked to blood as the ultimate link between the visible body and the invisible spirit.

¹⁷ Galen lived approximately 130-210 A.D.

sometimes encouraged recourse to prayer if medicine failed or in particularly dangerous situations” (2). These practitioners combined both the practical with the spiritual because they believed everything spiritual was also observable in physical traits. Louise Bishop adds, “the Galenically conceived universe – every part of it, including the soul – is completely material in nature” (34). This in turn encouraged all practitioners to consider both physical and metaphysical when treating various ailments. This theory also entered Europe well into the middle ages. Cementing its presence throughout medieval and breaching into early modern thought, Megan Leitch comments, “Galenic medicine...entered western Europe c. 1070-1300 via Arabic medicine,” and permeated European medical thought into the 16th century (“Sleeping Knights” 91). After the beginning of the 16th century, practitioners began to modify and question the combinations Galen created.

Most notably, Galenic medicine is responsible for adding a new dimension to the amalgamation of body and spirit: humors. Bishop argues, “Galenic theory...attributes psychology, mentality, to the ‘stuff’ of humors. And because these humors are one with the cosmos, so too the individual’s humoral character is connected ‘literally,’ through the body as well as through emergently material words, to the external universe” (35). Thus, the medieval individual’s body influences personality and the personality shapes the body. Personality was also linked to the soul and the humors. Andrew J. Power observes that in Galenic medicine, “The reason that the sanguine temperament and the humour blood are so highly prized is that they contain the two main qualities of life, heat and moisture...This heat and moisture comes from the soul which we are endowed with at birth by the breath of God” (81). Absolutely everything is connected and manifests physically.

The humors are critical in understanding the defining role that blood plays in medieval medicine. They are an ancient conception that shaped medieval and early modern medicine.

Siraisi explains,

The concept of humors—that is, specific bodily fluids essential to the physiological functioning of the organism—originated at a very early stage of Greek medicine... Blood occupied a special place among the humors. The actual fluid found in the veins was considered to be a sanguineous mass consisting of a mixture of the pure humor blood with a lesser proportion of the other three humors. (104-6)¹⁸

The humors allowed practitioners to study secondary bodily fluids, but more importantly, they provided an explanation for the presence of blood throughout the body and its propensity to exist both inside and outside the body. Blood was the most important substance in the body, according to medieval physicians. Bildhauer also notes, “the seeming complexity of blood depends on the seeming stability of body, and vice versa” (6). Only when that body and soul were stable did the blood stay within the body. Blood left the body when the body was unstable; therefore bleeding can be an indicator also of psychological or spiritual maladies.

Built on the notion that body and spirit were connected, Galenic medicine also addresses the role the mind plays in influencing physical health. Galenic medicine introduces the idea of the passions, the emotions made material. Bishop explains, “Passions and sense are not only material: they are active, not passive, and as such are agents of change and healthful balance, an integral part of Galen’s material complex... the senses... are inextricably tied to emotions,

¹⁸ Siraisi states that the other three fluids are: “phlegm, bile (also termed choler, or red or yellow bile), and black bile (or melancholy)” (105). These other fluids or humors were also considered in determining one’s “complexion” or temperament. Siraisi states, “the four humors collectively were the means whereby an individual’s overall complexional balance was maintained or altered. Hence, the balance of humors was held to be responsible for psychological as well as physical disposition, a belief enshrined in the survival of the English adjectives sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholy to describe traits of character. Humoral theory is probably the single most striking example of the habitual preference in ancient, medieval, and Renaissance medicine for materialist explanations for mental and emotional states” (106). Many scholars have discussed this element of humoral theory in Shakespeare’s plays, particularly in the *Henriad*. In my study, particularly in the last chapter, characters surprisingly do not make this connection when discussing characters acting differently than their general demeanor, which serves as an indicator in part for blood’s cultural shift during this time.

‘passion,’ in an experiential dance the five senses reflect and engender emotion, and they both create and respond to humoral balance” (39). Thus, the mind, body, and spirit relationship is developed and joined with humoral theory. As will be seen particularly in Chapter 2, they can all be interpreted as metonymic of each other. An imbalance of one would be equated with imbalance of another. Bishop also includes a key component of humoral theory: the need for balance; and she underscores and links the material importance of the body to the overall balance of the universe. She argues,

In its fullest understanding, Galenism – a theory shared between learned and lay, a powerful and eminently satisfying representational system – links character with health, body with thought, material temperament with material cosmos, reader with text. Emotions – joy, sorrow, fear, and wrath – rely on, affect, and even *are* the humors, and thus are not understood as something separate from bodily composition. Rather, humoral theory ties together the emotions of the body, including its senses, in the same way it ties together body and cosmos: all, even the emotions, participate in the material nature of health. (Bishop 41)

This representational system allows a medieval physician, audience, or reader to examine the various implications of any malady or injury as something outside the proper balance. Humoral theory combines medical, theological, and cultural considerations of physical ailments and cures, both invisible and visible.

These considerations, though not followed to the fullest extent of their medieval forebears, heavily influenced the actions and understandings of early modern medical practitioners and the larger cultural considerations of blood. Greene states, “Instead of taking a physical reality and making it figurative, the poets and playwrights of the European and transatlantic Renaissance often take an idealized blood and render it quotidian, or at least imagine ways that the symbolic and literal dimensions of blood can exist in a single idiom” (111). Blood was a transformational object. In this context, blood offers a productive line of investigation. It allowed discussions concerning the one discipline to bridge and participate in

other areas, including political, religious, social, psychological, and other cultural conversations simultaneously.

Early Modern Blood – Modifying Galen

While many early modern practitioners maintained the interdisciplinary significance of blood as upheld by their medieval counterparts, they also continued to explore and refine the manner in which they understand blood as a scientific object. Aird discusses the several works published throughout the sixteenth century. After briefly mentioning Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), Aird focuses the rest of the article on Andreas Vesalius (1514-64), Michael Serveto (also referred to as Michael Servetus, 1511-53), Realdo Colombo (1516-59), Girolamo Fabrizio (1537-1619), Andrea Cesalpino (1519-1603), Cesare Cremonini (1550-1631), and William Harvey (1578-1659)—all of whom contribute in various ways to the progression toward understanding the circulatory system. In his overview, Aird comments that da Vinci differs from Galen in his belief that the heart is a muscle and is the first to draw an accurate picture of the heart, including valves (123).¹⁹ Aird also records that Vesalius created “detailed, realistic illustrations of the human body in what amounted to be the first modern textbook of anatomy”; Colombo “provided an anatomical account of the pulmonary transit of blood”; Fabrizio “proposed that the valves function to slow the centrifugal flow of blood to the periphery”; and Servetus “proposed that blood is driven from the right ventricle to the lungs, where it mingles with inspired air and is ultimately drawn into the left ventricle” (123). All refining and building off of others’ ideas, these scientists also had to wrestle with the cultural impulse to focus on the communal whole of the social community. Now focusing on the individual experience and individual physical body, scientists needed to resist the communal approach of their medieval

¹⁹ Galen posited that the heart was not a muscle, but that it was one of the chief dispersers of nutrients, air, and blood in the human body, was central to a body’s function and the wellspring of personality and action (Aird 122).

counterparts who had coupled blood with spiritual and social experiences. Greene considers Servetus's contribution to the scientific consideration of blood, stating:

Servetus revised Galen to conform to biblical passages about blood and *anima* (spirit) as well as his own anatomical observations. His turn to sheer material fact as a counterweight to outmoded allegory marks the reconception of blood in a liminal moment, as a material connected to private, individual experience, to singular as opposed to collective identity, that briefly stands apart from one parcel of received allegory before being subsumed into another. Particular to the later sixteenth century, this is an alternative *cri du sang*—a call for attention to blood as itself. (115)

As this transformation occurs, many, both in the scientific community and in popular culture, appear to struggle between regarding the Galenic model and the emerging scientific and material understanding of blood as supreme in their considerations of the bodily substance.

As these debates continued, the notion of the passions and humors was also stressed more specifically, either in accordance with their purported connection with blood, or their noted separation from it. Greene argues, "The explanatory power of Galenism, however, underwent a striking change of terms during the sixteenth century: under pressure from forces within natural philosophy such as the anatomical movement and Paracelsian thought, Galenism became less a satisfactory account of how the body works and more an allegory concerned with the mind and its passions" (113). Even though, as Power observes, "Many of the medical treatise writers introduce their material by commending mankind and the excellence of his body and mind," blood and the mind/passions could become separated (85). No longer was anger the result of overly heated blood, but instead was a result of an imbalance in the mind, an interpretation portrayed in Chapter Four's examples *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. In response to these changing beliefs, differentiated manuals concerning the specific treatment of blood or the mind/passions were created. This progression can be seen in the difference between Erra Pater's *The pronostycacyon for Euer...* (1555), in which Pater links the proper times for bloodletting with the

month and most likely passion to be in overload, and other works from the beginning of the seventeenth century. For example, when discussing November, Pater states, “Bathe the not but vent the a lytell of grasyng, for than Ben as thyne humours ouer quycke for to Blede, and yf case Be that thou haue gret need for to Blede,” (sig B2^V). Limiting the times in which bloodletting should happen based on the humors indicates the influence of Galenic medicine on Pater’s practices. Unlike his successors, Pater’s lack of detail in his treatise demonstrates a moderate conformity to the Galenic principles for bloodletting.

Almost fifty years later, Simon Harward’s *Harvwards phlebotomy: or, A treatise of letting of blood* (1601) seems to bridge humoral theory with anatomically-based medicine.²⁰ In his foreword, Harward states,

For although on the one side the benefits be most excellent which redound by Phlebotomy being rightly & duly administred, for thereby the fulnesse of the body doth come to a mediocrity, griefes which come by extension are pacified, the spirits are refreshed, & naturall heate eunted, the lims being as it were eased of a great burthen, are made more quick & ready to execute euery office, nature is inabled to concoct what is requisite, and to expell the vnprofitable, flowing humours are either drawne back, or turned aside, from the place where they annoy, or else are they dispatched and vtterly auoyded, narrow and obstructed passages are opened; and finally, very present help is brought thereby to many dangerous infirmities. (sig A2-A3)²¹

Unlike Pater’s connection of bloodletting with the time of year, Harward connects humoral theory with specific medical diseases. Also in contrast with Pater, Harward associates specific illnesses with locations for bloodletting. Pater never gets that specific in his treatise. Although Harward continues to connect bloodletting with a renewing of spirits, pacifying grief, and the

²⁰ Harward also appears to be the author of several sermons, which supports the competing and constantly intersecting views of bloodletting and its cultural and medical utility.

²¹ He states that there are infirmities include should bloodletting go wrong. He states, “Yet on the other side, great also are the harmes which may ensue by letting of blood, if the same be rashly and vnconsiderately attempted, the spirits and blood are spent and waisted, the naturall heate is pluckt away and dispersed, the principall parts are made ouercold, and vtterly lose their strength, old age is hastened on, and made subiect to palsies, apoplexies, dropsies, and cachexies or bad habits, many (the bridle of choler being taken away) do in a moment fall into most faint laundises, many haue the one halfe of their hearing and sight diminished, and the one arme and the one side vtterly weakened, and many also are brought to an vnrecouerable destruction of their health and life.” (sig A3)

restoration of natural bodily functions by expelling unbalanced humors, his work reveals the tension between the practice of hard, visible science and the practice of curing unseen ailments that influence the mind. The separation between anatomical medicine and psychology has begun, despite continued reliance on Galenic theory.²²

During this period, other works fall on the other side of the spectrum, leaving Galenic theory further and further behind. Greene comments, “The forty or so years spanning the later sixteenth and earlier seventeenth centuries saw a spate of treatises and poems on moral philosophy that adjusted the Galenic doctrine of humors, generally toward a more abstract account of mental states and a less prominent role for blood itself” (115). At the forefront encouraging this distance between blood, the humors, and the mind was Thomas Wright’s *The Passions of the Mind in General*. Originally published in 1601, this work suggests that the humors impact the mind more directly, rather than being simply a physical manifestation in one’s blood. In a 1604 edition titled, *The passions of the minde in generall. Corrected, enlarged, and with sundry new discourses augmented*, Wright indicates the coming acceptance of modern circulation. In one of the four instances in which Wright uses the word “blood,” he states, “as for example, recall most of the bloud in the face, or other partes, to the heart, as wee see by daily experience to chance in feare and anger” (sig B2^V). According to Wright, instead of returning to the liver, as previous medical texts and Galenic theory had purported, blood returns to the heart. Wright later states concerning hereditary disease that appear in old age: “that in sixe or eight yeeres the liuer and heart which are fountaines of bloud, and origins of humours are so infected and corrupted, that in the last yeere they engender more vnnaturall superfluous humours, than

²² Also at the intersection of these considerations concerning bloodletting is Nicholas Gyer and his work *The English phlebotomy: or, Method and way of healing by letting of blood* (1592). Much more directly than Harward, Gyer’s work immediately emphasizes the importance of Christianity as the foundation for his work, as well as the Galen’s influence in creating his theories.

can stand with the right and naturall constitution of the body” (sig C1^V-C2).²³ Although the liver is still included in Wright’s discussions, the heart is also rightfully significant to the process of moving blood and is essential for ensuring blood’s proper function. When Wright discusses the passions, he does so in reference to other factors, such as the zodiac or psychological stressors, not imbalances in the blood itself. Blood began to break from its humoral and passion-based significance.²⁴

Outside of texts that discuss the anatomical purpose of blood, blood was a constant presence in early modern non-dramatic literature. Most often in reference to Christ’s blood and its saving and redemptive power, blood was an substance of frequent discussion and near constant influence in early modern culture.²⁵ Beyond the strict theological significance stressed to the early modern public, blood was also referenced as a marker of social significance. In the description of murder, one account describes the events as a “most cruell and bloudie murder,” emphasizing the presence of blood in the recounting of brutal and horrific scenes (*A briefe discourse of two most cruell and bloudie murthers*, sig A1^R). Another account titled *A most horrible & detestable murther committed by a bloudie minded man vpon his ovvne vvife* (1595) details the events as they transpired, and also refers to the murderer using a metaphor to describe his mental state. The document also records subsequent confessions of the murderer, as well as

²³ Although it is not clear that Wright is referring to hereditary disease as we consider it, he opens this paragraph stating, “This we may declare by the example of them, who are infected with hereditary diseases, as the gowte, or the stone” (sig C1^V).

²⁴ Another work cited in the study of melancholy from the period is Timothy Bright’s *A treatise of melancholie* (1586). Power uses Bright’s work as a cornerstone for his investigation of Hamlet’s melancholy in his chapter, “Broken Machines and Tainted Minds: Mental Health and Hamlet,” which can be found in the publication *On Literature and Science: Essays, Reflections, Provocations* (2007).

²⁵ To name a few, The Church of England published a sermon from the Bishop in the Lincoln diocese titled, *A true and perfect copie of a godly sermon preached in the minister at Lincolne* (1575) which mentions the Antichrist dipping his garment in blood, as well as Christ shedding his “most precious blood” for humanity’s salvation; Meredith Hamner preached a sermon titled, *The baptizing of a Turke A sermon preached at the Hospital of Saint Katherin* (1586) that focuses on blood shed from different cultures and ultimately Christ’s saving blood; and Henry Smith preached *The poore mans teares opened in a sermon* (1592) focuses on how to treat and help the poor and ultimately a tool to bring both the poor and the rich closer to Christ and his saving power, as given through his blood.

his son, who had survived the ordeal. In other accounts, including *The bloody booke, or, The tragicall and desperate end of Sir Iohn Fites (alias) Fitz* (1605), *Two most vnnaturall and bloodie murthers* (1605), *A true relation of the most inhumane and bloody murther, of Mast Iames Minister and preacher of the word of God at Rockland in Norfolke* (1609), among others document the events either from the murderer's perspective, as is done recording John Fites's exploits and eventual death or from the perspective of those seeking justice.²⁶ These works demonstrate the moral consequence when blood is spilled illicitly from an innocent body, as is also dramatized in Chapters Two and Three of my study. With strict moral judgment concerning those who commit murder, even if no blood actually spilled, early modern culture places those involved in spilling blood outside of warfare in a lower social caste. Blood became a representation metaphorical and symbolic of the heinous act.

The Body (and Blood) as Liminal Objects

My project identifies several objects, including Faustus's body and deed, Horatio's body and handkerchief stained with his blood, blood-stained handkerchiefs in *3 Henry VI* and *As You Like It*, Polonius's body, Banquo's ghost, and phantom blood on Lady Macbeth's hands. These objects have varying levels of presence and agency on the stage, typically connected with some kind of heinous or immoral act. This section seeks to group these objects together based on their liminality, their connection with a physical body, and their semiotic functions on the stage. Because of their common liminality and semiotic functions as afforded by the theatrical space, these objects can be linked in order to trace the cultural shift from one object to the next as the

²⁶ Other documentations of murders include: *A bloody new-yeares gift, or A true declaration of the most cruell and bloody murther, of maister Robert Heath, in his owne house at high Holbourne, being the signe of the fire-brand* (1609) and *A horrible creuel and bloody murther* (1614).

scientific community and early modern culture comes closer to understanding blood's circulation throughout the body.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an "object" is historically considered as, "something placed before or presented to the eyes or other sense" (1a). In addition, the *OED* defines an "object" as, "The presentation of something to the eye or perception" (1b, emphasis original). Using these definitions, one might conclude that anything presented on stage would be considered an object, as it is presented before an audience. Knowing the inherent fictionality of the events happening onstage, as well as the events depicted on the page, the reader and audience would recognize that everything presented in the play is simultaneously real and not real. In my examples, each item investigated is in some way outside and separate from the character(s) considering it, and thus may be defined as something presented 'to the eye or perception' for a reader or audience to consider.

While the inanimate objects are easily termed objects, a character's body is more difficult. In the selections I examine, the bodies discussed are all dead in these highly visible moments.²⁷ As will be discussed, the characters do not actively interact or speak with their fellow characters; instead they are dragged, man-handled, and otherwise treated as inanimate objects.²⁸ First coined by Victor Turner, "liminal" for a rite of passage "constitute[d] transitions between states" (4). A person undergoing this rite of passage could also be in a state of transition between "the physical, mental, or emotional condition" (4). Both the person undergoing the rite of passage and the rite of passage itself were described as liminal, one undergoing and another enabling of the transition. I submit that these blood-stained items are also "liminal," not

²⁷ I will examine Horatio's body in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Polonius's body in *Hamlet*, and Banquo's ghost in *Macbeth* in this project.

²⁸ Of course, the examples I have chosen to investigate from *Macbeth* severely problematizes this definition, which I will discuss in more detail the effects of Banquo's Ghost and Lady Macbeth's phantom blood in its respective chapter.

necessarily because of the specific ritual Turner describes, but because of their indeterminate state of transition in multiple ways: not fully object because they are covered in a substance of the body, but no longer in the body; and while a specific actor's body remains onstage, they are not yet considered to be the live character as portrayed earlier in the play and thus enter into the realm of character yet object, things which must be acted upon and signified through stage directions and verbal cues.²⁹

Several scholars have reappropriated the word "liminal" to examine early modern dramatic bodies. Previous scholars, including Susan Zimmerman in her book *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare's Theatre* (2005), N.M. Imbracsio in his dissertation, "Corpses Revealed: The Staging of the Theatrical Corpse in Early Modern Drama" (2010), and Sarah Outterson-Murphy in her dissertation, "Playing Dead: Staging Corpses, Ghosts, and Statues in Early Modern Drama," (2015) define the early modern corpse as "liminal." In his dissertation, Imbracsio builds upon Turner's definition and applies it to the corpse when acting in the in-betweenness of the theatrical space. He states that "the theatrical corpse has a latent power because of its occupation of the liminal state between death and life, between stillness and action. That power can be—and is—appropriated for theatrical spectacle" (Imbracsio 80). Sarah Outterson-Murphy likewise considers the significance of the stage corpse, but also considers the interaction between the stage and spectator, as well as the different types of corpses that can present themselves on the stage. She states, "Corpses, ghosts, and statues become liminal bodies when plays present them as more alive, powerful, and embodied—in other words, more like the

²⁹ The term "liminal" has been adapted and used in similar ways to describe and examine phenomenon happening on the stage by Sarah Outterson-Murphy in her dissertation, "Playing Dead: Staging Corpses, Ghosts, and Statues in Early Modern Drama," (PhD Diss., City University of New York, 2015), N.M. Imbracsio in his dissertation, "Corpses Revealed: The Staging of the Theatrical Corpse in Early Modern Drama" (PhD Diss., University of New Hampshire, 2010), and Susan Zimmerman in her book *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare's Theatre* (2005). I discuss their contributions more specifically in the next paragraph.

actor who performs them—than we expect. Further, these performing bodies affect others physically and mentally, as their actorly power reverberates through watchers onstage and off” (Outterson-Murphy 3). This project combines both Imbrascio and Outterson-Murphy’s approaches to consider corpses as liminal in their direct interactions with fellow characters, as seen explicitly in *Macbeth*, and also in their use in influencing fellow characters passively on stage, as seen in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet*.

The staging of blood in the early modern theatre raises fascinating issues of representation. If all items on stage become objects, using imagination as needed, so does the physical blood. Balizet notes, “Since animal bladders filled with vinegar, vials of blood, and sheep viscera would likely stain valuable stage costumes, blood effects were often confined to pre-stained props and items of clothing” (1). Thus, blood, the spilling of blood, and blood-stained objects would need to be indicated in words spoken on stage. Reader and spectator alike must rely on the verbal cues to recognize and interpret these liminal objects stained with blood.

In addition, the theatre created a liminal space on the stage—objects were presented for visual and auditory consideration as the events that use them connect to reality in various capacities. In her book, Susan Zimmerman comments:

The prevalence of language in which actors describe themselves as *playing* a fiction seems connected to the anti-illusionist structures of public theatres, as well as to the circumstances and conventions of performance (including the disruptive exigencies of early modern scheduling and repertory). More importantly, perhaps, the unruly mixtures of genres, plots, source materials and tonalities, the well-known ‘gallimaufry’ of Renaissance dramatic texts, militate against a sustained suspension of disbelief, for both actors and spectators. Thus the hallmark of this theatre is an insistence on its own theatricality, a resolute artificiality; and this quality is conceptually linked to what Turner calls the ‘subjunctive mood’ of liminal experience. By continually playing with the boundary between actor and spectator, between fiction and the enactment of it, English Renaissance theatre chose to explore the limits and the possibilities of dramatic impersonation. (11)

Because the structure of the theatre in early modernity resists the boundaries of fiction and reality, undoubtedly the objects and characters on display profoundly impacted early modern audiences. Despite many plays consciously calling attention to their fictionality, their numerous and purposeful connections with reality push the audiences to take particular lessons from the theatrical space and into their daily lives.

The Significance of Stage Objects

Stage properties are perhaps one of the most important elements on the early modern stage. As documented in sources such as Philip Henslowe's inventory of stage properties, these properties range from the iconic Yorick's skull in *Hamlet*, to thrones, to bows and quivers, to crowns, and many more.³⁰ Besides elaborate costuming, these properties provided the audience essential clues for the setting, the characters and their relationships with one another, and significant events within any given plot. Because of their wide range, properties were easily reused from play to play, genre to genre, sometimes serving to underscore similarities between plays (one common example being Yorick's skull), but typically understood as element to extend the intended action of the play in meaningful ways. Thanks to Henslowe's inventory, contemporary scholars know that no explicitly "bloodied" stage properties existed, though there were likely pieces of cloth dyed red that could be used to simulate blood (Gurr 229-30). So, many of the instances where blood is mentioned, the early modern audience would have to imagine the presence of blood at least to some extent when it is mentioned either in dialogue or in the stage directions, which forces scholars to address another concern, the so-called trustworthiness of the stage directions in the scripts available. Dessen notes,

³⁰ These properties are listed in detail from Henslowe's diary and are also included in Andrew Gurr's work *The Shakespearean Stage: 1574-1642*. [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. Print.] in his section titled "Stage Properties."

Any attempt to deal with the original staging or stage conventions must therefore build almost exclusively upon the evidence within the plays themselves. Thus, from dialogue and from the apparent requirements of a given scene much has been inferred about the number of stage doors, the need for stage machinery, and the presence of large properties like tombs or trees. (*Elizabethan Stage* 19-20)

Relying solely on the scripts provided, contemporary readers must assume a certain degree of distance from authentic knowledge of the work as an early modern audience would have understood these works. But, as Dessen later describes, these obstacles should not prevent modern scholars from attempting to understand the complex nature of various actions, reactions, and objects, such as blood for the specific purposes of my study, in early modern drama. Though few additional documents survived (besides the playtexts), contemporary scholars can reasonably infer the extent to which stage properties were used: what was used, when it would have been used, and how it may have been employed on stage.

Andrew Sofer, well known for his scholarship concerning issues of dramatic performance, comments on the importance of recurring stage properties and their value in understanding these larger implications. He states, “Invisible on the page except as textual signifiers, props seduce our attention in the playhouse as they become drawn into the stage action and absorb complex and sometimes conflicting meanings. By definition, a prop is an object that goes on a journey; hence props trace spatial trajectories and create temporal narratives as they track through a given performance” (2). Even if that journey is short-lived on a particular stage at a particular time, it has a significant impact on the action that surrounds its use and the implications of those actions. In addition, Sofer comments, “The stage life of props extends beyond their journey within a given play, moreover. As they move from play to play and from period to period, objects accrue intertextual resonance as they absorb and embody the theatrical past” (2). This links plays in a visual and visceral manner, forcing the audience to grapple with

the effects one object has in a given play and place that significance in conversation with its significance in other plays.

Blood and Semiotics: Metaphor and Metonymy

Because the contemporary reader must rely primarily on the words and actions of the actors, another idea, as explained by Keir Elam, is particularly useful to keep in mind for this analysis: transcodification. Elam states,

The mobility factor – as it were, the ‘transformation rule’ of stage representation – is dependent not only on the interchangeability of stage elements but still more on the reciprocal substitution of sign-systems or codes. The replacement, for example, of scenic indicators by gesture or verbal reference involves the process of *transcodification*: a given semantic unit (say, a ‘door’) is signified by the linguistic or gestural system rather than by the architectural or pictorial. (13)

The early modern audience would understand this idea almost instinctually because of the nature of theatre during this time, in which playwrights had to work tirelessly to ensure that the audience knew the story being portrayed was a fiction. And because Henslowe’s inventory of stage properties is so minimal, the audience would have no choice but to rely on the actors’ words and gestures to understand the space created on stage. Marvin Carlson also discusses these implications, noting, “In an actual Elizabethan performance, of course, a street scene, a forest, or a chamber would have been as far from any iconic representation of the original” (78). And so, seeing the stage directions provided in the script enacted on stage, as well as hearing the dialogue between characters, the contemporary reader is able to recognize and translate the multiple layers of meaning in a given scene and how these individual scenes contribute to larger implications for the play, and even how these fictions could influence their reality.

In enacting transcodification, early modern audiences needed to discern the threshold between understanding objects as metonymic or metaphoric of what they portrayed on stage in relation to their representative character, as well as to reality. Whether equating blood with the

soul, one's personhood, or recognizing it as symbolic for something else, early modern audiences participated in the shift of blood on stage. Utilizing Roman Jakobson's approach to understanding metaphor and metonymy, my study will investigate blood's semiotic and cultural shift from an object understood in terms of Galenism to one physically important for circulating throughout the body.

In his seminal essay, Jakobson explores the different ways in which patients with aphasia and how their language choices demonstrate how the brain connects and processes different words and concepts, and provides initial definitions for "metaphor" and "metonymy." In his opening paragraph, Jakobson observes that "The relation of similarity is suppressed in the former, the relation of contiguity in the latter type of aphasia. Metaphor is alien to the similarity disorder, and metonymy to the contiguity disorder" (76). Jakobson states that any response to a stimulus can be categorized "either as a substitute for, or as a complement to the stimulus" (76). In his example, Jakobson uses the word "hut" as the stimulus and asked participants to share the first word that came to mind. In the results, participants responded with "the synonyms *cabin* and *hovel*; the antonym *palace*, and the metaphors *den* and *burrow*." Jakobson states, "The capacity of two words to replace one another is an instance of positional similarity (or contrast)" (emphasis original, 77). These responses are indicative of metaphor because of their close relationship with the term without acting as a replacement. Additionally, Jakobson cites that "Metonymical responses to the same stimulus, such as *thatch*, *litter*, or *poverty*, combine and contrast the positional similarity with semantic contiguity" (emphasis original, 77). In contrast, these responses could serve as ideological substitutes. If one lives in a hut, it may also be assumed that one is surrounded by litter or living in poverty. While both types of responses

indicate more figurative and conceptual connections, this method of interpreting language becomes quite popular in forming later semiotic and literary theory.

Very popular in literature, metaphor shapes figurative language and allows authors and playwrights to link words, objects, and images in varying and exciting ways. In their seminal book *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson state that “Metaphor is principally a way of conceiving of one thing in terms of another, and its primary function is understanding” (36). Even though there is a distance between the literal item or idea and the figurative term used to describe it, there is similarity. For example, Zoltán Kövecses in his book *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction* elaborates on the metaphor “Love is a collaborative work of art” (32).³¹ When using this statement, Kövecses refers to all of the other actions and implications that coincide with this statement, including the ideas that “the two lovers should be able to work out their common goals, the premises of the work, the responsibilities that they do and do not share, the ratio of control and letting go in the creation, the costs and benefits of the project, and so on” (32). Even though the language of the statement, “Love is a collaborative work of art” linguistically shows an equation of the two ideas, Kövecses reveals that the image is much more complex and requires many more, smaller units in order to be completely understood. René Dirven in his article defines “metaphor” as, “combination, i.e. each sign consists of smaller and simpler units and finds its own context in a more complex linguistic unit so that combination and contexture are two faces of the same operation” (76). As I will examine

³¹ Kövecses labels this as an “unconventional conceptual metaphor” because it does not follow the same rules or experiences as other metaphors he had previously discussed (“love is a journey,” fire – when one is “*burning* with love,” insanity – when one is “*madly* in love,” war – when one is “*playing* hard to get,” etc. (emphasis original, 32). See his book for further examples. Kövecses highlights that the unconventional conceptual metaphor of “Love is a collaborative work of art,” it involves much more action than the other metaphorical language mentioned above. He states, “It is clear that the notion of love will be very different for those who ‘live by’ this metaphor... [This] metaphor is the product of two ordinary people attempting to make sense of their everyday love experiences. Artists, poets, and scientists also often do the same; they offer us new ways and possibilities in the form of new, unconventional conceptual metaphors to see the world around us” (32).

in later chapters, the actions and images characters present onstage can be linked together as complementary to the same operation. For example, I will end my study investigating the extent to which Hamlet's perceived madness and Polonius's bleeding body are read by characters both as symptoms of Hamlet's out of control grief. Blood's physical presence on the stage not only functions as a metaphor complementary to other dramatic action, but can also stand in and substitute immaterial objects and concepts.

While metonymy falls under the larger umbrella of figurative or metaphorical language, its primary function is to link words, objects, or images in terms of contiguity. Lakoff and Johnson state that metonymy "has primarily a referential function, that is, it allows us to use one entity to *stand for* another" (emphasis original, 36). René Dirven in his essay defines metonymy as "selection, i.e. the possibility of substituting one for the other, equivalent to the former in one respect and different from it in others" (76). In both of these definitions, no matter what object or idea is expressed or indicated, metonymy connects by equating one with another, sometimes even taking a part to stand for a whole. Kövecses provides some concrete examples of metonymy in language. For example: "I'm reading *Shakespeare*" really means "I'm reading *one of Shakespeare's works*" or "We need a better *glove* at third base" means "We need a better *baseball player* at third base" (emphasis original, Kövecses 144).³² The part can stand in for the whole, or one object can replace another. In the early plays I investigate, blood either acts as or is overtaken by a substitute, therefore, functioning metonymically. Although Hieronimo has always been concerned with justice, his encounters with two liminal objects, Horatio's body and the

³² Later, Kövecses remarks that "It is a basic feature of metonymically related vehicle and target entities that they are 'close' to each other in conceptual space. Thus, the producer is conceptually 'close' to the product (because he is the one who makes it), the place of institution is conceptually 'close' to the institution itself (because most institutions are located in particular physical places), gloves are conceptually 'close' to baseball players (because baseball players wear gloves), and so on. In the traditional view of metonymy, this feature of metonymy is expressed by the claim that the two entities are contiguously related, or that the two entities are in each other's proximity" (145).

handkerchief stained with his blood, overcome his faculties. These objects become his only links with his conception of family and justice and fuel Hieronimo's vengeful desires. Not unlike the baseball example provided above, Faustus substitutes one part of his body, his blood, for the whole of his physical being and immaterial and immortal soul. As both characters move forward and interpret blood as a metonymically-linked substance, their actions and thoughts drive the plays to their tragic ends and inadvertently warn audiences against medieval and strictly symbolic readings of blood.

Chapter 2 – Shakespeare's Tragic Precursors: Horatio's Body and Faustus's Blood

Numerous playwrights rooted their works firmly in classical or medieval precursors to provide early modern audiences with familiar images. Colin Burrow argues, “Seneca was *the* high-status model for drama in the formative years of the English professional stage, and playwrights who influenced Shakespeare at the start of his career—Kyd, Marlowe, Peele—not only read but showed their audiences that they had read Senecan tragedy” (162). Just as their scientific counterparts used their medieval predecessors to shift their study from the communal to individual experience, early modern playwrights likewise used their theatrical forebears and began to focus on the private experience. By exploring the effects of decisions and actions within individual experiences, playwrights were better equipped to make characters and their plights resonate with audiences on an individual level. Stephen Greenblatt comments that “Marlowe’s *Faustus*... seems like a startling departure from everything that has preceded it precisely because the dramatist has heightened an individuated anxiety to an unprecedented degree and because he has contrived to implicate his audience as individuals in that anxiety” (133). By implicating audiences in specific religious anxieties relevant to their individual lives and experiences, as seen in *Doctor Faustus*, playwrights like Marlowe and Kyd are able to likewise connect audiences to other ideological and cultural structures. This chapter explores how Shakespeare’s precursors emphasized blood’s utility as a metonymic token in their modifications of medieval actions and ideologies.

In their utilization of their medieval counterparts, Kyd and Marlowe equate and substitute immaterial and immensely significant objects with blood-stained tokens that are portrayed physically on the stage. Even though, as Janet Clare argues, Marlowe’s “drama does not expressly engage in ideological debate,” his dramaturgical choices may imply another moral than

his explicitly stated conclusions (75). Clare also observes that “It is a commonplace of our understanding of Marlowe that he produced a theatre of consistently violent techniques and effects” in many of his works (74). These violent effects influence the audience as a direct result from their connection with Marlowe’s fatally flawed Faustus, as well as encourage practical consideration for blood’s role in their individual experiences.³³ Violent effects were not only commonplace in Marlowe’s work, but also in many of Kyd’s works, including his extremely bloody depiction of a father avenging the wrongful murder of a son. Through the use of spectacle and by possessing physical blood-stained tokens that act contiguously with character intention, *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Doctor Faustus* approach blood’s cultural threshold in slightly different manners: one rejects metaphysical power and examines the significance of blood’s power over the mind and body; and the other questions blood’s connections with the eternal soul, demonstrating the dangers of strictly adhering to the Christo-centric symbolism of blood.

“With My Proper Blood”: Faustus’s Intentionally Spilled Blood

In Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, the central action revolves around the battle for Faustus’s soul. Despite the eternal consequences of his actions, Faustus is not deterred from his ambitions and offers his soul to Lucifer so that he may “live in all voluptuousness” (1.3.92). To prove his offer, Faustus pens a contract in his own blood that details his expectations and promises. This blood and the various ways in which Faustus appears to understand its significance both shape his interpretation of his pact with Lucifer and his role in shaping his individual fate. Using the A-Text as their primary mode for examining *Doctor Faustus*, numerous scholars have connected this action and Faustus’s blood with various individual fields

³³ Clare also states that the full impact of *Doctor Faustus*, “through an assault on the audience’s sensory perceptions and the release of extreme conflicts, ambitions, and passions” (Clare 87).

including medicine, theology, and economics.³⁴ Most recently, Richard Sugg discusses the medical and theological significance of this moment, as well as issues with staging; Emily Stockard investigates the economic implications of this scene; and Jennifer Waldron and Ryan Curtis Friesen discuss the theological and supernatural significance.³⁵ As a liminal object, the blood Faustus takes from his body and attaches to a deed invites arguments that link disciplines as complementary to blood's physical presence. Regardless of these readily available connections, Faustus ultimately follows medieval and Galenic interpretations of blood and turns it into a substitute, into a metonym for his soul. In turn, amalgamating these ideas illustrates the layers of meaning at work in understanding this transformational moment, and I suggest that new lessons emerge for audiences beyond *Faustus*'s explicit final warning.³⁶

Immediately after Faustus agrees to trade his soul, Mephistopheles compels Faustus to provide a physical legal deed to guarantee his promise. Stockard argues, “for Faustus, his soul is a thing—a commodity ... that he will trade in return for goods he lacks...As the economic logic of the bargain has it, the soul is a material bit of Faustus that can be separated from him at death, and the loss of the piece at this time will have been compensated for by the material gains this trade affords him while alive” (22). Faustus's soul has unparalleled spiritual capital that must be recorded with the physical marker of his blood. Mephistopheles states that Faustus “must

³⁴ Other scholars including, but not limited to John S. Mebane (*Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age*, 1989), Margaret Owens (*Stages of Dismemberment: The Fragmented Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Drama*, 2005), Bronwyn Johnston (“Who the Devil is in Charge? Mastery and the Faustian Pact on the Early Modern Stage” in *Magical Transformations on the Early Modern Stage*, ed. Lisa Hopkins and Helen Ostovich, 2014), and John D. Cox (*The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350-1642*, 2000) have discussed various individual facets of Faustus's deal and its consequences.

³⁵ Emily Stockard investigates Doctor Faustus's blood in her article, “The Soul as Commodity: Materialism in *Doctor Faustus*” (2012), Richard Sugg in his book, *The Smoke of the Soul: Medicine, Physiology and Religion in Early Modern England* (2013), Jennifer Waldron in her book *Reformations of the Body: Idolatry, Sacrifice, and Early Modern Theater* (2013), and Ryan Curtis Friesen in his book *Supernatural Fiction in Early Modern Drama and Culture* (2010). Although Stephen Pender does not discuss *Doctor Faustus* explicitly, he discusses the changing notions of humoral theory in his article, “Subventing Disease: Anger, Passions, and the Non-Naturals.”

³⁶ For my discussion of *Doctor Faustus*, I use the A-Text because it is the earlier version and also most commonly used by scholars. For my investigation, I will be using the 2005 Norton Critical Edition edited by David Scott Kastan.

bequeath it solemnly / And write a deed of gift with thine own blood / For that security craves great Lucifer” (2.1.34-36). Words and promises alone are not enough. Lucifer needs a physical marker of this promise – something that can stand in place of his body and ensure his compliance. Mephistopheles’s demands not only signify blood as an essential component of Faustus’s being and the need to create a physical legal deed, but also blood as a commodity that can be exchanged for spiritual purposes.

From Mephistopheles’s perspective, blood is not only a material to be traded for services, but something that has supernatural significance. With that in mind, in his manipulations of Faustus, he continues to change the rhetoric with which he refers to blood. Laura Levine comments,

Even as the conditions multiply, the language which describes the transaction changes from that of a contract to that of a bequest. Thus, during early transactions, one speaker or the other employs the language of contract. . . . But as the scene progresses, the language of contract gives way to the language of ‘bequest’ and ‘deed[s] of gift’. Faustus must ‘bequeath’ his soul ‘solemnly’ and write it as a ‘deed of gift’ in blood (2.1.34, 35). In contemporary law, in contrast to the language of contract, this language of gift suggests immediate consummation as soon as the deed is written. Even ‘bequest’ suggests a diminution of rights for the bequeather, Faustus. (53)

Despite his vast education, Faustus does not see the impact of this distinction. Faustus’s later comments also indicate his belief in his soul as a commodity, declaring “I give it to thee,” underscoring Faustus’s belief in his soul as an object to be given (or traded) as needed (2.1.48). To Faustus, his blood is merely a means to an end, the material used in a trade to make his dominion to stretch “as far as doth the mind of man” (1.1.61). So that Lucifer and Faustus have the security that each will receive what they desire, more than a spiritual “giving over” of the soul, it’s a formal exchange of goods and services. Just as Bishop investigates and concludes for medieval blood, Faustus’s blood is such as substance to connect body, mind, and soul, and it

could act as a substitute for any and all of one's personhood.³⁷ To ensure that the deed would indeed provide Faustus's soul at the end of the allotted time, Faustus must take his blood intentionally.³⁸

As Faustus cuts his arm to write the deed, his comments express the significance of using his physical blood. This reinforces previously discussed scholarly economic and theological understandings. Faustus declares, "I cut mine arm, and with my proper blood / Assure my soul to be great Lucifer's" (2.1.53-55). It is not any blood from any wound, but Faustus's blood specifically drawn by Faustus to prove his devotion and confirm his deal with Lucifer. With his words, Faustus appears to transfer authority over his soul to Lucifer through his blood. With his physical actions, Faustus transforms Mephistopheles's demands into deliberate action and a physical stand in for his soul.³⁹ From then on, every time the deed is referred to, Mephistopheles and the spectator understand blood to be a secondary indicator for Faustus's soul. Sugg comments, "for early modern medicine, [blood] is the carrier of the spirits, which themselves

³⁷ Please see pages 14-15 of this document for more detailed statements concerning blood and the humors and their connection with the mind, body, and soul in material form.

³⁸ Levine notes quite astutely, "the devils keep requiring new, increasingly material iterations of his promise. It must be written. It must be written in blood. It must be written in heated ('cleared') blood because the flowing blood has congealed. One might imagine that as the devils get the better of him, as Mephistopheles rewrites the agreement both to include new conditions and to free the devils of obligations, the need for reiteration would diminish. But the vow keeps having to be made over and over again, as if each previous iteration were insufficient or as if the repetition itself were what the devils were after. Why does the promise have to be repeated again and again? And why do the devils require it to take an increasingly material form?... That the devils in *Faustus* require not only the reiteration of Faustus' promise but also for it to take an increasingly material form, both in writing and in blood, reflects the need for visible observable evidence of what goes on in the human mind. That they require Faustus to promise again and again suggests both an anxiety about the 'force' of a promise as an act (a speech act) as well as a set of evolving legal strategies designed to quell that anxiety. The need for repetition of the promise and the demand for visible 'proof' of its existence alike suggest an insecurity about whether a promise like Faustus's can really have force" (55).

³⁹ Even in one of Marlowe's contemporary literary texts, *The Historie of the damnable life and deserved death of Doctor Iohn Faustus* translated by P.F. (1592) cites that Faustus "should giue himselfe to his Lorde *Lucifer*, body and soule. Secondly, for confirmation of the same, he should make him a writing, written in his owne blood" (qtd. Palmer and More 141). Also, in a possible medieval source text, "The Legend of Theophilus From the Nativity of Our Lady," the Faustian character, Theophilus likewise sells his soul to the devil. The legend records "Then Theophilus, by commandment of the devil, denied God and his Mother, and renounced his Christian profession, and wrote an obligation with his blood" (Palmer and More 76). Clearly, the notion of a blood-pact was one that had severe and metaphysical consequences in both medieval and early modern theological thought.

bear the soul. Hence blood is closely bound up with both consciousness and will” (111). By intentionally taking his blood here, Faustus verbalizes his spiritual intention and its understood connection with his eternal soul. Also with his declaration and physical action, Faustus assures Mephistopheles that this intentionally spilled blood reflects and acts as a substitute for Faustus’s person, and most importantly that Faustus believes in blood’s metonymic power to be contiguous with his soul.

Performing what appears to be a very formal action, even ritualistic, Faustus draws blood and writes the deed. Even though the ritual seems straightforward enough, Faustus’s comments on his bodily reactions further complicate this act, adding signs of medical significance to this discussion. Faustus notes the physical reaction of his blood when it congeals. He remarks, “But Mephistopheles, / My blood congeals, and I can write no more” (2.1.61-62). This statement also indicates Faustus’s degree of knowledge of medicine and the relationship between blood and the humors.⁴⁰ It is to be expected because Faustus alludes to his knowledge of Galenic medicine in the opening lines of the play. But here, this line is of particular importance because of the symbiotic relationship Galenic medicine purported between physical body and invisible soul. Because of early modern considerations equating the passions, humors, blood, and one’s person, care for the body was integral to care for the spirit. As Stephen Pender explains, all of these ideas were linked with one another in such ways that they would have been almost impossible to distinguish for an early modern audience. Pender notes, “The passions have an overweening influence on the ‘immediate Guardian’ of the body, the sensitive soul itself” (215).⁴¹ This

⁴⁰ Combined with humoral theory, as Sugg notes, “any literate person (and probably some of the illiterate) knew that the spirits were the hottest part of the blood...With that kind of irony in which Marlowe seems to have delighted Faustus uses his soul to sign away his soul. Those very hottest spirits of the blood most closely linked to the soul then seem to freeze in horror” (111-112).

⁴¹ In this instance, Pender is distinguishing Walter Charleton’s distinction between the rational soul and the sensitive soul in his work *Natural history of the passions* in 1674. Charleton believes and argues that man has two distinct souls, stating, “I have declared my assent to their opinion, who hold that in every individual Man, there are *two*

intrinsically links the early modern understanding of medicine with religious considerations of the time, particularly as Faustus uses it. Instead of bloodletting for the purpose of balancing the humors, Faustus intentionally lets his blood and creates an imbalance in his mind, body, and soul. Because blood is the vessel of the passions, understanding the relationship between blood and soul transforms the exchange. Now, it is not only an economic trade of theological significance, it is a symbolic exchange of items that are powerful in visceral and formidable ways. This commentary demonstrates the early modern understanding of the inextricable link of the mind, body, and soul in physical terms. Faustus's blood houses his will, comes from his physical body, and carries his eternal soul. Besides its status as a substance of medical, economic, and theological significance, blood's natural congealing reveals other possible interpretations.

When Faustus indicates blood's power a few lines later, it also reveals his own psychological reaction to his blood's coagulation and its seeming agency in hindering this ritualistic act. Faustus questions,

What might the staying of my blood portend?
Is it unwilling I should write this bill?
Why streams it not, that I may write afresh:
'Faustus gives to thee his soul'?" Ah, there it stayed!
Why shouldst thou not? Is not thy soul thy own? (2.1.64-68)

Faustus seemingly equates his blood not only with himself and his intentions, but directly with his soul. By this time in history, "congeal" was already a well-known word.⁴² Despite the "staying of blood" having a straightforward explanation, this exchange not only has blood

distinct *Souls*, coexistent, conjoined, and cooperating; one, only *Rational*, by which he is made a Reasonable creature; the other, *Sensitive*, by virtue whereof he participateth also of Life and Sense" (sig. A5^v). While it was written later than *Doctor Faustus*, these beliefs concerning blood's interactions with the mind and soul were clearly present and persisted beyond Marlowe's time.

⁴² According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "congeal" was first used as early as 1393 and was defined as, "To convert, by freezing, from a fluid or soft to a solid and rigid state, as water into ice; to freeze" (1a). Specifically relating to blood, "congeal" was used as early as 1400 and defined: "To make (a liquid) viscid or jelly-like; to stiffen, curdle, clot, coagulate (esp. the blood; often in fig. sense: cf. curdle v. 3b)" (Def. 3).

functioning seemingly as the image of Faustus's soul, but also as a secondary indicator of Faustus's psychological resolve and attitude. Instead of openly examining his resolve, Faustus chooses to question why his blood would actively resist him and his authority over his soul. In this moment, Faustus fails to recognize the inseparable connection Mephistopheles alluded to when he commanded that Faustus "bind thy soul" with his blood. Jennifer Waldron introduces a surprising idea, that perhaps Faustus imagines the blood congealing and that is indicative of a different presence onstage, even if not seen or indicated in the script. She states, "the moment when Faustus's blood seems to resist being instrumentalized for demonic purposes carries the weight of contemporary claims on the body as a demonstration of God's lawful magic" (94). Blood, in its liminal state, appears open to the intercession of others. While Faustus intended to use the blood only for Lucifer's wishes, God appears to step in, albeit momentarily, and enacts a divine power over Faustus's blood. Although the sign of the congealing blood may have indicated God's will to prevent Faustus from committing an unforgivable sin, God ultimately allows Faustus's free will to take back control of the situation. Faustus circumvents this momentary setback, reasserts his agency, and again commands his blood, "Then write again 'Faustus gives to thee his soul'" (2.1.69).⁴³ Regardless of the greater powers seemingly vying for Faustus's soul, Faustus refuses to allow the momentary congealing to influence his intention and proceeds, completing the ritual. He forces his congealing blood to flow again in order to finish writing the deed, foregoing any other possible paths to achieving his goals. But perhaps more importantly, this moment may indicate Faustus's own deep-seated reluctance to finish writing this deed.

⁴³ Ryan Curtis Friesen argues that Lucifer's magic also has power over Faustus. He states, "By drawing his own 'proper blood' and binding his own soul (2.1.53-4), Faustus is compelled by his devil to perform magic on himself; he conjures and imprisons his own soul by the action of his will, which repeatedly imperils itself in the pursuit of new experiences and compelling spectacles" (Friesen 106). This further complicates the audience's understanding both of the power of Faustus's actions and what he uses to enact his ignoble magic.

Even though Faustus carries on and finishes the deed, this struggle intensifies immediately thereafter. Faustus states,

*Consummatum est;*⁴⁴ this bill is ended,
And Faustus hath bequeathed his soul to Lucifer.
But what is this inscription on mine arm?
“*Homo, fuge!*” Whither should I fly?
If unto God, he’ll throw me down to hell.
My senses are deceived; here’s nothing writ.
I see it plain; here in this place is writ
“*Homo, fuge!*” Yet shall not Faustus fly. (2.1.73-80)

By far, this statement communicates the most complex and significant signs of psychological, theological, and economic/legal importance. Faustus recalls the image of the physical deed once again with his use of the word “bequeath.” This reminds Faustus and the reader of the economic and legal significance of this moment. Faustus again insists on considering his soul a commodity. In addition, Faustus’s perception of the visible words on his arm and his reaction denote different layers of meaning. Although Kenneth L. Golden argues that the “indeterminacy of Faustus’ consciousness is illustrated in the scene soon *after* the signing of the contract when he questions Mephistophilis about hell,” Faustus’s reaction signals that psychological indeterminacy happens during and immediately after the writing process (emphasis mine, 204). By stating, “My senses are deceived; here’s nothing writ,” Faustus knows the writing on his arm (presumably in his blood) is an illusion. Despite this knowledge, Faustus’s continued comments concerning their presence signify that Faustus may not be as internally determined as he seems; however, his comments also suggest that Faustus sees no alternative to his actions. He has completed an inversion of Christ’s redemptive promise, exchanging his blood and soul.

⁴⁴ From Latin, this translates to “It is finished;” a clear Biblical allusion to Christ’s death on the Cross. In John 19:30, immediately before his death on the Cross, “When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

Now that his contract is complete, Faustus seems to understand the physical manifestation to indicate the spiritual ramifications of his earthly actions. His blood, taken from his body as a substitute for his soul, is attached to a permanent and tangible object. Even though his physical body is communicating what Faustus must do to save his soul, Faustus here rejects any possibility of God's forgiveness, and he shows no remorse for inverting Christ's redemptive shedding of blood on the Cross. Now Faustus only sees his blood as and its attachment to the legal deed as a marker of theological significance. While Christ's blood shed on the Cross signified the end of sinners' automatic damnation to hell and ending the need to sacrifice blood for salvation, Faustus's declaration indicates his belief in the inevitability of his fate.⁴⁵

Although Faustus verbally suggests that his blood would act only as a place-marker for his soul, his commentary, as well as considerations of early modern understandings of theology, medicine, and economics, signifies that his blood serves a far more complex purpose. More importantly, this latest exchange signifies that Faustus has abandoned the knowledge needed to interpret and apply it. It is not merely the ink used to write away Faustus's soul, but instead seems to be something more, silently urging Faustus to rethink his decisions as it congeals and gives him time to reconsider his actions and their consequences.⁴⁶ Despite this urging, Faustus only considers his blood, now attached to the deed, to be metonymic for his soul. In his mind, Faustus's body, blood, and spirit are now irredeemably tied together.

⁴⁵ In the Bible, the redemptive power of blood was first hinted at with Abraham's offering of Isaac as a sacrifice in Genesis 22, and it was finally necessary in Exodus 12 when the final plague would kill the firstborn son of every household. Only the blood of a Passover lamb on the doorway would save those inside.

⁴⁶ Historically, blood (or the likeness of blood) was used in writing to increase affect or authenticity. Martha Rust, in her article, "Blood and Tears as Ink: Writing the Pictorial Sense of the Text" (2013) discusses how medieval scribes would create a likeness of blood-ink in their texts to make particular visual connections with their reader, most often connecting with the reader's sensibilities concerning Christ's death on the Cross or the Passover.

As the action unfolds, Faustus ultimately submits to the terms of his deal with Lucifer and goes to hell, despite a lengthy and drawn-out conversation with an Old Man. When the Old Man enters, he states that Faustus must,

Break heart, drop blood, and mingle it with tears,
Tears falling from repentant heaviness
Of thy most vile and loathsome filthiness,
The stench whereof corrupts the inward soul
With such flagitious crimes of heinous sins
As no commiseration may expel
But mercy, Faustus, of thy Savior sweet,
Whose blood alone must wash away thy guilt. (5.1.39-46)⁴⁷

Alluding to Christ's sacrificial blood and its redemptive power, the Old Man indicates that Faustus must spill his blood once more, this time linking Faustus's blood with tears of repentance, highlighting blood as representative of or being Faustus's soul and a predictor for what Faustus's eternal life could be. Even though Faustus placed his soul and eternal life in jeopardy in the beginning of the play, redemption is possible with newly spilled blood. Instead of bloodletting to restore a body's physical balance, the Old Man proposes a spiritual bloodletting that brings redemption. Blood's theological significance is emphasized further when the Old Man invokes the saving power of Christ's blood. Even when Faustus is offered this redemption, he is unable to psychologically accept its possibility as he cries, "Where art thou, Faustus? Wretch, what hast thou done? / Damned art thou, Faustus, damned; despair and die!" (5.1.47-48). He refuses any possibility of salvation. And when Mephistopheles threatens Faustus and the prospect of abandoning their legally-binding deal, Faustus proclaims,

Sweet Mephistopheles, entreat thy Lord

⁴⁷ This is different from the B-Text, in which the Old Man states, "Though thou hast now offended like a man, / Do not persever in it like a devil. / Yet, yet thou hast an amiable soul, / If sin by custom grow not into nature. / Then, Faustus, will repentance come too late; / Then thou art banished from the sight of heaven" (5.37-42). Although there is no mention of blood, the Old Man's statement indicates Faustus's ability to repent and save himself from eternal damnation. This decidedly gives Faustus agency over his eternal fate and suggests that Faustus only has limited time to repent of his sinful actions before they put an irredeemable mark on his soul. While Faustus's previous actions certainly put his soul in jeopardy, salvation is still possible.

To pardon my unjust presumption,
And with my blood again I will confirm
My former vow I made to Lucifer. (5.1.70-73)

Once again directly invoking the deed made earlier in the play and his inversion and rejection of Christ's promise, Faustus confirms his promise to Mephistopheles and reenacts his previous ritual, offering his blood as a physical reminder to demonstrate his devotion. Despite yet more opportunities to let his blood undo what his blood originally promised, Faustus refuses even until the final moments before his descent into Hell.

As the play ends, Faustus continues to express his defeatist attitude, articulating his inability to enact any changes, to change any habits, or to change his fate. As the hour approaches for Faustus to descend into Hell, Faustus implores, "See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament! / One drop would save my soul, half a drop. Ah, my Christ! /... / Yet I will call on him. O, spare me, Lucifer!" (5.2.74-75, 77). Faustus now appears unable to enact any kind of action that would allow him to redeem himself or receive salvation. Even when he appears to want to cry out in repentance and ask for mercy, Faustus's own person seems to prevent himself. Waldron comments, "Faustus's subjection to the theater of God's judgments converges with his status as a character in Marlowe's play, and readings of these scenes turn on attempts to divine the intentions of both authors. The scholars tell Faustus to call on God, but Faustus feels that his offense cannot be pardoned (5.2.15)" (112). Faustus has determined he is incapable of receiving the saving power of Christ's blood. Though he recognizes the real power of Christ's blood, and therefore of God's power, he is unable to change. Faustus is thus dragged to Hell and reaps the consequences of his actions.

Perhaps the polysemous nature of these layers of signification reveals that *Faustus* is more than only a theological warning to those who, "wonder at unlawful things, / Whose

deepness doth entice such forward wits / To practice more than heavenly power permits,” or a commentary on the ethics of deal-making, as others have discussed (Epilogue.6-8). Faustus’s story illuminates early modern considerations of the innate connectedness of mind, body, and soul, and explores how a man so learned in so many disciplines fails to recognize their significance in his own body. Although *Doctor Faustus* is undoubtedly a cautionary tale, it also invites scrutiny for only considering blood for its theological significance. Despite its presence in concurrence with a physical object throughout most of the play, it was blood’s liminal connection between body and soul and Faustus’s determination to heighten that association above all others that sealed his fate. Blood understood as a purely metonymic substance for the soul limits not only Faustus’s abilities to respond and adapt to his changing circumstances but also blood’s true nature and function in the body.

Making a Spectacle: Horatio’s Bloody Body

Most likely performed earlier than *Doctor Faustus*, *The Spanish Tragedy* depicts blood’s significance in a different way. Diverging from Marlowe’s subtle presentation of blood on stage, Kyd creates a spectacle with Horatio’s material and bleeding body that he displays multiple times either through memory or physical presentation. This portrayal encourages specific discussion of bodily wounds and their impact on a soul and body, just as Doctor Faustus’s wound had an impact on his soul and body. Unlike Marlowe, Kyd emphasizes the influence that this spectacle has on other characters and their minds and bodies, particularly Hieronimo’s. Several scholars have studied Hieronimo’s actions following his encounter with the spectacle of his son’s body and linked these depictions to several topics, including humoral medicine, grief, the boundary between justice and revenge, the physical spectacle, Seneca, and language. Zackariah C. Long investigates the role of memory and how memory influences emotions and

actions; Molly Easo Smith contemplates the connections between the spectacle as seen on theatrical stages and in public executions; Heather Hirschfeld explores the psychotheology of Hieronimo's vengeful response to his son's dead body; Peter Sacks focuses his study on the role grief plays in enacting justice and revenge and how those ideas are communicated through particular choices in language; and Margaret Lamb examines how *The Spanish Tragedy* amalgamates Christian and Senecan ideas through particular choices in language.⁴⁸ As early modern drama continues to transform blood from a metonymic to metaphoric substance on stage, Horatio's bloody body and its repeated allusions and appearances influence both Hieronimo's actions and the significance by which blood was understood.

These discussions, when put in conversation with each other, emphasize the liminality of the theatrical space by connecting different facets of blood's cultural signifying power in the real world with its physical presentation in the pretended world of the theatre. Instead of approaching the threshold between symbolic readings of blood and the material and scientific by stressing the consequences for considering blood only as a theologically significant substance, as seen in *Doctor Faustus*, Kyd's depiction of blood challenges this threshold by equating blood with the mind. Through his presentation of blood as connected with a particular body throughout the narrative, Kyd examines the dangers of purely metonymic understandings of blood through his creation of hyperbole in Hieronimo's reaction to his son's violent death. Instead of one overcome with the metaphysical implications for his actions, as seen with Faustus, Hieronimo's continuous dissatisfaction with any promise of justice, heavenly or temporal, and constant obsession with his

⁴⁸ Zackariah C. Long investigates blood in *The Spanish Tragedy* in his article, "*The Spanish Tragedy* and *Hamlet*: Infernal Memory in English Renaissance Revenge Tragedy" (2014), Molly Easo Smith in her article, "The Theatre and the Scaffold: Death as Spectacle in *The Spanish Tragedy*" (2001), Heather Hirschfeld in her article, "'Conceived of Young Horatio His Son': *The Spanish Tragedy* and the Psychotheology of Revenge" (2010), Peter Sacks in his article, "Where Words Prevail Not: Grief, Revenge, and Language in Kyd and Shakespeare" (1982), and Margaret Lamb in her article, ". "Beyond Revenge: *The Spanish Tragedy*" (1975).

son's body overwhelms Hieronimo's every thought and action, propelling the play to its violent end.

When Horatio is first stabbed and hanged in the garden, the audience sees an image that is quite familiar that connects with their real world experiences. Molly Easo Smith juxtaposes the depiction of Horatio's hanging and stabbing to public punishment, specifically the scaffold. Smith comments, "The theatre and the scaffold provided occasions for communal festivities whose format and ends emerge as remarkably similar... the influence of the scaffold may also account for a general dramatic fascination with the spectacle of death evident throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries" (74). Spectacles of bodies being executed were particularly popular in Renaissance England. When these bodies were displayed on the stage, even though they were understood as fictional, the audience likely would have related the object of the staged body with real bodies they witnessed in public executions. Smith also notes, "The organisation of spectators around hangings and executions and in the theatres, and the simultaneous localisation of these entertainments through the construction of permanent structures, suggest the close alliance between these communal worlds in early modern England" (72). In addition to the presentation of similar events, the proximity and similarity between places of public executions and the theatrical spaces would help the early modern audience to likewise relate the events in each of these spaces to one another. Kyd's portrayal as a body hanged seemingly for acting contrary to those in power reinforces the relationship between real public execution and fictional representation.⁴⁹ In addition, Hieronimo's response to his son's body challenges the boundary of the theatrical space and forms another bridge between the fiction as told on stage and its influence on reality.

⁴⁹ Also, given the woodcut that appeared on the printed edition of the play, Horatio's hanged body seemed to be of primary concern to early modern printers and readers. Look to Appendix A.

Hieronimo, once he sees his son's dead yet still bleeding body, remarks on the spectacle. He observes, "But stay, what murd'rous spectacle is this? / A man hanged up and all the murderers gone" (2.5.9-10). Before he realizes that the bleeding body is that of his son, Hieronimo recognizes and voices the problematic nature of the scene he has discovered.⁵⁰ He further comments, "And in my bower, to lay the guilt on me: / This place was made for pleasure not for death" (2.5.11-12). Either interpreting this as a direct attempt to frame guilt or as an affront to his position, Hieronimo seems to believe that a certain degree of responsibility for what happened to this body has been placed on his shoulders because of his ownership of the garden, despite the placement of the body in a counterintuitive location.⁵¹ Instead of being a place intended as a site for death, it is one intended for the enjoyment of life. As Heather Hirschfeld notes, Kyd chooses to depict this event in a garden, "the emblem *par excellence* of both the paradise and death associated with the biblical Eden" (448). Just as Eden was a place of transformation for its inhabitants, Kyd transforms both the son and the father in his garden: the son from a living, breathing person on the stage to something to be regarded as an object, and the father from an arbiter of justice to a purveyor of vengeance.

As Hieronimo cuts down the body, he realizes that it is indeed his son. His realization marks "a vicious rupture and perversion of a miniature pastoral world" (Sacks 581). Instead of a

⁵⁰ Hirschfeld also notes that "Hieronimo, albeit obliquely, assumes blame for the hanging body from the moment he sees it, and such an assumption is only augmented when he recognizes the body and his son's" (444-45). The idea of assuming and assessing blame, while incredibly interesting in this moment, will be discussed in greater detail later in the paper.

⁵¹ Hirschfeld also comments on the significance of Hieronimo's first remarks and how that sense of responsibility permeates the action of the play, and how it appeals to the early modern audience. She remarks, "For Hieronimo's initial reaction to the hanging body – that he might somehow be, or seem to be, responsible for it – hints at a deep, inchoate connection between the avenger's quest to right a wrong done to him or his family and his own abiding sense of guilt and shame. The dramatic presentation of this sense of personal sinfulness (inculcated by centuries of religious teaching and freshly re-imagined in the wake of sixteenth-century Reformation doctrinal change) in terms of a dynamic, honor-bound struggle to restore oppressed justice, was part of the revenge drama's great appeal to Elizabethan playgoers and part of its great contribution to the development of the Elizabethan stage. Kyd's tragedy sustains the connection through a protagonist whose efforts to avenge his son's murder are designed to punish himself as much as the murderers" (Hirschfeld 444).

place of peace, Hieronimo has to cut down this body and inspect it as blood appears to seep from the wounds. Hieronimo implores the body of his dead son,

O speak, if any spark of life remain:
I am thy father. Who hath slain my son?
What savage monster not of human kind
Hath here been glutted with thy harmless blood,
And left thy bloody corpse dishonored here
For me, amidst this dark and deathful shades,
To drown thee with an ocean of my tears? (2.5.16-23)

Hieronimo not only connects the moral implications of what he witnessed to his own grief, but also stresses the physicality of the body placed before him. First, his observations indicate that the body at this moment has no sign of life, despite his desperate pleas. Even though this would have been an actor on the stage playing Horatio, Hieronimo's plea indicates to the audience that they should ignore any accidental movement, that they should consider the body as being dead in the theatrical space. Hieronimo also emphasizes the appearance of blood and dispenses judgment on those who would end life and dispose of a body in such a manner. Evoking the idea that his son was "harmless" or innocent, Hieronimo determines that one who would spill his son's blood in this manner and in this place is not just one who committed a crime but is a "savage monster," one separate from and lesser than humanity. As a result, Hieronimo states his personal offense to this crime much more explicitly and expresses his astonishment that one would dishonor him in this manner. It is no longer merely an affront to the garden, but something left specifically to punish Hieronimo for his sins. In this moment, as Lamb puts it, "Hieronimo... [falls] from innocence into a void," a void of grief in which all of his beliefs no longer hold true (37).

Diverging from the molds of English medieval drama and in Seneca, in which "values assumed at the beginning are proved to endure at the end... Hieronimo learns what he never dreamed, and

the world turns upside down” (37).⁵² And with his world changing in this way, witnessing Horatio’s bloody body transforms Hieronimo as he links his son’s blood with his need for revenge.

As Isabella enters, Kyd draws attention to both the physical presence of this bleeding body and the emotional and moral impact on those around it. Smith notes that “Kyd’s play thus presents death in vivid detail and follows this up with an elaborate scene of discovery in which both Hieronimo and Isabella identify Horatio’s corpse” (79). Beyond that identification, Hieronimo and Isabella also care for the corpse, challenging the threshold between fiction and reality as the two parents move the corpse of their child and mourn his loss. Instead of grief, as Isabella exhibits, Hieronimo turns to rage. As he contemplates his son’s body, Hieronimo observes and promises:

Seest thou this handkerchief besemeared with blood?
It shall not from me till I take revenge.
Seest thou those wounds that yet are bleeding fresh?
I’ll not entomb them till I have revenged:
Then will I joy amidst my discontent;
Till then my sorrow never shall be spent. (2.5.51-56)

Aligning with early modern depictions of murders, Hieronimo also passes moral judgment on those who murdered his son, and promises vengeance. And in this declaration, Hieronimo takes a token for which to remind him of his new purpose in life: a handkerchief stained with his son’s freshly-spilled blood. This physical marker thus works in conjunction with Horatio’s bleeding body. Even as the body is physically removed from the garden, the blood-stained handkerchief and the bloody body serve as a metonymic and physical talisman for Hieronimo’s transformed

⁵² As we famously see in *Doctor Faustus*, even though the morality play is altered, Christian values are consistent throughout the entire play.

outlook and purpose in life.⁵³ Throughout the play, Hieronimo equates and substitutes both the handkerchief and Horatio's dead body with his failure as a father and his vengeful purpose.

As Hieronimo continues to come to terms with the death of his son, he contemplates the correct course of action. As he reflects, he directly addresses a higher power. He questions:

O sacred heavens, if this unhallowed deed,
If this inhuman and barbarous attempt,
If this incomparable murder thus
Of mine—but now no more my son—
Shall unrevealed and unrevengèd pass,
How should we term your dealings to be just,
If you unjustly deal with those that in your justice trust? (3.2.6-11)

Because the heavenly powers seem unwilling to either recognize or revenge the “unhallowed deed,” Hieronimo no longer feels justified in trusting the system of justice, the system that he served and expected to serve him. Hieronimo reveals both his rejection of heavenly motivations and the extent his own guilt concerning his son's murder. And with this murder, Hieronimo also acknowledges the change in status for his son's body. Even though he has chosen to keep it until it has been avenged, the body is “now no more” Hieronimo's son. The blood that was emphasized as his son's in the previous scene now only exists on the handkerchief, which Hieronimo takes as a metonymic token. The body is an empty vessel for his son's person, a life taken too soon and unjustly. As Hirschfeld comments, “The injustice of which Hieronimo accuses the heavens is informed by his perception of his place at the font of his child's mortality” (451). Assuming responsibility for his son's death, Hieronimo questions his understanding of justice and its implementation in his life. Not only does Hieronimo alter his perception of justice, but he also experiences other bodily and psychological changes. Zackariah C. Long posits, “once Horatio dies, the feelings Hieronimo attaches to him and the world change from joy to sadness.

⁵³ Hieronimo directs Isabella, “now let us take him up, / And bear him in from out this cursèd place” (2.5.64-65). Even though the body is removed from the scene, Hieronimo states that the body will not be buried and put to rest until he has his revenge.

This reversed affect then circulates throughout Hieronimo and his environment in a neatly defined progression, as the grief and anger that Hieronimo feels within him become externalized in his surroundings” (157). No longer will Hieronimo act within the system, but instead create justice as he sees fit. Hieronimo is irrevocably changed in mind, body, and spirit; and his changed nature circulates throughout his body.

Even though Horatio’s body is not physically present, the image of his son’s corpse continues to haunt Hieronimo’s beliefs and actions. Continuing his lament, Hieronimo declares:

The night, sad secretary to my moans,
With direful visions wakes my vexèd soul,
And with the wounds of my distressful son
Solicits me for notice of his death.
The ugly fiends do sally forth of hell,
And frame my steps to unfrequented paths,
And fear my heart with fierce inflamèd thoughts.
The cloudy day my discontents records,
Early begins to register my dreams,
And drive me forth to seek the murderer. (3.2.12-21)

Hieronimo’s mind is overcome with images of his son’s bleeding body. Even though he verbally links this response to demons from hell, Hieronimo’s focus on his heart’s power to determine his actions indicate the direct relationship between Horatio’s wounds had on Hieronimo’s heart, as well as the influence strong emotions have on the physical body. Long argues, “When aroused by a concupiscible emotion, the heart expands rather than contracts, and instead of gathering humors around itself it propels them outward to the rest of the body to ready it for action... in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Kyd foregrounds the affective dimension of infernal memory by making Hieronimo’s heart the corporeal locus of his suffering” (163-64). Given the heart’s understood function in the body according to humoral medicine, the “fierce inflamèd thoughts” that plague Hieronimo’s heart appear to change his very nature, driving him toward his vengeful purpose.

Helped along by the discovery of Bel-Imperia's letter, he is overcome with the belief of the justice to be found in his vengeance.⁵⁴

After he creates a plan to ascertain the truth of Bel-Imperia's letter, Hieronimo meets Bazulto, a fellow father to a wrongfully-killed son. Bazulto tells Hieronimo his story, and Hieronimo feels a sense of comradeship, looking to comfort Bazulto as he becomes overcome with grief. Hieronimo states,

Here, take my handkercher and wipe thine eyes,
Whiles wretched I in thy mishaps may see
The lively portrait of my dying self.
He draweth out a bloody napkin.
O no, not this: Horatio this was thine,
And when I dyed it in thy dearest blood,
This was a token 'twixt thy soul and me
That of thy death revengèd I should be. (3.13.83-89)

Hoping to comfort Bazulto, Hieronimo offers him a handkerchief. Unfortunately, Hieronimo seems to have forgotten the token he took, and reveals yet another image to remind him of his own grief. Hieronimo also draws the only direct link between blood and soul in this passage, reminiscent of Faustus's deed. Faustus's blood on the deed serves as a substitute until Faustus fulfills his promise of eternal damnation, and Horatio's blood on the handkerchief is likewise a substitute for his soul. This presentation does not share the religious connotations of Faustus's blood, but instead is the very substance that exists between and connects father and son. And now the handkerchief has the only connective device left on earth to bind Hieronimo and Horatio – family blood. The handkerchief and Horatio's blood once again exerts its power over

⁵⁴ It is also important to note is that Bel-Imperia wrote her letter in blood. In the letter, Bel-Imperia names Lorenzo and Balthazar as those responsible for Horatio's murder. After he reads the letter, Hieronimo ponders his next steps, stating, "Dear was the life of my beloved son, / And of his death behoves me be revenged: / Then hazard not thine own, Hieronimo, / But live t'effect thy resolution. / Therefor will by circumstances try / What I can gather to confirm this writ, / And, hark'ning near the Duke of Castile's house, / Close if I can with Bel Imperia / To listen more ,but nothing to bewray" (3.2.44-52). Although Hieronimo does not explicitly trust the complete truth of the letter sent to him, he is eager to confirm the information and continue his investigation.

Hieronimo's mind as his changed nature is remembered and restored. The grief of his dead son is forgotten, and the promise of revenge is renewed.

As Hieronimo continues to talk with Bazulto, his rejection of any heavenly justice or intervention becomes even more apparent.⁵⁵ In his declarations of intent, Hieronimo demonstrates the extent of his madness, "Though on this earth justice will not be found, / I'll down to hell, and in this passion / Knock at the dismal gates of Pluto's court," in order to obtain the tools needed for his vengeance (3.13.108-110). Instead of invoking the heavenly forms of law and order, Hieronimo insists that he is going to rely on mythological beings to enforce his version of justice, something that now includes explicit torture (an experience Hieronimo explicitly works to avoid at the end of the play).⁵⁶ Once again, Hieronimo emphasizes the influence and power that his bodily passion (humors) have in supporting his quest for vengeance. He knows that nowhere in reality can he find the justice he seeks, and thus feels compelled to forego normal channels. This break from culturally acceptable channels continues to manifest as Hieronimo continues to break from reality, resulting in his hallucination of his son during this meeting with Bazulto and his final plan to fulfill his vengeful urges.

After Hieronimo's successful ruse and Lorenzo and Balthazar have been stabbed, Hieronimo reveals the truth behind the actions as portrayed in the fake-play and displays his dead son's body for the King and Viceroy. Bringing Horatio's body back on stage, Hieronimo

⁵⁵ Kara Mollway Russell states, "Hieronimo's madness retains much of the iconic aspects of his medieval predecessors; while he does not run about the stage in pastoral attire, he does contemplate the idea in an impassioned soliloquy replete with Senecan imagery" (84). Kyd appears to use this element from Senecan tragedy to connect with his predecessors as the action approaches its bloody end.

⁵⁶ Hieronimo declares that he is going to get "by force, as once Alcides did, / A troop of Furies and tormenting hags / To torture Don Lorenzo and the rest" in order to achieve his vengeance as completely as possible (3.13.111-13). For a more specific discussion of torture and how it is discussed and depicted in *The Spanish Tragedy*, see Timothy A. Turner's article, "Torture and Summary Justice in *The Spanish Tragedy*" (2013).

presents the body to his fellow fathers (now fathers to likewise dead sons).⁵⁷ Insisting that he has reason behind his actions, Hieronimo declares:

See here my show, look on this spectacle:
Here lay my hope, and here my hope hath end;
Here lay my heart, and here my heart was slain;
Here lay my treasure, here my treasure lost;
Here lay my bliss, and here my bliss bereft;
But hope, heart, treasure, joy, and bliss
All fled, failed, died, yea all decayed with this.
From forth these wounds came breath that gave me life;
They murdered me that made these fatal marks. (4.4.89-97)

Emphasizing the spectacle that he has created, Hieronimo draws attention to the close connection he and his son shared. Instead of relating the body to his son's injuries, Hieronimo directly relates his hope, heart, treasure, and bliss with the spectacle of his son's wounded body. All of these things were killed with Horatio's death. Instead of being symbolic of these things, Hieronimo creates relationships of metonymy in which Horatio's body is contiguous with his hope, heart, treasure, and bliss. Horatio's body is not merely a body, but an embodiment of these things. Hieronimo's belief in these substitutions not only links blood and the body with humoral medicine, but also all of the items that make Hieronimo's life worth living. The loss of blood in his son's wounds caused the death of who he is. As Hieronimo continues his soliloquy, the transformational power remains paramount of the discovery of Horatio's body. Hieronimo's interpretation of Horatio's wounded (and very likely blood-stained) body leaves no room for any other action besides that which he has taken. Guilt and sorrow for his son's death and the need for revenge has overshadowed every hope, belief, and intention of Hieronimo's character.

⁵⁷ Curiously, blood is not mentioned in reference to either of these two deaths – only Horatio's blood is mentioned, much less discussed multiple times throughout the play.

Hieronimo, in his description concerning how he discovered his son's body, calls attention to the heinous act, his son's fatal wounds, and the transformative power of the spectacle. He narrates:

There merciless they butchered up my boy
In black, dark night to pale, dim, cruel death.
He shrieks, I heard—and yet methinks I hear—
His dismal outcry echo in the air.
With soonest speed I hasted to the noise,
Where hanging on a tree I found my son,
Through-girt with wounds, and slaughtered as you see.
And grieved I, think you, at this spectacle? (4.4.106-13)

Hieronimo, using the term “spectacle” in his description of the scene, demonstrates the emotional trauma he experienced and continues to relive in his memory. Continuing to experience his trauma, Hieronimo's likely madness is displayed with his reference to still hearing his son's shrieks. Also referring to Horatio's murderers as “butchers” and his son as one who was “slaughtered,” Hieronimo paints the image of his son as innocent or harmless and those who killed him as brutal and ruthless. Instead of being treated with the respect and dignity of a justified death, Horatio suffered a death as an animal at the hands of unskilled and dishonorable butchers.

Hieronimo's narrative then turns toward his vengeful plan and the transformation his body and mind underwent as a result of the traumatic experience. He continues:

And here behold this bloody handkerchief,
Which at Horatio's death I weeping dipped
Within the river of his bleeding wounds:
It as propitious, see I have reserved,
And never hath it left my bloody heart
Soliciting remembrance of my vow
With these, o these accursed murders—
Which now performed, my heart is satisfied. (4.4.121-29)

Explicitly drawing attention to the blood present on the stage, Hieronimo reminds the audience of the continual presence and significance of the bloody handkerchief throughout the play. Now referring to his son as spilling a “river” of blood from his wounds, Hieronimo also connects this event as one that would never leave his own memory and heart. His comments also remind the audience of the power his heart had in determining his perspective and actions. Instead of mimicking Faustus’s inversion of Christ’s vow, Hieronimo employs Eucharistic language to buttress his vow to seek justice for his son’s violent death. Also, for the first time, Hieronimo refers to his heart as the very part of his body that enforces remembrance of his vow. While Hieronimo locates blood’s anatomical home correctly in the body with his reference to his heart as “bloody,” his declaration shows his belief that blood in the heart is the home of vows more than anything else—that the intentions of the mind creates physical manifestations and determines bodily function. Now, with the completion of his revenge, the heat from Hieronimo’s heart has dissipated, and he feels no qualms striving to end his life.

Despite his clearly questionable actions, Hieronimo’s justifications demonstrate his inability to escape the power witnessing his son’s spilled blood had over his mind. Throughout the play, Hieronimo returns to that image whether it is through some kind of vision, as he appears to see or experience at various points in the play, or through the physical token of the bloody handkerchief. It encompasses his waking and unconscious thoughts, preventing any kind of spiritual refuge to take hold. There would be no possible redemption for anyone involved because the only blood Hieronimo considers elevated enough is Horatio’s spilled and remembered throughout the play. This renders blood both extremely powerful in condemning those culpable in Horatio’s death (either Lorenzo/Balthazar as intentional murders or Bel-imperia/Isabella/Hieronimo as those who felt they could or should have protected him) and

utterly powerless in its lack of spiritual saving grace. Smith observes, “Horatio’s gruesome murder in the arbour remains the centerpiece; we come back to it again and again through Hieronimo’s recounting of it, and as if to reiterate its centrality, the playwright exploits the value of the mutilated body as spectacle by holding Horatio’s body up to view either literally or metaphorically several times in the course of the play” (76). Because this image is depicted over and over in the same way, the audience has little choice but accept the power that this liminal object has in challenging a strictly symbolic view of blood, for it had a real and perceptible influence on Hieronimo’s mental state and future action.

Concluding Thoughts

I have argued that both of these works question the manner in which early modern culture considered blood as the great connector of the mind, body, and spirit. While *Doctor Faustus* challenges the merit of considering blood primarily for its theological significance and its power over one’s soul, *The Spanish Tragedy* confronts the nebulous power blood purports to have over the mind. Both plays localize blood from a particular body; and as a result, the manner in which blood is spilled becomes paramount in determining its primary significance. By rendering blood and blood-stained objects as metonymic substitutes for the soul or mindful intention, both of these works confront the cultural power blood maintains when represented in these fictional settings and determine what should be applied and considered real and what needs to stay in the realm of fiction. Even though *Doctor Faustus* does not explicitly warn against abandoning multi-disciplinary knowledge, an audience might consider more carefully the manner in which they make life-altering deals and consider the value of their soul. Likewise, *The Spanish Tragedy* depicts a man who loses himself in a quest for vengeance, but also gives a voice to those who suffer from traumatic experiences and illustrates the formidable power blood maintains when

visible both on the body from whence it came and on a tangible object. By taking elements from their precursors and modifying them to fit the needs of their audiences, Kyd and Marlowe present individuals who exaggerate blood's symbolic power when rendering it visible. These visible renderings allow them and their audiences to forego the metaphysical or supernatural significance of blood and focus on the significance blood has in their social structures, something Shakespeare addresses in his depictions and use of a bloody handkerchief in *I Henry VI* and *As You Like It*.

Chapter 3 – Bloody Cloths: Shakespeare’s Bloodstain’d Handkerchiefs

Historically, the handkerchief may have served as a ceremonial love token, but its presence may also change the perceptions of the characters, how the audience understands the characters, and the plot. In these two works, the main characters ascribe different agencies to the handkerchief.⁵⁸ In *As You Like It*, Rosalind’s brief encounter with a handkerchief alters her perception, and the event serves as a turning point for her character and the characters surrounding her. Complicating matters further, in *3 Henry VI* Margaret’s vengeful presentation of a blood-stained handkerchief to the Duke of York demonstrates the political charge of particular blood. Both plays portray the blood-stained handkerchief as a liminal object that is both the character whose blood stains it (functioning as metonymy similar to the selections in the previous chapter), but also separate from that character and signifies the bond of family (functioning as metaphor, something complementary to the ideas and objects juxtaposing its presence onstage). Even though a seemingly insignificant object, the handkerchief becomes fraught with meaning and highlights the impact of understanding these objects as metonymy and metaphor. These characters struggle to balance the significance of handkerchief as metonymy and of handkerchief as metaphor to varying effects. In turn, comprehending the signifying power complicates traditional understandings of characters in *As You Like It* and *3 Henry VI*, as well as the price to pay when interpreting blood both as metonymy and as metaphor.

The Handkerchief: A Historical and Cultural Context

Historically, the handkerchief was a relatively new artifact when these plays were first performed. The word “handkerchief” or “handkercher” is a combination of “kerchief” and

⁵⁸ The characters either allow it to stand in for someone or something or grant it power atypical for such an object. This uses two possible definitions for the word, which will be explained in more detail later in the paper.

“hand” respectively. Originating from Old French and Anglo-Norman roots, “kerchief” is recorded being used by 1325 as “a cloth used to cover the head, formerly a woman’s head-dress” (*OED* Def.1). Similarly, a “neckerchief” (a combination of “neck” and “kerchief” respectively) is recorded as early as 1384 and means “A kerchief worn about the neck; in later use esp. a square of cloth folded diagonally and fastened or tied around the neck” (*OED*). Sometime between these uses and 1530, when “Handkerchief” was first recorded, one can speculate that the primary uses (and perhaps size) of the object changed from a larger cloth used around the neck or head to a smaller object used by hands, thus necessitating a change in terminology.⁵⁹

“Handkerchief” is defined as “a small square of cotton, silk, or other material carried on the person and used for wiping the nose, hands, etc.; (formerly also) one worn on the head or around the neck” (*OED* Def. 1). Also closely associated with the handkerchief, the word “napkin,” first documented in 1384, may have also been used almost interchangeably with “handkerchief” at times. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines napkin as “A usually square piece of cloth, paper, etc., used at a meal to wipe the fingers and lips and to protect the clothes” (1a), “a handkerchief” (2a), or “A napkin or cloth for wiping the face” (3a). Though they may literally mean the same thing, the different uses of terminology may reveal different connotations. Because of the handkerchief’s or napkin’s relatively new nature, as Will Fisher states, “its social connotations and the rules governing its use were still in process of being defined” (201). With their use beginning in the more formal levels of society, handkerchiefs or napkins served as a ceremonial or practical object.

Women were expected to use kerchiefs to maintain their modesty, especially in holy places: a topic of debate for the early modern audience. For example, in 1587, John Bridges in

⁵⁹ Without any solid evidence from historical artifacts and finds, this conclusion, though founded on other trends of word creation, remains speculation.

his *Defence of the government in the Church of Englande* uses the example of the woman and her handkerchief to question the teachings of Calvin. He implores, “What? is there a religion consisting in a womans kerchiefe, that it were a wicked thing to come foorth bare headed?” (sig Gggg 2^V). Bridges concludes, “although it were but of a linen kercheife on a womans head, yet, (for publike order sake) he [Calvin] would not haue it contemned though vpon occasion nor necessitie it were omitted, so farre off was Cauine from this contemptuous likening of these smallest Ceremonies in the Church,” to many smaller and domestic tasks, attacking Calvin for his beliefs for promoting the kerchiefe’s necessity in the church. Bridges instead argues that it is not the clothing or lack thereof that women would wear to church, but instead the spirit in which a woman would go to church (sig Gggg 3). This signifies the kerchiefe’s growing obsolescence in early modern English culture, particularly in ceremonial circumstances.

Ceremonially, the handkerchief typically served as a love token. As Fisher notes, “Handkerchiefs were, of course, well-known tokens of love” (203). For example, Fisher cites a story about Queen Elizabeth and Leicester in 1565.⁶⁰ Since it was also a personal token of the Queen, Fisher notes that the handkerchief could serve as a physical stand-in, a true symbol of Queen Elizabeth’s purity and that Norfolk thought that Leicester was attempting symbolically to soil the Queen’s purity, claiming her as his future wife, before taking her virginity, if not hinting that he had already done so (203).⁶¹ This anecdote is not the only example in which exchanging a handkerchief indicates intent to marry. Diana O’Hara discusses the court case *Divers v. Williams*

⁶⁰ Apparently while Elizabeth was watching a tennis match, Leicester took one of the Queen’s handkerchiefs in order to wipe his own sweating brow. Because this was early in Queen Elizabeth’s reign and some had not accepted the ‘marriage to her nation,’ this event was significant to many. The Duke of Norfolk, also vying for Elizabeth’s hand, took this event much more seriously than others. Norfolk then reportedly threatened Leicester with bodily harm because he dared use the Queen’s handkerchief. To many at the time, this sharing of sweat signified the future exchange of bodily fluids on the marriage bed (Fisher 205).

⁶¹ Fisher addresses this story more directly and in more detail in his article, “Handkerchiefs and Early Modern Ideologies of Gender” (2000), particularly extending the cultural significance of Leicester’s obsession with the handkerchief, as well as the rivalry between Norfolk and Leicester for the Queen’s hand in marriage.

from 1596 documents the exchange of handkerchiefs as some of the tokens used in the courting process. The court case states, “of the goods of the said william dyvers [are] viii handcarchars a candlestick a chamberpott, in token of the said matrimonie betwene them” (qtd. O’Hara 2).⁶²

With its place as but one of the many tokens recorded in this case, the handkerchief may have had a ceremonial significance to the couple because of its early placement in the list. They also could have been considered, as Paul Yachnin states, “gentrified but unexotic love tokens in Shakespeare’s day” because there are so many other tokens recorded as part of this courtship (317). Also, because of its nature as a love token, as O’Hara states, it “constituted only ‘supportive evidence,’ and [was] seldom used as the sole, legitimate proof of a contract” (9). Because Shakespeare wrote about many different characters and the many different relationships that they have, the handkerchief, in its cultural, practical, and ceremonial functions, could serve as a flexible property that he could employ in his works.

Instead of the love token, as seen famously in *Othello*, Shakespeare fashions blood-stained versions of the handkerchief in a history play and comedy respectively. Despite this distance from acting as a conventional love token, the handkerchiefs in *3 Henry VI* and *As You Like It* resonate this purpose, connecting these blood-stained objects with loved persons. In addition, these works challenge the strictly metonymic understandings of blood, asking characters and audiences alike to question the accuracy and the utility of interpreting objects as substitutes for certain ideals and characters. By blending the metonymic and metaphoric signifying power of the blood-stained handkerchief, these plays ask audiences to consider blood as a physical substance as well as the culturally significant substance.

⁶² Note that it is but one of many love tokens given to Elizabeth Williams by William Divers, who claimed that these many tokens were proof of their intended and enacted marriage (O’Hara 1-4).

3 *Henry VI*: Margaret's Vengeful Token

Bloodshed abounds in Shakespeare's *3 Henry VI*. The culmination of the *Henry VI* trilogy, this play sees the beginning of the end of the War of the Roses. The Lancastrians and the Yorks continue their battles, with each blow becoming more and more bloody and brutal. While the family ties of bloodlines are consistently referenced, this play presents that tie in a visible and visceral manner in a transformational moment. Resulting from a changed loyalty and a broken heart, Queen Margaret presents the blood-stained handkerchief to York after having his son Rutland killed. In this moment, the audience and reader sees the height of the perils of warfare, as well as another example of a father's love for his son and the role blood plays in shaping that relationship or lack thereof.

The beginning of the play introduces a father/son pair for whom the bond of blood means little. In a startling decision, Henry decides to disinherit his son, Edward. Considering Henry's decision quite an unnatural act, Margaret admonishes her husband and the harsh decision he has made. She implores:

Hadst thou but loved him half so well as I,
Or felt that pain which I did for him once,
Or nourished him as I did with my blood,
Thou wouldst have left thy dearest heart-blood there,
Rather than have made that savage Duke thine heir
And disinherited thine only son. (*3H6* 1.1.221-26)

Margaret indicates blood as a substance of metonymic and metaphoric significance. Margaret references both the literal and real way in which her blood nourished Edward as he grew in her womb. Here, blood is contiguous and metonymic with life. Edward would not live without Margaret and her blood. Instead of honoring and cherishing that connection, as Hieronimo did, Henry VI does not even acknowledge the familial link as one complementary to his desires. In her accusations, she claims that even though he did not share the life-blood that she provided

Edward, Henry should share at least some resonance instead of giving the throne to another. Maurice Hunt underscores the unnaturalness of Henry's act during this time, stating that "Through Margaret's speech, Shakespeare focuses Henry's unnaturalness as a failure to feel a blood bond with kin forged by pain endured for that kin. Basically she tells him that he does not understand how or why he and Edward are one flesh, sharing the same blood" (149).⁶³ In stark contrast to the visceral feelings and actions that Hieronimo feels in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Shakespeare's rendition of this father/son relationship is quite the opposite. Henry VI appears completely incapable of understanding and uninterested in the bond of family, nor his wife's obsession with maintaining it.

After Margaret leaves the room, overcome with her frustration about her husband, Henry remarks on his interpretation of his actions. Instead of lamenting his wife's reaction, he hopes to use it against his enemies who have hurt his other kin. He muses:

Poor queen, how love to me and to her son
Hath made her break out into terms of rage.
Revenged may she be on that hateful Duke,
Whose haughty spirit, winged with desire,
Will cost my crown, and like an empty eagle
Tire on the flesh of me and of my son.
The loss of those three lords torments my heart. (*3H6* 1.1.265-71)

Henry hopes that Margaret will do what he so far has not. Unlike the rage Margaret feels on behalf of her son, Henry feels the torment in his heart for his lords. Even though, as Kathryn Schwartz notes, "Patriarchal history is designed to construct a verbal substitute for the visible physical connection between a mother and her children, to authenticate the relationships between

⁶³ Also important to the political dimension of the play, Kathryn Schwartz also underscores the importance of bloodlines and how Henry's actions cannot undo the royal line. Schwartz argues, "Margaret's intervention reanimates Henry's language of the unnatural, asserting that lines of blood cannot be broken by surrogacy and that inheritance is not a speech act" (234). Inheritance is an honor and duty bestowed by blood. In this sense, blood and bloodlines acts as metonymy for the right to rule, something incredibly important for those fighting during the War of the Roses.

fathers and sons and to suppress and supplant the role of the mother;” Henry shirks from this role and encourages Margaret’s rage to protect her child (229). In turn, as she seeks to protect her son’s royal position, Margaret’s obsession with family blood and the lack of those bonds in her family leads her to take vengeance against those who would seek to take the throne, namely York and his kin.

Margaret assumes control of the Lancastrian army and battles the Yorks in her husband’s place. After successfully capturing the Duke of York, Margaret both humiliates and tortures York with the handkerchief stained with the blood of his youngest son. In an impassioned speech, Margaret mocks:

Where are your mess of sons to back you now?
...
Or, with the rest, where is your darling Rutland?
Look, York: I stain'd this napkin with the blood
That valiant Clifford, with his rapier's point,
Made issue from the bosom of the boy;
And if thine eyes can water for his death,
I give thee this to dry thy cheeks withal. (*3H6* 1.4.73, 78-83)

Focusing on a father’s bond with his sons, Margaret’s speech hopes to break York in ways her husband refused to be moved. Margaret attaches this bond with a physical presentation of blood on a handkerchief. Not the blood spilt from any child, but the spilled blood of York’s youngest child that Hunt considers Margaret’s actions to be cruel in an unusual way. Hunt comments, “Margaret’s ‘mannish’ cruelty, regarded as unnatural in a woman, materializes...Sadistically she delays killing York so that she might see him pitiably cry over his loss” (151). Instead of a demonstration to accuse the guilty, Margaret’s actions openly mock and torture a captive as part of the spoils of war. Margaret also uses language connected with motherhood, that Rutland’s blood was “made issue” from his bosom. Rather than associating with the giving of life,

Margaret deals death to her enemy. With this liminal object, Margaret links Rutland's death metonymically with her successful vengeance.

As her speech continues, Margaret calls attention to the impact she endeavors to have on her enemy, as well as provide him with another object with which to recall his disgrace: a paper crown.⁶⁴ Despite York's immediate refusal to cry in the midst of her speech, Margaret continues on her crazed tirade. She declares,

What, hath thy fiery heart so parch'd thine entrails
That not a tear can fall for Rutland's death?
Why art thou patient, man? thou shouldst be mad;
And I, to make thee mad, do mock thee thus.
Stamp, rave, and fret, that I may sing and dance.
Thou wouldst be fee'd, I see, to make me sport:
York cannot speak, unless he wear a crown. (*3H6* 1.4.87-93)

By invoking the image of a fiery heart, Margaret expects to see a similar reaction to his son's death as Hieronimo exhibits. She expects York to be mad with grief over the loss of his son, that his heart would be so overtaken with his grief that even his entrails wouldn't receive the necessary blood. York is to treat the handkerchief as the object betwixt and between his political aspirations and the reality of his impending death. Margaret believes that York, like Hieronimo, would link the blood-stained handkerchief directly to his dead son and all of the lost opportunities his death represents and respond accordingly. When the handkerchief fails to have the desired effect on her captive, Margaret turns to a different object for its ceremonial charge and presents him with a faux crown to entice a response.

York, upon receiving the crown and handkerchief, reproaches Margaret for her heinous actions against a child and laments the death of his son. While York associates the handkerchief

⁶⁴ This object, while not stained with blood, also serves a semiotic function. Just as Margaret intends the blood-stained handkerchief to act as a substitute for all of York's now dead hopes and desires for his immediate family (as seen in *The Spanish Tragedy*), the paper crown is representative of York's seemingly defeated aspirations to take the Crown and become king.

with his son's taken life, he focuses more on Margaret's cruelty and how this object serves as a metaphor for Margaret's failure to act according to traditional maternal instincts. York admonishes:

That face of his the hungry cannibals
Would not have touch'd, would not have stain'd with blood:
But you are more inhuman, more inexorable,
O, ten times more, than tigers of Hyrcania.
See, ruthless queen, a hapless father's tears:
This cloth thou dip'dst in blood of my sweet boy,
And I with tears do wash the blood away. (3H6 1.4.152-58)

Opening his speech, York declares that not even cannibals would have committed a deed as monstrous as Margaret has in the murder of a child. Instead of the explicit metonymic relation Margaret attempts to draw with the handkerchief, the handkerchief combines metaphorically with Margaret and her inhumanity demonstrated by causing this kind of harm to a child. Hunt posits that "York's words imply that she has had to override this predisposition in order to dip her handkerchief in the blood of a slaughtered child so as terribly to taunt the father; in his despairing mind, she is no longer a woman or even an Amazon but an animal" (152). Even though Margaret's actions and mockery cause York to cry, York claims this action as one that washes away the blood of his son and is one that should cause Margaret to fret.⁶⁵ York even urges Margaret to keep the token, explaining that her actions will have a far more reaching effect

⁶⁵ This creates another curious parallel, connecting York's comments *Doctor Faustus*. At the end of the play, Faustus has the potential to wash away his sin with a new shedding of blood along with his tears. The Old Man implies that the combination of blood and tears of remorse would allow for Christ's redeeming blood to save his soul. Even though York understands the inevitability of his fate, he insists on the power of his tears combined with blood. Instead of its theological redemptive power, York invokes the social power the blood-stained handkerchief and his story will have on others. In addition to this correlation, other scholars have drawn connections between this moment and other Christian parallels. Hunt remarks, "Shakespeare invokes a Christian context that acts as a foil accentuating Margaret's bizarre sadism when playgoers realize that her bloody napkin is a blasphemous veronica and the paper crown she places on her victim's head a reminiscence of the callous crowning the of the King of the Jews pinioned not on a molehill (as in the play) but on Calvary" (152). Furthermore, David Bergeron discusses the parallels more specifically in his article, "The Play-Within-the-Play in *3 Henry VI*" (*Tennessee Studies in Literature*, 1977). Ultimately, even though Margaret insists on this mock coronation before the Duke of York's execution, the real social power lies not with the paper crown, but with the blood-stained handkerchief; and it is that ruthlessness in her approved murder of a child that seals her later fate.

than she could predict. York instructs Margaret, “Keep thou the napkin, and go boast of this: / And if thou tell'st the heavy story right, / Upon my soul, the hearers will shed tears” (3H6 1.4.159-61). York expects the story of Margaret’s actions to have a profound impact not only on York himself, but on anyone who hears the story. York continues, “Yea even my foes will shed fast-falling tears, / And say 'Alas, it was a piteous deed!’” (3H6 1.4.162-63). Despite Margaret’s attempt to force York to concede defeat, he remains defiant and sure that his enemies would even show sorrow and disdain for Margaret’s actions. This renders the handkerchief powerful not against York, but instead against Margaret because even York’s enemies would wash away his child’s blood from the handkerchief and unleash their fury against Margaret.

Immediately before his death, York rejects the metonymic power of the blood-stained handkerchief even further. Unlike his tragic predecessors, who had given their blood and blood-stained objects literal power over their minds, spirits, and bodies, York gives a different object greater cultural power—the crown intended to humiliate him. York declares:

There, take the crown, and, with the crown, my curse;
And in thy need such comfort come to thee
As now I reap at thy too cruel hand!
Hard-hearted Clifford, take me from the world:
My soul to heaven, my blood upon your heads! (3H6 1.4.164-68)

York invokes the crown to be the source of his curse. He understands that his death swiftly approaches and knows his soul to be at peace, despite the cruelty dispensed on him and his family. Although York claims that his tears were enough to wash away the guilt of his son’s death, he believes that his death will follow those responsible and that they will eventually reap what they sow. Rightly as York claims, by the end of the play, Margaret’s actions in this scene come back to haunt her as her young son is killed.

While Margaret is not provoked the same way she taunted York with the handkerchief, Margaret finds her son's body and laments at the implications of such a death. She cries,

O Ned, sweet Ned, speak to thy mother, boy.
Canst thou not speak? O traitors, murderers!
They that stabbed Caesar shed no blood at all,
Did not offend, nor were not worthy blame,
If this foul deed were by to equal it,
He was a man; this, in respect, a child,
And men ne'er spend their fury on a child. (*3H6* 5.5.51-57)

As she looks upon the bleeding body of her dead son, Margaret associates her son's unwarranted death with that of Caesar and that her child deserved at least that much dignity to be treated with the respect of a king. Despite Edward's political status as would-be king, Margaret declares that he is still a child and bared the burden only a man should have borne. Hunt comments,

By emphasizing the fact that Edward, Clarence, and Richard have killed a child, Margaret questions their manhood, implicitly redefining her own earlier idea of bloody masculinity. The York brothers join Clifford by performing an unnatural act – child murder. In one sense, of course, Margaret is getting her own due. ... now she must endure the spectacle of her own flesh and blood's murder. (162)

Margaret must endure the same pain she inflicted on York in the beginning of the play. Instead of being taunted with a physical marker of her son's death, she must gaze upon the body itself. She is afforded no substitute. Mirroring the language by which York referred to her actions, Margaret likewise calls to those who murdered her son: "Butchers and villains, bloody cannibals, / How sweet a plant have you untimely cropped" (*3H6* 5.5.61-62). No longer is an act of killing a child an appropriate mark of superiority to Margaret, but one that should be admonished in the harshest manner possible.

Despite its brief appearance, the blood-stained handkerchief, and the persons and ideas for which it substituted or symbolized shapes the manner in which various characters perceived their actions and purposes. While York is not overwhelmed with the connection the blood-

stained handkerchief maintained with his son, Margaret is overcome with the significance of blood throughout the play.⁶⁶ Her constant focus on the importance of family ties signified by blood helped to determine her actions as she sought revenge. Unfortunately, her obsession also seals her son's fate as the Richard, Duke of Gloucester (later becoming King Richard III) adopts her methods to accomplish his own revenge. Ultimately, Margaret's constant substitution and obsession with blood leads to her family's undoing and York's understanding of blood as metaphor helps his family to overlook its immediate connections and attain power once more.

As You Like It: Rosalind's Transformative Napkin

As You Like It likewise presents a blood-stained handkerchief as a means by which to depict family bonds. Unlike the unfortunate conclusion for Margaret's obsession with blood's metonymic significance, the characters in *As You Like It* challenge the boundary more readily between reading blood as metonymic and metaphoric. By the end of the play, the presentation of the blood-stained handkerchief both signifies the reconciliation of family ties and incites Rosalind's return to her proper state to facilitate the play's comedic conclusion.

In the beginning of the play, Rosalind and Orlando are each presented with separate, yet equally devastating issues long before the handkerchief appears. Introduced first to Orlando, the audience realizes the problematic relationship between him and his brother, Oliver. Though Oliver is the older brother and uses his power to limit Orlando's education as a gentleman, Orlando refuses to let him forget their biological connection, and the play's first reference to blood (an idea of great importance later when Oliver presents the blood-stained handkerchief to Rosalind). Orlando declares to Oliver that "The courtesy of nations allows you my better, in that you are the first-born; but the same tradition takes not away my blood, were there twenty

⁶⁶ This is similar to the manner in which Lady Macbeth is overcome with the blood on her hands as she realizes the significance of her actions.

brothers betwixt us. I have as much of my father in me as you” (*AYL* 1.1.43-47). This antagonism leads Oliver to plot Orlando’s death in various ways (first at the hands of Charles the wrestler; and when Orlando wins, then plots to kill Orlando himself), causing Orlando and Adam to flee into the Forest of Arden.⁶⁷ Rosalind and Celia likewise flee into the Forest of Arden to escape Celia’s father, Duke Frederick, who has usurped Rosalind’s father’s throne (Duke Senior and Frederick’s brother) and banishes Rosalind.⁶⁸ Once Rosalind and Celia flee and decide on disguises for their protection, Rosalind becomes Ganymede, Jove’s page, and Celia becomes Aliena, Ganymede’s female cousin.⁶⁹ After Rosalind and Orlando meet again, Rosalind begins love lessons with him and the relationship develops, based on earlier declarations of intense attraction or love.⁷⁰ Though Orlando is not always punctual to these love lessons, the one time he is inconceivably late, Oliver reenters the stage and, obviously a changed man, delivers the handkerchief and dramatically transforms the tone of the play. In these final scenes of the play, the blood-stained handkerchief possesses both metonymic and metaphoric significance for the two most important couples in the play: Orlando and Rosalind, and Orlando and Oliver.

To explain Orlando’s absence, Oliver, presents a blood-stained handkerchief to Rosalind (called a napkin in this instance). Rosalind, Celia, and the audience rely on Oliver’s tale to explain what the handkerchief represents, as well as what the handkerchief implies about Orlando’s wellbeing. Oliver states that Orlando “sent me hither, stranger as I am, / To tell this

⁶⁷ Adam reports this to Orlando, stating, “Your brother... / Hath heard your praises, and this night he means / To burn the lodging where you use to lie, / And you within it,” later stating, “If he fail of that / He will have other means to cut you off” (*AYL* 2.3.20, 23-26).

⁶⁸ Duke Frederick states that he does this because “She is too subtle for thee, and her smoothness, / Her very silence, and her patience / Speak to the people, and they pity her” and concludes simply that, “She is banished” (*AYL* 1.3.75-77, 83).

⁶⁹ Rosalind states her assumed name and role explicitly (*AYL* 1.3.123-24). Celia likewise takes her own disguise and assumed name explicitly immediately following Rosalind’s declaration (*AYL* 1.3.127).

⁷⁰ Orlando calls her “heavenly Rosalind” (*AYL* 1.2.274) and then writes the poem in her honor, found by Rosalind and Celia (*AYL* 3.2.120-149). Rosalind states, “Let me love him for that, and do you love him because I do” (*AYL* 1.3.34-35).

story, that you might excuse / His broken promise, and to give this napkin” to the one Orlando called Rosalind (*AYL* 4.3.153-157). He explains further that should he tell the story of the bloody napkin, they will understand, “Some of my shame, if you will know of me / What man I am, and how, and why, and where / this handkerchief was stained” (*AYL* 4.3.96-98).⁷¹ Oliver further describes how Orlando found him lying under a tree, and then encountering a lioness lying in wait, battled the lioness and was wounded during the fight. This event, and the resulting presentation of the blood-stained handkerchief, serves as a turning point for all of the main characters.

Although Rosalind, Celia, and Orlando fled to the Forest of Arden to escape from mortal danger, the handkerchief reminds everyone that this new setting is just as fraught with danger. This drastically changes the tone of the play from the jovial merriment of love lessons back to the threatening environment the characters escaped from at the beginning of the play. The Forest of Arden is not the jocular and care-free place that the characters assume. It instead jeopardizes Rosalind and Orlando’s happiness. Without doubt, the encounter with the lioness suggests that regardless of changed outward appearances and locations, all characters are at risk. Reminding Oliver of the risk he put Orlando in during the opening scenes, the blood-stained handkerchief also signifies the brotherly bond that he and Orlando share, to which Orlando refers in the play’s opening scene, as well as Oliver’s cruelty toward Orlando.⁷² Though Oliver initially cast away their family-bond and planned Orlando’s brutal murder, Oliver admits that he “came into that desert place,” met Duke Senior, and committed himself to his “brother’s love,” and ultimately bound Orlando’s wound and cared for him (*AYL* 4.3.142-45, 51), seeming to repair their

⁷¹ Note that Oliver uses the terms “napkin” and “handkerchief” for the same object, indicating the terms’ interchangeability.

⁷² This is through both his willful ignoring of Orlando’s education and physical well-being, and his numerous covert attempts to take Orlando’s life.

relationship. To Oliver, though the handkerchief physically cleans Orlando's bleeding and wounded body, it metaphorically signifies his and Orlando's rekindled relationship; their bond of blood is not only restored, but also strengthened, honored, and cherished.⁷³

Although Oliver may not ascribe the same significance to the bloody napkin, Rosalind understands what the handkerchief means and its implications as something much more significant, and faints, briefly losing her manly composure. Frances Teague links this incident to her idea of the "metonymic token." She states, "Rosalind sees the blood on the cloth and understands it metonymically to mean that Orlando (to whom the cloth belongs) is injured" (Teague 73). Rosalind equates the blood stains on the handkerchief with the Orlando's near-death experience and his physical injuries. In this instance, to Rosalind, the handkerchief is standing in for Orlando on stage, serving as the agent to which Rosalind responds.⁷⁴ While Oliver uses the handkerchief to explain why Orlando missed his "love lesson" with Ganymede/Rosalind, Rosalind equates the handkerchief directly with Orlando, understanding the significance of Orlando's bloody and, seemingly serious, injuries. As she faints, Rosalind reveals the extent of her emotional connection with Orlando, and, more tellingly, her true gender.

Even though her slip is brief, she drops her disguise long enough for Oliver to notice. Peter Erickson observes, "Rosalind's transparent femininity takes the form of fainting – a sign of weakness that gives her away" (45). Speaking to cultural conventions of the time, when Oliver notices, he questions her manhood, "You a man? You lack a man's heart" (*AYL* 4.3.165-166).

⁷³ This is demonstrated particularly when Oliver takes the time and graciously asks for Orlando's permission to marry Celia and states, "It shall be to your good, for my father's house and all the revenue that was old Sir Rowland's will I estate upon you" (*AYL* 5.2.9-11), giving Orlando everything so that he (Oliver) can marry Celia (who he thinks is a shepherdess).

⁷⁴ I purposely link this with the *OED*'s definition of "agent," which states, "A person or thing that operates in a particular direction, or produces a specified effect; the cause of some process or change" (Def. 1b), as a deliberate play on words—that the handkerchief in particular is used to garner such a reaction from a person romantically interested in the person injured. Not only does the handkerchief act as a faux love token, but also as the explicit semiotic purpose that I discuss throughout this section.

Unlike Margaret's mannish grasp at control and cruel actions in taking blood from an innocent child or her defiant speech following the bloody death of her son, Rosalind cannot even withstand the sight of her love's blood. Not only does this comment express the gendered understanding of Rosalind's reaction, but also invite the medical implications of fainting and its relationship with the humors/blood. According to Leitch, "In Galenic medicine...sleep was considered one of the six 'non-natural' influences on the body" ("Sleeping Knights" 91). Sometimes, this sleep is initiated by tiredness or even as a reaction to heightened emotional states. Barry Windeatt adds, "Swoons register an excess of distress, including shame and embarrassment, but also may reflect overwhelming excitement and joy, not least from love. Almost by definition, swoons are seen to be spontaneous" (212). But while the source of the stress may be debatable, it is most often in response to an interpersonal altercation or a physical trauma.

Despite her quick recovery with some well-timed word-play explaining her "counterfeit" reaction, Rosalind's character must shift to meet new expectations brought about by the handkerchief's presentation and Oliver's observations. Teague concludes, "Rosalind betrays the imposture that keeps them apart" (73). Rosalind not only betrays her disguise, but she also sees a direct consequence of her actions. Because she created the love lessons, Rosalind now deals with the consequences of Orlando missing such a lesson. Although Orlando misses it for perhaps one of the best possible reasons, Rosalind discovers she, as Ganymede, is unable to follow through with her façade when it counts most. Because she understands the significance of the handkerchief as Orlando directly and physically giving himself to her, Rosalind realizes that she cannot continue playing the game that she created with her disguise, not if she wants to give herself to Orlando as well. Conceding this, she admits, "I should have been a woman by right"

when Oliver tells her to “counterfeit to be a man” (*AYL* 4.3.174-176). Erickson argues that, “This loss of control signals that Rosalind can no longer deny her inner feminine self” (45). In order for her to reunite with her now-injured love, she must take up the feminine identity she embodied at court without delay. No longer able to maintain this guise, Rosalind must quickly find a way to end the deception. Though many see Rosalind’s subsequent decisions as one of stereotypical submission to patriarchal values, her decisions seemingly encourage the play’s ultimate comedic conclusion.⁷⁵

Because of other unintended consequences of the napkin’s presentation, Rosalind only needs to take advantage of the situations driven by its appearance. Oliver and Celia’s relationship provides one such consequence, as well as that of Phoebe and Silvius (despite Phoebe’s attraction to Ganymede). Even though they do not have a long conversation when the handkerchief is presented, Oliver and Celia form a bond strong enough to warrant marriage from their conversation while Rosalind recovers from her fainting spell. In his subsequent conversation with Orlando, Oliver implores, “consent ... that we may enjoy each other” (*AYL* 5.2.8-9), looking for his younger brother’s approval of his marriage to Celia. After Orlando consents, wedding plans commence immediately, in fact, for the next day. Immediately after this event comes the last mention of the handkerchief.

Rosalind, still acting as Ganymede, approaches Orlando after his accident and questions him about what happened with the lioness and what will happen in the future. After Orlando makes it clear that he is still madly in love with Rosalind, saying that his heart is wounded, “but

⁷⁵ Erickson states, “a [gendered] approach sees Rosalind as a woman who submits to a man who is her inferior. The power symbolized by her male costume is only temporary, and the harmonious conclusion is based on her willingness to relinquish this power. Thus, Rosalind’s passionate involvement has a significant negative side since involvement means co-option and assimilation by a society ruled by men. She escapes the female stereotype of the all-powerful woman created by lyrical inflation only at the price of succumbing to another stereotype: the compliant, essentially powerless woman fostered by practical patriarchal politics” (44).

with the eyes of a lady” (*AYL* 5.2.24), Rosalind replies, asking “Did your brother tell you how I counterfeited to swoon when he showed me your handkerchief?” (*AYL* 5.2.25-26). The first time Rosalind refers to the handkerchief, she calls it a napkin.⁷⁶ Now, she calls it a handkerchief. Although Oliver interchanges the names within the same scene (when he tells the story), Rosalind calls it a napkin until she realizes its significance to her. Only after she equates the handkerchief with her great love Orlando does Rosalind call it the same name used by others in reference to love tokens. In this instance, the blood-stained handkerchief is a token given to her that physically contains her love, Orlando. Initially, Rosalind creates a metonymic connection, making the handkerchief a replacement for Orlando and all he is. When Rosalind attempts to take it too far and focus only on the object’s significance, Orlando does not allow it, and instead turns her attention to the coming events, namely the nuptials of Oliver and Celia. While the handkerchief is instrumental in influencing Rosalind’s actions, it does not define the ultimate outcome of the play.

The handkerchief’s presentation reminds the characters of the dangerous environment surrounding them, displays a rekindled brotherly bond between Oliver and Orlando, ignites Oliver and Celia’s relationship, and facilitates Rosalind’s return to her womanly submission. All the while, its presentation imbues a sense of urgency. Rosalind must abandon her masculine mask and return to the reality of her identity as Rosalind. Barbara Bono concludes that “events have impelled her toward accepting this reality; even when with [it is an] implied threat to herself,” because she will have to accept the dangers of her family ties (144). Because Duke Frederick mysteriously relinquishes his power because of a religious conversion, Rosalind’s initial need for the disguise is now gone (*AYL* 5.4.176-77). Even though her disguise as Ganymede represented her desire for independence and freedom, Rosalind is willing to sacrifice

⁷⁶ Rosalind initially refers to it as a “bloody napkin” (*AYL* 4.3.139)

her newfound freedom for the love she fully realizes with the handkerchief's presentation.⁷⁷

Even though she steps away from the handkerchief's metonymic significance, Rosalind focuses on the handkerchief's metaphorical importance—a token working in combination with the love between Orlando and herself she already knows to exist. But, in order for that love to come to fruition with a marriage, Rosalind must act immediately.

Because Rosalind understands the handkerchief to mean something much more significant than the other characters recognize, she arranges for all of the couples to appear in a certain place at an appointed time.⁷⁸ The final scene opens on the day of Celia (although as *Aliena*) and Oliver's wedding with Duke Senior, Silvius, Phoebe, Jaques, Orlando, Oliver, Rosalind as *Ganymede*, and Celia playing *Aliena* on stage (Brissenden 217), she makes her grand promise for all to get their happy ending (*AYL* 5.4.18-25).⁷⁹ After appearing on stage with *Hymen*, a god of marriage, Rosalind and Celia reveal their true identities, Rosalind's promises are kept, and everyone is married as they should. Although not intended as a specific love token between two identified lovers, the handkerchief and its presentation ultimately serve to bring Oliver and Orlando together as brothers, as well as all of the couples in marital bliss. Despite briefly creating doubt for the play's ultimate conclusion and despite diverse understandings, the blood-stained handkerchief allows the characters to realize the actions necessary to bring about the expected ending for a comedy, all couples married and order restored.

⁷⁷ Celia notes this idea clearest at the close of Act One that they go "To liberty and not to banishment" (*AYL* 1.3.137).

⁷⁸ This is discussed briefly when Rosalind refers to the bloody napkin as a handkerchief, as well as my discussion of her elevated response to its initial presentation in Act Four.

⁷⁹ In this she promises the Duke his daughter, Orlando the Duke's daughter and her hand in marriage, Phoebe that she will refuse *Ganymede* and marry *Silvius* instead, and *Silvius* that he will get his bride

Concluding Thoughts

Both plays present the power of blood in their depictions of blood-stained handkerchiefs. Like her predecessors in *Doctor Faustus* and *The Spanish Tragedy*, Margaret becomes obsessed with the symbolic and metonymic interpretations of blood. As a result, Margaret's obsession clouds and limits her actions, propelling her need for revenge and angering those with more power and a more metaphorical understanding of blood, as the Duke of York demonstrates in his speech. While York displays grief over the loss of his son, he instead imbues another object with significant cultural power and implores his fellow Yorks to act accordingly. Because they were not overcome with the significance of blood saturated in a single object, York's followers are able to plan and execute their return to power, dooming Margaret to endure the same loss she inflicted on her enemies. Branching even further from their predecessors, Oliver and Rosalind ultimately view Orlando's blood as a substance complementary to a renewed bond of brotherhood and a need to return to gendered expectations. Unlike Hieronimo's destructive obsession with his son's blood staining the handkerchief, Oliver and Rosalind embrace the handkerchief as a representative item that can be used to bring loved ones back together. Even though Shakespeare uses the blood-stained handkerchief to juxtapose the metonymic and metaphoric signifying power of blood, his portrayal of blood in his later tragedies emphasizes reading blood as a metaphor unless it refers to blood's physical and medical significance.

Chapter 4 – Shakespeare's Bloody Bodies: The Effects of Revenge and the Physical Body

In some respects Shakespeare's most famous, the middle tragedies demonstrate his careful mastery of the art that his predecessors had practiced before him. Just as Kyd and Marlowe appropriated and modified their medieval and classical forerunners, Shakespeare likewise adapts both classical/medieval and his early modern predecessors in his tragedies.⁸⁰ Whether creating a specific dramatic response to Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* with his *Hamlet* or ideologies questioned in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* in his *Macbeth*, Shakespeare's use of blood questions even more openly the consequences of equating blood with any ideology or cultural expectation. Instead of binding blood to objects that hold metonymic significance for the plays' main protagonists, Shakespeare in two of his middle tragedies presents bloody bodies that work in combination with other symptoms of his tragic protagonists' perceived madness.

Linked in part by their use of the supernatural, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* also depict blood of and on the body.⁸¹ These portrayals link the spilling of blood with madness to varying extents. For example, just as Hieronimo's final actions are linked to his madness, Hamlet's murder of Polonius is diagnosed to be a symptom of Hamlet's overwhelming grief and

⁸⁰ David Cleaves in his article, "To Thine Own Self Be False: Polonius as a Danish Seneca" discusses the personality traits Polonius shares with Seneca, as well as the other parallels Shakespeare seemed to make between the lives of Polonius and Seneca.

⁸¹ In the article, "Intertextual Madness in 'Hamlet': The Ghost's Fragmented Performativity," Hilaire Kallendorf investigates the intertextual connections between Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and King James I's *Daemonologie* and Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*. In the opening paragraph, Kallendorf argues that "The madness in *Hamlet* becomes more verisimilar because it is associated intertextually with demonic possession, and the Ghost appears more frightening because one of his intertextual masks is devilish" (69). While, as Kallendorf rightly records, other scholars have linked *Daemonologie* with *Macbeth*, it very likely also served as a source by which Shakespeare may have used to craft his portrayal of the supernatural in *Hamlet*. Kallendorf critiques that "Critics searching for 'sources' of *Hamlet* have sometimes remained so narrowly focused on a specific hermeneutical tangle, such as the nature of the Ghost, that they have failed to look for intertexts which might be relevant on a far less subtle level, such as shared discourse or terminology and certain plot details... It is precisely Shakespeare's use of, for example, *Daemonologie* in *Macbeth* and his appropriations from Reginald Scot in *The Tempest* that make the idea of these treatises as intertexts for *Hamlet* so plausible. If they affected his consciousness on one or more occasions, why not again? His preoccupations with recurring themes have led many scholars to conclude that he even returned to his own plays as further intertexts" (73-74).

madness.⁸² Additionally, Macbeth's actions when perceiving Banquo's bloody ghost are associated not with blood's humoral significance, but Macbeth's guilt and impending ruin as Scotland's unrightful ruler. These displays cement the need to understand blood as metaphoric, as complementary to other dramaturgical happenings in the theatrical space (instead of as a substituting marker that encourages madness or other specific beliefs, as seen in *The Spanish Tragedy* or *Doctor Faustus*). In rendering the spilling of blood as an action working in combination with madness, these portrayals eliminate the strictly constructed view of madness as something gendered. As Maria Isabel Barbudo observes in her investigation, "In these Shakespearean tragedies, madness is a central topic, and it happens to affect not only their male protagonists, but also the women they love" (152).⁸³ Unlike the women's obsession with blood, as seen with Margaret and Rosalind, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* return to the concerns of their male tragic forerunners and emphasize the metaphoric significance of blood as paramount in early modern drama.

'What a Rash and Bloody Deed is This!': Polonius's Dead Body

Considered by many to be his best, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is by far one of the most popular plays in early modern drama. Plagued by his near-constant indecision and grief over the death of his father, Hamlet is considered by many of his fellow characters to be mad throughout the play. Spurred by the image of his dead father, Hamlet first encounters descriptions of the body in physical terms. His father's story and Hamlet's perception and validation of its truth seemingly causes Hamlet's madness, which seems to worsen as the play continues. This madness finally drives Hamlet to act on the promise he made to his father's ghost to avenge his

⁸² Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has on numerous occasions been linked to *The Spanish Tragedy* as an intentional response because of *Hamlet*'s many intertextual references to the events of *The Spanish Tragedy*.

⁸³ In the rest of her section, Barbudo focuses on the different portrayals of female madness, the silent and poetically driven madness of Ophelia and the conflict between masculine and feminine that plays a role in causing Lady Macbeth's madness.

assassination by murdering those responsible. Although many characters die by the play's end, as is common with many dramas connected with Seneca's tragedies, Hamlet's unintentional murder of Polonius represents Hamlet's first direct act to fulfill his vengeance against those he deems responsible for his father's death.⁸⁴ While Hamlet hoped to kill Claudius instead, his actions cause the first blood-producing body as perceived by Gertrude, which she and other characters attribute as a symptom of Hamlet's madness. The treatment of transcoded visible blood spilled during Polonius's death and the ghost's descriptions of his death encourage audiences to consider blood for its physical nature instead of only its humoral considerations.⁸⁵ By either privileging blood's physical nature or relating it as a symptom of Hamlet's madness, blood becomes a substance more important not for its humoral significance but for its physical purpose in the body.

⁸⁴ Despite this commonly upheld argument, Cleaves argues that "Shakespeare did not want his *Tragedy of Hamlet* to be a slavish Senecan imitation, as the *Ur-Hamlet* presumably was. So he compensated, mocking rather than copying Seneca" (55).

⁸⁵ Even though humoral language is still present in *Hamlet*, it is left in the realm of language and is not considered when blood is presented physically onstage. Polonius seems overcome with blood's humoral significance and how it influences how others perceive his children. For example, Polonius relies heavily on humoral language when cautioning Ophelia from pursuing a relationship with Hamlet. Polonius explains, "When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul / Lends the tongue vows. These blazes, daughter, / Giving more light than heat, extinct in both / Even in their promise, as it is a-making, / You must not take for fire" (*Ham.* 1.3.115-19). Polonius seems to link the burning of blood with passion – not the kind of passion that is seen in *The Spanish Tragedy* or in *3 Henry VI*, in which blood is fiery because of a lust and desire for vengeance. Polonius instead explains how the soul is vulnerable to the fires that the tongue can incite, but that the tongue may promise fire and not be able to fulfill the vows it makes. Polonius links this heated blood to the passion of love and its dangers for the soul when not taken seriously on both sides. Polonius likewise refers to Laertes using humoral language when he sends his man Reynaldo to Paris to search for his son. Even though Laertes appears to have his own share of faults, Polonius instructs that Reynaldo should not indicate Laertes's shortcomings, "That they may seem the taints of liberty, / The flash and outbreak of a fiery mind, / A savageness in unreclaimèd blood," (*Ham.* 2.1.32-34). Instead of fiery blood the result of impassioned emotions (overheated as a result of an imbalance in the humors), Polonius links his son's shortcomings as a result of his mind, that the powers of his mind overpower his blood. Despite this inadequacy, Polonius lays most of his suspicions and harsh words for Hamlet's actions and demeanor, unable to provide any concrete reason to Hamlet's actions.

In his speech to Hamlet, King Hamlet's Ghost tells Hamlet the story of how he was killed.⁸⁶ After sharing that he was following his routine and sleeping in the orchard, the Ghost narrates that Claudius took a vial,

And in the porches of my ears did pour
The leperous distilment, whose effect
Holds such enmity with blood of man
That swift as quicksilver it courses through
The natural gates and alleys of the body
And with a sudden vigor it doth posset
And curd, like eager droppings into mild,
The thin and wholesome blood. (*Ham.* 1.5.63-70)

In his descriptions, the Ghost states that the poison entered into the bloodstream and "courses" throughout the body. He also describes the physical effect that the poison had on the blood, that it would turn the thin liquid of blood into curds. Blood is important not for its part in humoral medicine, but for its circulation through the "natural gates and alleys of the body." It also must be "thin and wholesome," traits this poison takes away from blood's physical state. Despite his lack of complete knowledge of the body's anatomical circulatory system, the Ghost's description calls for Hamlet to consider blood as itself important for his father's bodily function. Even though blood was not physically spilled in this assassination, the effect of blood in and on his father's now-dead body, as well as the Ghost's demands, compel Hamlet to take action.

Driven by his grief and the story of his father's death from the Ghost, Hamlet seeks to determine whether or not there is truth to the ghost's claims. Even though his methods and manner are considered mad by those who observe him, Hamlet devises a plan to ensnare

⁸⁶ Additionally, the ghost of King Hamlet also links blood with the soul, similar to the connections made in *Doctor Faustus*. Opening his speech, the ghost warns Hamlet that to share the truth of his current location, "Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, / ... / But this eternal blazon must not be / To ears of flesh and blood" (*Ham.* 1.5.16, 21-22). The ghost believes that sharing religiously charged information would have an adverse effect on Hamlet's living soul – that hearing the Ghost's story of the place in which he resides is too terrible for any living soul to hear. There is also the link that blood is inherently in the body, and because of that link, Hamlet cannot have access to all of the information. The truth in that respect is only fit for those whose blood has left the body or has stopped giving life to the body.

Claudius in a trap to confirm his guilt.⁸⁷ Like Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Hamlet plans to stage a play. As those plans come to fruition, Hamlet ponders the possible outcomes for this action. He muses to Horatio,

Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice
And could of men distinguish her election,
S'hath sealed thee for herself, for thou hast been
As one in suff'ring all that suffers nothing,
A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards
Hast ta'en with equal thanks; and blessed are those
Whose blood and judgment are so well commedled
That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
As I do thee. (*Ham.* 3.2.62-73)

Hamlet determines that his soul would accept nothing less than to verify Claudius's guilt and to avenge his father's murder. He also laments his inability to forego his passions and act as one who is not passion's slave. Even though only Horatio is privy to Hamlet's innermost thoughts and turmoil, Hamlet still wishes that his inmost passion (and blood) and decisions were linked to sound and logical judgment. Instead, as Andrew J. Power comments, "Hamlet means in part to compliment his friend's balance humoural system in contrast to his own disposition" (88). When Hamlet states that "blessed are those / Whose blood and judgement are so well commedled," he praises Horatio for the consistently balanced and logical perception of fellow characters and events. Similar to the language Hieronimo uses, Hamlet instead keeps his attention focused on the immaterial and theoretical as he blames Fortune for his inability to let his suspicions go and

⁸⁷ Most notably and vocally, Polonius points to Hamlet's actions, even from early on in the play, to be the result of madness within. He announces to Gertrude and Claudius, "Your noble son is mad. / Mad call I it, for, to define true madness, / What is't but to be nothing else but mad?" (*Ham.* 2.2.92-94).

act like Horatio. Hamlet feels that he has little choice in his actions and decisions; but his blood is not balanced with the rest of his body, and he thus must follow what the Ghost ordered.⁸⁸

After he has confirmed Claudius's guilt with his production of "The Murder of Gonzago," and refused to kill Claudius as he appeared to pray, Hamlet enters Gertrude's bedchamber and implores her to see the guilt of Claudius's actions. When Gertrude continues to deny Hamlet's accusations and accuses him of madness, Hamlet becomes agitated, has Gertrude sit on the bed, and declares to her: "go not till I set you up a glass / Where you may see the inmost part of you" (*Ham.* 3.4.19-20). Instead of taking Hamlet at his word, because he has already been acting so strange, she assumes that Hamlet has set out to kill her and cries out for help.⁸⁹ In response to his queen's cry, Polonius, from behind the arras, cries out in like fashion. In response, Hamlet approaches the arras and kills Polonius.⁹⁰ After Polonius is stabbed, he is eventually revealed to be the one behind the arras.⁹¹ Hamlet and Gertrude have the following conversation:

⁸⁸ Jerome Mazzaro discusses the possibilities for considering Hamlet's madness, particularly in relation to the idea of melancholy and the near-constant state of indecision that Hamlet embodies throughout most of the play. He muses, "Indeed, the proximity of Hamlet's acknowledged melancholy to insanity makes the 'antic disposition' he affects credible to those about him. The melancholy accounts, too, for his lethargy in acting and for his inability to understand why he delays, and it can be used as well to explain his wit and quick discernment, prolonged deliberation, and sustained passion" (Mazzaro 104).

⁸⁹ She cries, "What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me? / Help, ho!" (*Ham.* 3.4.21-22).

⁹⁰ Hamlet states, "What now? a rat? Dead for a ducat, dead!" and thrusts through the curtain to kill Polonius (*Ham.* 3.4.24).

⁹¹ Dale Churchwood discusses the difficulties in staging this particular scene, as well as how different editors have staged the action of Hamlet stabbing Polonius, some of which would privilege and support the notion of Hamlet's madness more than others. Churchwood states, "the *possibilities* for enactment at the moment of Polonius's death are multiple, and one might reasonably postulate alternatives when faced with stage directions which too prescriptively encode stage action... According to the texts of the play (Q2 and F1), numerous additional hypothetical possibilities also conform to what have been interpreted as textual constraints when one speculates concerning stage action. For example, it is *possible* that a Hamlet proceeds to the opening at either end of an arras and thrusts his rapier into a figure engulfed in shadow. It is also *possible* that Hamlet kills a Polonius who breaks from behind the arras and withholds his identity by presenting only his back to Hamlet; or *perhaps* Hamlet kills a Polonius who falls prostrate, shielding both his face and his identity; *perhaps* Polonius is concealed with a cloak or gown. It is also *possible* that Gertrude's reference to the 'unseene good old man' specifically indicates Hamlet's failure to distinguish and recognize his victim as Ophelia's father" (emphasis original, 229). The final possibility, that Hamlet is the one that fails to realize Polonius's identity points even more directly to the connection of Polonius's bloody body acting as metaphor to Hamlet's madness.

Queen: O me, what has thou done!
Ham: Nay, I know not. Is it the king?
Queen: O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!
Ham: A bloody deed – almost as bad, good mother,
As kill a king, and marry with his brother. (*Ham.* 3.4.25-29)

Gertrude refers to this murder as one that is literally rash and that causes a literal loss of blood. Even though her comments clearly ascribe a moral dimension to them, Hamlet refuses to let Gertrude place all of the blame on his shoulders. Instead, Hamlet charges Gertrude with at least some of the blame for the way in which this situation unfolds. Hamlet links the questionable morality of his bloody murder to Gertrude's actions of marrying the brother of a murdered king (especially when the murderer is that same brother). Despite this preoccupation, Hamlet is far more preoccupied with ascertaining the identity of the victim, hoping that his vengeful quest is over and the blood spilled belongs to the person who caused his father's blood to stop circulating.

With regard to Polonius, Hamlet has few more feelings than contempt and a sense that Polonius's death is deserved because of his loyalty to Claudius. Hamlet addresses Polonius's body,

Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!
I took thee for thy better. Take thy fortune.
Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger. –
And let me wring your heart, for so I shall
If it be made of penetrable stuff,
If damnèd custom have not brazed it so
That it be proof and bulwark against sense. (*Ham.* 3.4.31-38)

Disappointed that Polonius's dead body is not Claudius's, Hamlet confirms his belief that Polonius is indeed a fool and that he has asserted his superiority over Polonius definitively and permanently.⁹² Hamlet's wringing of Polonius's heart both the physical nature of the body before

⁹² In her article, Judith A. Johnson discusses the use of pronouns in various plays. Concerning *Hamlet*, she observes, "But Hamlet does use 'thou' in the course of the scene; when he is addressing Polonius's corpse, he reveals his

him and the metaphysical nature of the haughtiness of the person before him. Hamlet hopes that this will prove that Polonius is not worth any grief that Hamlet might feel as a result of his rash actions. As the scene continues, Polonius's body fades away as Hamlet and Gertrude dispute whether or not Hamlet is mad.⁹³ The audience cares little for the fact that Polonius is dead, and neither does Hamlet nor Gertrude. What is of greater importance is Hamlet's perceived sanity or madness. Most importantly, after most of the play has passed, Hamlet finally acts.⁹⁴

When Hamlet is convinced that Gertrude will keep his secret, he makes ready to leave and Gertrude's belief in her son's madness is confirmed. Only then is Polonius's body remembered and reasserted as a physical body on stage. Hamlet tells Gertrude that "I'll lug the guts into the neighbor room.... Indeed, this counselor / Is now most still, most secret, and most grave" (*Ham.* 3.4.212-14).⁹⁵ Just as Horatio's body is portrayed and treated onstage, Polonius's body lies between the world of the theater and the world of the stage; but unlike Hieronimo's decrees of his son's body being the hope and treasure of his life, Hamlet only considers this an empty vessel that needs disposal in order to maintain his guise. After Hamlet leaves, Gertrude

contempt and sense of superiority through his choice of pronouns... Socially, of course, Hamlet is somewhat superior to Polonius, but the old man's years might be considered sufficient reason for using the formal pronouns, to show respect" (153).

⁹³ Late in the scene, Hamlet implores Gertrude to believe that he is "not in madness, / But mad in craft" (*Ham.* 3.4.187-88). While Hamlet grants that his methods have not been sensible, his goals are.

⁹⁴ N.M. Imbrascio argues in his dissertation that "Polonius's dead body has more theatrical power than Hamlet Sr.'s ghost, as it is Polonius' corpse that releases the building tension in the play and unblocks the plot, inciting every other character's eventual death... However, on the stage physical, living actors represent both states, questioning not only cultural beliefs in the integrity of the body and the life of the corpse beyond the grave in many ways avowing tangible reality as a more efficacious presence than an imagined apparition" (7).

⁹⁵ Later, when Hamlet and Claudius discuss Polonius's whereabouts, Hamlet states that Polonius is "Not where he eats, but where a is eaten. A certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him" (*Ham.* 4.3.19-20). After more prodding, Hamlet replies that he is "In heaven. Send thither to see. If your messenger find him not there, seek him i' th' other place yourself. But if indeed you find him not within this month, you shall nose him as you go up the stairs into the lobby" (*Ham.* 4.3.32-36). Even though Polonius's death is not one that is important, and the physicality of his now decaying body is referenced, no longer important is the blood that coursed through his veins. Blood has faded away and the attention turns Hamlet's exile to England, where Claudius reveals his hopes that Hamlet will meet a similar fate to Polonius.

reveals her true belief that Hamlet is mad, for she reports to Claudius when he asks where Hamlet has gone:

To draw apart the body he hath killed;
O'er whom his very madness, like some ore
Among a mineral of metals base,
Shows itself pure. A weeps for what is done. (*Ham.* 4.1.24-27)

Polonius's body in this moment is not equated with Hamlet's madness, but instead is linked as a visible object that complements it and proves its existence. As far as Gertrude is concerned, "Polonius dies as a result of Hamlet's distemper" (Power 95). Polonius's dead body provides the physical proof Polonius himself had sought throughout the play to prove Hamlet's departure from reality.

Even though Hamlet's revenge was not swift, his break from perceivable sanity produced a violent and bloody act that propels the play to its expected end. Ultimately, as Imbrascio observes, "Polonius' corpse transforms Hamlet's violent rage against Claudius and turns it onto the play itself; the corpse serves as both a conduit and the catalyst for the violence and annihilation performed in the rest of the play" (7). Hamlet's consideration of Polonius's bloody body momentarily corresponds with the play's previous interpretations of blood, but ultimately presents the body as only a body and blood as the liquid of the body. In turn, the other characters who consider Polonius's body only do so as a complementary representation of Hamlet's madness. Even though both Laertes and Ophelia are both visibly troubled by news of their father's death, they never observe his body.⁹⁶ They only feel the deep loss of their parent, and respond accordingly.⁹⁷ By creating this separation between the theoretical considerations of

⁹⁶ Many of the verses Ophelia sings could be interpreted as a direct response to her father's death throughout Act IV, scene v. In addition, Laertes storms into the room and demands a lengthy explanation from Claudius and Gertrude concerning the cause of his father's death.

⁹⁷ Ophelia eventually commits suicide, as reported by Gertrude (*Ham.* 4.7.162). Laertes chooses the same path taken by Hieronimo and decides to avenge his father's death. In order to kill Hamlet, Laertes declares, "I'll anoint my

blood and the physical presentation, Shakespeare ultimately privileges viewing blood as metaphorical to his audiences.

‘Blood hath Been Shed ere Now’: Banquo’s Gory Locks and Lady Macbeth’s Phantom Blood

As a later tragedy, Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* portrays blood as a substance that has a unique physical power in influencing belief and action. Even though Lady Macbeth readily cries to “make thick my blood,” and Macbeth muses the nature of Duncan’s golden blood, both characters experience the power of blood in very visible and visceral ways.⁹⁸ In order to achieve his desires to become king, Macbeth commits and has others perform bloody and brutal murders. As Macbeth begins to realize the significance of the actions he has taken to become king, he is visited by the ghost of his dead friend Banquo, one of many deaths for which Macbeth is responsible when he commissions his assassination. Likewise, Lady Macbeth reaps the psychological impact of her constant and harsh influence on her husband’s actions and eventually submits to her visions of blood on her hands. Both scenes depict blood on the body, and instead of exploring the distinction between physical and theoretical blood depicted in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*’s presentation of blood questions the validity of equating blood with other issues of cultural importance.

sword. / I bought an unction of a mountebank, / So mortal that, but dip a knife in it, / Where it draws blood no cataplasm so rare, / Collected from all simples that have virtue / Under the moon, can save the thing from death” (*Ham.* 4.7.138-43). Just as Claudius used poison to curd the veins of King Hamlet’s blood, Laertes brand of poison also requires blood to achieve its goal.

⁹⁸ After she finds out that Duncan will be coming that night, Lady Macbeth implores the dark spirits to give her the power to do what she needs to in order to attain the power she seeks. She states, “Make thick my blood, / Stop up th’access and passage to remorse, / That no compunctious visitings of nature / Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between / Th’effect and it” (*Mac.* 1.5.42-46). Later, Lady Macbeth also calls the night “thick,” which signifies a connection between her dark desires and the unnaturalness of the actions she plans to take. Also, she asks the spirits to prevent any remorse from overtaking her sensibilities. Ironically, she suffers the exact fate she hoped to avoid, one overcome with remorse and seemingly committing suicide because of it (a point of irony that I will discuss later in the chapter).

Before Macbeth reaps the consequences of his actions, his and Lady Macbeth's lust for power drives them to murder Duncan and those most loyal to him on a royal visit. Even though the murder of Duncan is not portrayed onstage, the audience witnesses the aftereffects after Macbeth returns with perceived blood-stained daggers. After Macbeth's return, Lady Macbeth admonishes him,

Why worthy thane,
You do unbend your noble strength to think
So brain-sickly of things—go get some water,
And wash this filthy witness from your hand.
Why did you bring these daggers from the place?
They must lie there—go carry them, and smear
The sleepy grooms with blood. (*Mac.* 2.2.43-49)

Even if physical blood was not literally present, Lady Macbeth's comments indicate a necessary transcodification to perceive blood on the stage.⁹⁹ Visible to Lady Macbeth, the blood on these daggers is nothing more than a "filthy witness" to the crime that Macbeth committed. She is neither concerned with the murders her husband committed, nor the guilt that should be overcoming them, Lady Macbeth is only concerned with the liquid that adorns the daggers. It is the physical evidence needed in order to ascertain guilt. Instead of urging Macbeth to get rid of all evidence, she insists that Macbeth use the blood-stained daggers to frame Duncan's grooms for his crime. When Macbeth appears unable to do as she commands, Lady Macbeth takes the daggers to place them accordingly, setting up for Macduff's discovery of the bodies the next morning.

After Macduff wakes the household and informs everyone of the horror he found in Duncan's bedchamber, the fellow lords confirm their belief in the grooms' guilt. Lennox reports

⁹⁹ "Transcodification" is coined by Keir Elam and is defined as the process specifically in theatrical spaces in which audiences use verbal cues from the characters onstage to perceive objects as being visibly present onstage even though those items may not be physically present onstage. It is also used to perceive different locations based on different characters' announcements throughout the production. For more specific discussion of Keir Elam's definitions of "transcodification," and their implications for this project, look to pages 28-29 of this document.

that “Their hands and faces were all badged with blood, / So were their daggers which, unwiped, we found / Upon their pillows” (*Mac.* 2.3.104-6). Taking advantage of the opportunity before him, Macbeth credits himself with the murder of the grooms as retribution for their crime.

Macbeth explains that when he entered the bedchamber,

Here lay Duncan,
His silver skin laced with his golden blood,
And his gashed stabs looked like a breach in nature
For ruin’s wasteful entrance; there the murderers,
Steeped in the colours of their trade, their daggers
Unmannerly breeched with gore—who could refrain,
That had a heart to love, and in that heart,
Courage, to make’s love known? (*Mac.* 2.3.113-19)

Claiming to be overcome by the image of his king’s dead corpse, Macbeth asserts that he was compelled by his great love for his king to avenge his death. But even in his descriptions of his actions, blood is nothing more than that which left the body in a “breach in nature” as the grooms supposedly gruesomely murdered a beloved kin. In his murder of the grooms, Macbeth seems to become a champion for his king and crown, and upholder of what a good thane would do to protect Scotland. Macbeth, rewarded for his stated actions, becomes king. To ensure his station as king, Macbeth plots to have others killed, including Banquo and his children.¹⁰⁰ Even though Macbeth is successful in his plot to have Banquo murdered, his son Fleance escapes, and Macbeth begins to confront the consequences of his insatiable lust for power.

When Banquo’s ghost first appears to Macbeth in the banquet scene, Macbeth has already reaped the benefits of his actions. Despite his actions and his previous encounters with

¹⁰⁰ After his coronation, Macbeth ponders about the dangers Banquo now poses to his status as king. He muses that the witches declared Banquo, “father to a line of kings” (*Mac.* 3.1.59). As a result of this declaration, Macbeth decides, “if’t be so, / For Banquo’s issue have I filed my mind, / For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered, / Put rancours in the vessel of my peace / Only for them, and mine eternal jewel / Given to the common enemy of man, / To make them kings, the seeds of Banquo kings. / Rather than so, come Fate into the list, / And champion me to th’ utterance” (*Mac.* 3.1.63-71). Macbeth marvels at the injustice that he has committed these heinous acts and given up his inner peace in order to give the throne to Banquo’s offspring. Macbeth decides that this is unacceptable and chooses to have his close friend and his family murdered in order to keep the crown to himself.

supernatural beings, the appearance of the spectre does not impact him until he realizes who it is.¹⁰¹ After finishing a discussion with Lennox and Ross, two Scottish thanes, Macbeth first believes that Banquo's ghost is a guest and believes the table is full when it is not. Then, once Macbeth realizes who it is, he pleads, "Thou canst not say I did it—never shake / Thy gory locks at me" (*Mac.* 3.4.50-51). This appearance, outburst, and following dialogue serve several semiotic functions in this scene. The only indication that we as contemporary readers have for Banquo's bloodied state is the dialogue stated by Macbeth because as this portion of the scene begins, the stage directions state "Enter the Ghost of Banquo, and sits in Macbeth's place" (Brooke 155). There are neither direct indications nor explicit statements that Banquo is bloody in the performance notes; so in Elam's language, the early modern audience would understand this situation through transcodification, and they would perceive Banquo as one covered in blood. Also, Banquo's ghost does not have any dialogue, nor do the stage directions indicate any movement or other direct interaction with other characters. Thus, Banquo's ghost appears as if an object, something only for Macbeth and the audience to see and consider. But, Banquo's presence onstage offers several signs that evoke various levels of response from Macbeth and other characters.

Macbeth perceives this blood-stained Banquo as the visible proof of his guilt and trepidation over his morally questionable actions. Given the familiar language he uses, Macbeth also recognizes the ghost as his now-dead friend, a physical rendering that is representative for Banquo's person. Macbeth visibly experiences trepidation as he pleads to the ghost, "Thou canst not say I did it—never shake / Thy gory locks at me" (*Mac.* 3.4.50-51). Just as Macbeth claimed the image of Duncan's bloody and unmoving body had a visceral and immediate influence on his emotions and actions, the image of Banquo has a much more real impact on Macbeth's language

¹⁰¹ i.e. the witches

and action. Macbeth departs from his kingly state to implore Banquo's figure never to blame Macbeth for his death. Macbeth later remarks to Lady Macbeth that

I am in blood,
Stepped in so far, that should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.
Strange things I have in head, that will to hand,
Which must be acted, ere they may be scanned.
...
Come, we'll to sleep—my strange and self-abuse
Is the initiate fear, that want hard use. (*Mac.* 4.137-41, 43-44)

So while in the moment with Banquo's ghost, Macbeth seemed to identify the seriousness of his actions and the moral/spiritual implications of them, he immediately discounts his reaction and appears to then continue on as if nothing happened at least for the moment. He refuses to interpret Banquo's appearance as one that could and should change his habits. Even though Macbeth is responsible for shedding much more than Banquo's blood, Banquo's appearance forces Macbeth to consider more seriously the ramifications and lasting consequences of his actions. In contrast to Macbeth's dismissal of his guilt, Linda Woodbridge comments on Macbeth's guilt and how his compatriots respond stating, "Macbeth seems largely responsible for the sickness of his society—since he murders a legitimate and good king, it might be argued that Macbeth himself creates the need for himself as a sacrificial victim [later in the play]" (134). Because Macbeth appears incapable of maintaining and responding to the guilt he very evidently feels here, perhaps his determination to dismiss his guilt leads to his death at the end of the play, as well as govern how other characters understand him in this scene.

When Macbeth pleads with Banquo's ghost and his bloodied state, the other characters do not see Banquo's ghost, particularly one of the thanes previously mentioned, Ross. Because Ross does not see the cause of Macbeth's outburst, he infers that Macbeth's reaction is one of madness because he responds, "Gentlemen rise, his highness is not well" (*Mac.* 3.4.52). This response

then corresponds with the socio-political expectations of how one would treat another in power, particularly the king. Lady Macbeth likewise reinforces this image, stating:

Sit worthy friends, my lord is often thus,
And hath been from his youth. Pray you keep seat,
The fit is momentary, upon a thought
He will again be well. If much you note him
You shall offend him and extend his passion;
Feed, and regard him not. (*Mac.* 3.4.53-58)

Instead of linking Macbeth's actions with anything more serious, Lady Macbeth claims that this is normal for Macbeth and that this outburst is one driven by "passion." Lady Macbeth indicates that this is a normal madness for her husband, and one that will soon subside. Lady Macbeth and Ross publicly allow Macbeth a way to explain his outburst without sounding anything less than kingly. Even though Macbeth does not act as a king would normally act, Ross interprets his actions as one of a momentary lapse, unlike what Lady Macbeth's private comments reveal.

While Lady Macbeth appears to maintain her composure in front of the thanes, she speaks to Macbeth, questioning, "Are you a man?" (*Mac.* 3.4.58). This and Lady Macbeth's later comments to Macbeth's reactions allow for a specifically gendered reading of Macbeth's outburst. Lady Macbeth sees her husband's outburst as another bout of his inability to act as a man should.¹⁰² She explicitly references these moments as she declares,

O these flaws and starts,
Impostors to true fear, would well become
A woman's story at a winter's fire,
Authorized by her grandma—shame itself. (*Mac.* 3.5.63-66)

¹⁰² I refer back to her previous comments on his masculinity leading up to the murder of Duncan, Duncan's children, and others as Macbeth sought the Scottish throne. As they are beginning to plot Duncan's demise, Lady Macbeth declares "Yet do I fear thy nature, / It is too full o'th' milk of human kindness" (*Mac.* 1.5.15-16). As the moment approaches for Macbeth to murder Duncan but questions his actions, Lady Macbeth responds, "What beast was't then / That made you break this enterprise to me? / When you durst do it, then you were a man; And to be more than what you were, you would / Be so much more the man" (*Mac.* 1.7.47-51).

Lady Macbeth perceives Macbeth's outburst as metonymic and contiguous with his continued failure to achieve the accomplishments of a true man. Although she may not see the cause of her husband's outburst, Lady Macbeth interprets this event as a confirmation of her husband's willful emasculation. While Lady Macbeth also provides a cover to help her husband maintain his kingly demeanor in front of the thanes after their exchange, it is abundantly clear to the audience that she is only doing so for the sake of appearances.¹⁰³ As she continues to encourage her husband's behavior, Lady Macbeth likewise succumbs to the madness that Macbeth appears to suffer.

Macbeth's final act opens with a sleep-walking Lady Macbeth as she suffers from the psychological consequences of her morally corrupt actions and desires. The scene opens with a doctor and a gentlewoman discussing Lady Macbeth's condition. While these three characters are the only ones on stage for the scene, their statements and reactions to one another help to bring together the greater considerations of the play.

The stage directions offer little in terms of any semiotic significance. The opening stage directions state, "Enter a Doctor of Physic, and a Waiting Gentlewoman" (Brooke 193). The two discuss Lady Macbeth and her strange actions as of late until the stage directions state, "Enter Lady Macbeth as Queen, with a taper" (Brooke 194). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a taper is "A wax candle, in early times used chiefly for devotional or penitential purposes; now spec. a long wick coated with wax for temporary use as a spill, etc." (Def. a). This candle could indeed serve as a sign of Lady Macbeth's unknown sin to the Doctor and the Gentlewoman because they are not aware of the sins committed, but recognize that she feels the

¹⁰³ She states to Macbeth loud enough for the thanes to hear, "My worthy lord, / Your noble friends do lack you" (*Mac.* 3.4.84-85).

need for this forgiveness.¹⁰⁴ It also serves as an indicator to the audience of Lady Macbeth's guilt and need for forgiveness; and its continual presence indicates her failure in obtaining appropriate atonement. After a brief discussion concerning Lady Macbeth's use of this kind of candle, then the Doctor and Gentlewoman listen to her commentary as she appears to wash her completely dry hands of something. Although the audience finds out quickly that Lady Macbeth is reliving the scene of Duncan's murder and her remorse concerning that crime, the Doctor and Gentlewoman take longer to realize Lady Macbeth's immense guilt.

Lady Macbeth makes three distinct and intriguing declarations as she attempts to rid her hands of this unseen stain. She implores,

Out damned sopt—out I say. One—two—why then 'tis time to do't—Hell is murky. Fie, my lord, fie, a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account? Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him. (*Mac.* 5.1.33-38)

Lady Macbeth clearly thinks she has the blood of an old man on her hands and is unable to remove it. She later states, "Here's the smell of the blood still—all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand" (*Mac.* 5.1.48-49). She later replies, voicing guilt over another's death, "Wash your hands, put on your nightgown, look not so pale: I tell you yet again Banquo's buried: he cannot come on's grave" (*Mac.* 5.1.59-61). Her final statement before she exits is, "To bed, to bed—there's knocking at the gate—come, come, come, come, give me your hand—what's done, cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed" (*Mac.* 5.1.62-65). These statements show that Lady Macbeth's demeanor is not the one that she portrayed as her husband encountered

¹⁰⁴ R.B. Graves in his book *Lighting the Shakespearean Stage* discusses various forms of lighting and the symbolic significance, as well as the practical use of each lighting apparatus. Concerning the taper, Graves declares, "Tapers were employed indoors, despite their also being made of rope. Tapers were usually single, thin ropes dipped in wax or tallow. They smoked and stank but had the advantage of requiring little snuffing. Hence, they were used as night-lights in bedrooms, where they could burn safely with little attention. Imogen has a taper in her bedroom in *Cymbeline*, and Lady Macbeth carries one from her bedroom while sleepwalking. Early emblem books often used lights of all kinds as images of life and death, but because of the taper's relative weakness as a light and its association with the bedroom, playwrights often use it to signal the frailty of human love and passion" (22).

Banquo's ghost, but is now one plagued with ghosts of her own. Lady Macbeth links the blood that she continually fails at washing from her hands serves for her as substitutions of those who have died because of her actions, namely Duncan (the old man) and the grooms. Although she knows that Duncan, the grooms, and Banquo cannot leave their graves, still their memories, their selves are haunting Lady Macbeth, constantly reminding her of the penitence that she should feel because of her role in their murders.¹⁰⁵ The audience also clearly sees this image of blood on her hands as metaphorical indicators, providing a physical symptom to complement her words that indicate Lady Macbeth's guilt. It also suggests that Lady Macbeth should (and does) despair over Duncan's death. This is now her habit of mind; her actions have caused irreparable damage to her psychologically; and despite her actions' debilitating consequences, she is determined to move forward and carry on her role as queen (though she most certainly recognizes that she is not fit to serve that role any longer). Just as Gertrude sees the blood as a visible symptom for Hamlet's madness, the audience now recognizes the phantom blood on Lady Macbeth's hands as secondary indicators for the guilt she experiences in her mind. The blood itself is not important, but Lady Macbeth's perception and reaction are. Lady Macbeth acknowledges her role in the events that have transpired and must now reap the consequences of those actions; but perhaps more telling of these consequences is how the Doctor and the Gentlewoman respond to her actions.

Upon entering the scene, the Doctor and the Gentlewoman know that Lady Macbeth's actions are not only off-putting, but also are the result of prior dubious actions. After Lady Macbeth enters with the taper, the Doctor makes inquiries about it and the Gentlewoman responds, "she has light by her continually, 'tis her command" (*Mac.* 5.1.21-22). Then after they

¹⁰⁵ Lady Macbeth, as she sleepwalks, states, "Wash your hands, put on your nightgown, look not so pale: I tell you yet again Banquo's buried: he cannot come out on's grave" (*Mac.* 5.1.59-61).

hear Lady Macbeth's ramblings about the need to wash her hands, they each marvel about the implications of her statements. The Gentlewoman marvels, "She has spoke what she should not. I am not sure of that; Heaven knows what she has known" (*Mac.* 5.1.46-47). The Doctor muses, "This disease is beyond my practice; yet I have known those which have walked in their sleep, who have died holily in their beds" (*Mac.* 5.1.56-58). And finally, after Lady Macbeth departs, the Doctor comments,

Foul whisp'rings are abroad: unnatural deeds
Do breed unnatural troubles; infected minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets:
More needs she the divine than the physician. (*Mac.* 5.1.69-72)

The Doctor not only perceives Lady Macbeth's actions and words as proof of her "unnatural deeds," but also diagnoses her ailment. Lady Macbeth's sins have infected her mind, which manifests as the appearance of blood on her hands. She has suffered the fate she ironically pleaded to avoid at the beginning of the play.¹⁰⁶ More so than any remedy he can offer, the Doctor links her needs to divine intervention much more than any earthly remedy. These statements not only have great semiotic significance in how these characters view Lady Macbeth at this time, but also display many cultural understandings prevalent in early modern England.

In semiotic understandings, the Gentlewoman and the Doctor offer medical, social/cultural, and religious interpretations of Lady Macbeth's situation. Both do not see the blood that Lady Macbeth sees on her hands, which make all of her words and actions secondary to their understanding. They understand that her constant cleaning of hands and her statements like, "all the perfumes of Arabia..." indicate an uncleanliness that Lady Macbeth believes she embodies, even if they do not know of the direct cause for her actions. As the Doctor's final

¹⁰⁶ She implores the spirits, "Make thick my blood, / Stop up th'access and passage to remorse, / That no compunctious visitings of nature / Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between / Th'effect and it" (*Mac.* 1.5.42-46).

statement, “unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles,” indicates they understand that Lady Macbeth must have committed some heinous action or series of actions that have brought this kind of result. The Doctor appears to identify that somehow Lady Macbeth’s condition is emblematic of the issues Scotland is facing at the moment.¹⁰⁷ This allows the Doctor to see Lady Macbeth’s illness as a metaphor for the kingdom. The Doctor also recognizes that her actions stem from a likely medical illness. He also recognizes that the disease is beyond him, but might be something Lady Macbeth can recover from, given the proper treatment, even if he is not the proper practitioner to cure her. Finally, both the Doctor and the Gentlewoman understand that only God can know and can fix Lady Macbeth’s troubles, just as only God can heal the wounds of a now-sick nation.

This scene creates parallels between Lady Macbeth and her husband, draws attention to the greater medical and cultural implications at work in this scene, and generates an alternate portrayal of madness. Lady Macbeth visibly exemplifies all of the qualities of a sick mind and soul. Her individual illness is microcosmic of the greater illness Scotland is experiencing because of continual corrupt and sinful actions. Both Lady Macbeth’s soul and the nation’s overall well-being suffer for these deeds. The Doctor and Gentlewoman (except for Lady Macbeth) inform the audience to see this scene as a call to action, for a change in habit. In response to what they have witnessed, the Doctor and the Gentlewoman decide to modify their behaviors lest they suffer the fates of their masters.

Like their counterpart in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Lady Macbeth and Macbeth are overcome with their interpretations of Banquo’s bloody ghost and Lady Macbeth’s phantom blood as metonymic. To Macbeth, Banquo’s ghost is contiguous with his dead friend’s personhood. In

¹⁰⁷ Scotland is facing war with the English, under the command of Malcolm, Seyward, and Macduff (*Mac.* 5.2.1). The land is also not thriving as it should

addition, the blood of Banquo's "gory locks" acts as a substitute for all of the spilled blood Macbeth caused either by his own hand or by his command. Likewise, Lady Macbeth perceives her vision of phantom blood on her hands as the very real and literal consequence for her role in Macbeth's blood-riddled rise to power. Unlike what is witnessed in *The Spanish Tragedy*, the portrayals of blood in *Macbeth* are fraught with a supernatural charge that affords the likes of Ross, the Doctor, and the Gentlewoman to render the Macbeths' interpretations of blood ridiculous and view these events as metaphorical and symptomatic of their guilt and deviation from sanity.

Even though Lady Macbeth and Macbeth see blood as metonymic substitutes and visible indicators of the victims of their crimes, Ross's, the Doctor's, and the Gentlewoman's dialogue interpret these events as secondary symptoms that combine to form their madness. As signified though Macbeth's, Lady Macbeth's, Ross's, the Doctor's, and the Gentlewoman's dialogue, the source of this madness is the Macbeths' multiplying guilt. Even though blood is presented as a liquid witness to violent and unjust deaths, blood's presence fades away. Of most importance is the Macbeths' increasing madness and eventual fall from power and similarly bloody deaths.¹⁰⁸ Just as Gertrude, Hamlet, and Claudius view Polonius's dead and bleeding body, and as Ross, the Doctor, and Gentlewoman perceive Macbeth's outburst and Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking rants, Banquo's ghost and Lady Macbeth's encounters with bloody objects work in combination with and as metaphorical of other deep-rooted motivations and actions that cause Lady Macbeth and Macbeth's ultimate downfall.

¹⁰⁸ Macduff cuts off Macbeth's head. When Macduff victoriously enters onstage with Macbeth's severed head, he states to Malcolm, "Hail King, for so thou art. Behold where stands / Th'usurper's cursed head" (*Mac*. 5.7.84-85). Later, when Malcolm speaks, he describes that they must call home again those who fled "the snares of watchful tyranny, / Producing forth the cruel ministers / Of this dead butcher, and his fiend-like Queen / Who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands / took off her life" (*Mac*. 5.7.97-101). Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth suffer seemingly equally violent deaths, mirroring the many deaths they caused either directly or by commission in their lust for power.

Concluding Thoughts

In contrast with the presentations of blood in the plays I previously examined, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* represent blood after the tragic protagonists' motivations have been set. Hamlet's murder of Polonius occurs after he has actively sought out to avenge his father's murder. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are driven from the play's beginning to obtain and retain the throne at any cost; and as a result of that lust for power, they cause Duncan's and Banquo's bloody deaths, whose blood and bodies are portrayed with perceived visible blood on the stage. Contrasting the other depictions and their power to promote action, these ghostly bodies appear as the result of action.¹⁰⁹ Ultimately, the creation and portrayal of these blood-stained objects signify to the audience the already beginning downfall of the tragic protagonists – their presentations are secondary symptoms to larger concerns.

Presenting blood after and alongside supernatural apparitions, both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* render blood's purely metonymic significance questionable because of the tragic deaths of characters such as Polonius, Lady Macbeth, and Macbeth—all of whom are overcome by understanding blood as metonymic. The presence of King Hamlet's ghost, Banquo's ghost, and Lady Macbeth's phantom blood both heightens the questionable reality of the situation presented before the audience and makes it easier to distinguish the dangers of overly equating blood with the mind and soul directly, as was seen in their dramatic predecessors, *Doctor Faustus* and *The Spanish Tragedy*. Instead of emphasizing the motivations and characters to whom the blood is important, these plays link blood with its complementary power to signify secondary concerns for the main characters, connecting all of these events instead with a character's madness and

¹⁰⁹ By this, I refer to Horatio's body, Doctor Faustus's deed, the handkerchief stained with Rutland's blood, the handkerchief stained with Orlando's blood

guilt. As a result, the metaphorical significance blood takes in these plays outweighs any metonymic significance that characters may take.

Epilogue

Ultimately, these plays demonstrate the shift of blood from being understood primarily metonymically to privileging the audience's interpretation of blood as metaphoric. Taking place in a public space, the theatre affords its audiences to readily view and consider the political, social, psychological, medical, and cultural issues openly.¹¹⁰ While the stories told on the stage are fictional, the knowledge used to create their situations is not. Toeing the line between fiction and reality, audiences present in the theatrical space or readers studying these dramas on the page are asked on an increasingly frequent basis to consider very real issues within the safety of a fictional story.

While early dramatic presentations of blood align more with Galenic interpretations of blood, the ways in which the early protagonists consider their bloody tokens encourage the audience to question and perhaps hesitate to consider blood in the same fashion as Faustus and Hieronimo. As time progresses, early modern audiences had to wrestle with the notion that blood could occupy both metonymic and metaphoric layers of signification and witness the result of balancing or failing to balance those interpretations, as seen in *3 Henry VI* and *As You Like It*. Despite some similar treatments, blood and the manner in which it was signified was undoubtedly transforming.

In his later tragedies, Shakespeare asks his audiences to reconsider blood's role in supernatural situations both preceding and following unjust murder.¹¹¹ While Hamlet's first

¹¹⁰ Greene argues, "Where blood appears in this era, it threatens too much meaning—too many competing allegories in different degrees of revision—or the reduction of meaning to sheer spectacle... The literature of this moment recognizes the semantic shift under way, as older genres such as picaresque fiction become bloodier and new genres such as revenge tragedy make the display of blood essential to their projects" (108). Not only did literature of this moment communicate such revisions, but as my study shows, drama also played a pivotal role in communicating this cultural shift.

¹¹¹ Unlike the ghosts/spirits Don Andrea and Revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy*, who never interact directly or seem to have any direct power over the other characters in the play, as well as the explicitly demonic spirits in *Doctor*

direct action results in a bloody body, both other characters and audience alike concern themselves with Hamlet's well-being. Likewise, Banquo's ghost and the phantom blood in *Macbeth* are not important for their physical appearance onstage, rather for their signifying power that is complementary to Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's guilt. The events influence the perception of their actions throughout the rest of the play and aid in leading these characters to reap the fatal consequences of their selfish actions. These depictions do not concern themselves with the physical blood presented on stage, but instead with the events that precluded or followed its presentation. Blood onstage becomes just blood. Blood in theoretical terms becomes separated from blood in physical presentation.

As blood's scientific significance continues to transform, in the early modern plays I investigated, "blood is what it will be for Servetus and Harvey, the substance of life that is everywhere in the body at all times...and that, more present and recognizable than the other humors, lives beyond the limit of the Hippocratic and Galenic systems" (Greene 131). Even though the confirmation of the circulatory system was not confirmed until 1628 by William Harvey, by separating theoretical and physical blood, theatrical space afforded those in the scientific community greater opportunities to investigate blood's physical role in the human body. By openly questioning blood's role in fictions on the stage, English early modern drama allows blood to physically be presented as an object to be studied and treated as real while simultaneously staged in a fiction, inherently not real. These distinctions are not at odds with each other, but rather work in concert to bring the literal and the figurative together in ways that can only be accomplished in the theatre.

Faustus, both *Hamlet* in its portrayal of King Hamlet's Ghost and *Macbeth* and the witches use far more problematic characters to embody the supernatural. While ghosts and witches were not considered to be trustworthy by many in the early modern era, both tragic protagonists ultimately believe their words and act accordingly for good or ill.

In its own way, the early modern theatre combats the strict categorization that we now in the humanities have been combating. Michael Witmore opens his article discussing the decline in the humanities and the rise of the sciences. He states,

We live in a divided kingdom of disciplines ... In the first province we find the humanities, concerned as they are with a distinct class of objects—with the things humans make or do... The other, more technical kingdom is populated with things that humans find already to be the case, things we can know but never negotiate because they are not, at least prospectively, the product of human deliberation. (353)

Instead of two competing kingdoms, blood on the early modern stage is a substance both created of human deliberation and found “already to be the case.” In *Doctor Faustus* and *The Spanish Tragedy*, blood is immediately recognized and instantly important for its spiritual and familial significance, accepted as a matter of fact in accordance with humoral theory. As time continues, the significance accepted as “matter of fact” transforms. Undoubtedly still important, blood in the later plays *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* becomes meaningful because of human deliberation, understanding it as figurative for one’s mental state. The characters who read blood as significant as “matter of fact,” are scrutinized and ultimately suffer tragic ends. Blood’s significance shifts from directly aligning with humoral theory to one more uncertain.

Greene states, “While the modern horizons are no less allegorical than the medieval, they seem less abstract, they accord with the new science” (110). Blood remains a substance important for its figurative and allegorical function. Even today it is still important for determining the leaders of the British monarchy. Blood was and is still used in the debates concerning race (even though blood’s scientific function has long been determined).¹¹² It still

¹¹² Greene discusses the allegory of race to be the next to use blood as a signifier. He states, “The reconception of blood in social rather than cosmic terms, as evidence of relations more than of a fixed reality, belongs to the replacement of ipseity by identity that gains momentum during the century. Moreover, the attraction to blood as a substance, as a speaking liquid, bridges the space between one conceptual regime and the next. When new allegories connect blood to race, for instance, it will be with a renewed sense of material blood and the modern conviction that the blood of quotidian experience is continuous with that of the allegories” (Greene 110).

carries immense weight concerning religious belief, especially in Christian doctrine concerning Christ's redemptive blood. The shedding of blood both continues to turn soldiers into heroes and mark women for their biological gender. Despite this continuous urge to distinguish blood for its literal and figurative significance that has persisted far beyond the early modern era, the early modern stage provided the shuttle that weaves together all of these perceptions.¹¹³ Instead of having these different considerations compete with one another, early modern theatre creates a space where these distinctions fall away, the kingdoms come together, and push each other forward into new allegories and new fictions that continue to transform as the sciences and the humanities develop, giving blood a life of its own.

¹¹³ I pull this wording from Bruno Latour's book *We Have Never Been Modern*. In his book, Latour states, "Our intellectual life is out of kilter. Epistemology, the social sciences, the sciences of text – all have their privileged vantage point, provided that they remain separate. If the creatures we are pursuing cross all three spaces, we are no longer understood. Offer the established disciplines some fine sociotechnological network, some lovely translations, and the first group will extract our concepts and pull out all the roots that might connect them to society or to rhetoric; the second group will erase the social and political dimensions, and purify our network of any object; the third group, finally, will retain our discourse and rhetoric but purge our work of any undue adherence to reality – *horresco referens* – or to power plays. In the eyes of our critics the ozone hole above our heads, the moral law in our hearts, the autonomous text, may each be of interest, but only separately. That a delicate shuttle should have woven together the heavens, industry, texts, souls and moral law – this remains uncanny, unthinkable, unseemly" (5). Later, Latour uses Boyle and Hobbes as case studies to discuss the manners in which both unintentionally use evidence and ideologies from the other to inform their practice. Latour states, "Boyle is creating a political discourse from which politics is to be excluded, while Hobbes is imagining a scientific politics from which experimental science has to be excluded" (27). Just as Latour recognizes Boyle and Hobbes for their cross-pollination, blood on the stage and in scientific inquiry molded each other as each reached new heights in discovery and signification.

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Appendix A

The Spanish Tragedie:
OR,
Hieronimo is mad againe.

Containing the lamentable end of *Don Horatio*, and
Belimperia; with the pittfull death of *Hieronimo*.

Newly corrected, amended, and enlarged with new
Additions of the *Painters* part, and others, as
it hath of late been diuers times acted.



LONDON,
Printed by W. White, for I. White and T. Langley,
and are to be sold at their Shop ouer against the
Sarazens head without New-gate. 1615.

Folger STC 15091a Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

In the woodcut above, in the far left, maliciously hanged and the focal point in part because of the arch surrounding only his body (this sets his body apart from the other bodies in the woodcut), is Horatio. Immediately to the body's right is Hieronimo who is saying, "Alas it is my son Horatio," and is the closest character to the center of the woodcut and intended to be the play's focus (particularly given the secondary title of the play, "Hieronimo is mad againe"). He is also looking to Horatio's body, giving the reader another reason to consider Horatio's body the focal point of the image. To the right of Hieronimo is Bel Imperia, who is saying, "Murder, helpe Hieronimo." Finally, to Bel Imperia's right is presumably Lorenzo saying "Stop her mouth."