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Blood and the Jews

Throughout its ugly history, anti-Semitism has repeatedly asserted perverse and pervasive connections between Jews and blood. Most obviously, there is the blood libel, which asserts the existence of a secret Jewish ritual in which a Christian child’s body is tortured and killed, often in a manner perceived to imitate Christ’s Passion, and its blood collected, usually for baking in the unleavened bread eaten at Passover. The first blood libel in England related to the death of a twelve-year-old boy, William, in Norwich, in 1144: the story was recounted by Thomas of Monmouth to create a prestigious local cult, but numerous other examples followed, of which the most renowned was the “martyrdom” of Hugh of Lincoln, reputedly victim of Jewish child murder in 1255. The story lies behind Chaucer’s blood libel narrative, *The Prioress’s Tale*, but it was earlier recorded in the chronicles of Matthew Paris:¹ Paris echoes the language of Christ’s passion as he describes the scourging, piercing and crucifixion of eight-year-old Hugh in insult to Jesus Christ. The blood libel is of course entirely historically unconvincing – ritual bleedings are a nonsense for Jews, who are rendered ritually unclean by contact with blood - the blood libel was, in fact, primarily a tool for persecution of the Jews by the authorities.²

Thomas of Monmouth, in creating the blood libel, contributed also to a second bizarre connection made between Jews and blood. According to Thomas, a sheriff who tried to protect the Jews of Norwich was punished by a flow of blood from his anus. This curious divine punishment seems to have been inspired by Psalm 77:66, “He smote His enemies in their posteriors”, a passage which Hugh of St Victor interpreted as showing God afflicting the Jews with tumours which protrude from their anuses and are nibbled by mice. Medically, menstruation and haemorrhoidal bleeding were understood to serve the same function: purging. “Many men are purged [of bad humours] via these small veins (just as women are by their menses) and preserved from diverse illnesses when they flow in the appropriate amount.”³ Scriptural scholars argued that menstruation was part of Eve’s punishment for her disobedience in Eden, and the spilling of Judas’s guts, after his betrayal of Christ, was

thought to have been through his anus. As the image of the cursed Jew evolved in medieval Europe, these elements combined in the myth of Jewish male menstruation, perhaps the weirdest manifestation of an association of Jews with blood found also in the Passion narratives: “When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but *that* rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed *his* hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye *to it*. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood *be* on us, and on our children.” (Matthew 27:23-5)

However, the myth which is most relevant to the play that will be the focus of this chapter, the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, is a bloody myth which has, in origin at least, nothing to do with the Jews. According to the 8th century biography of Gregory I, as the Pope was celebrating Mass a woman in the congregation remarked that the host could not possibly be the body of Christ, since it was bread that she had baked herself: the Eucharistic host was then transformed into a bleeding finger. Later versions of the story have not a finger but the whole body of Christ appear: what all the host miracles have in common, however, is blood. In 1263, in the Italian city of Bolsena, a Bohemian priest who did not believe in the Real Presence of God in the host was convinced when the host started to bleed: the church at Bolsena still displays the stones stained with blood today, and the neighboring cathedral of Orvieto preserves the blood-stained cloth in which the host was wrapped. It is now in a chapel surrounded by frescoes of related host miracles -- many of which involve Jews. This is odd, since Jews do not feature in either the miracle at Bolsena or the Mass of St Gregory. But since they were already understood to torture and bleed little Christian boys, they were soon also to be found torturing Christ in the form of the Eucharistic host. The miracle of Bolsena led to the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi, celebrated across Europe. In 1320, Jews were banned from the streets of Barcelona on Corpus Christi day.⁴

Staging Croxton’s Blood

This chapter will discuss blood as “proof” in the late 15th century Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, a miracle play in which a group of Jews bribe a Christian merchant to steal the Eucharistic host for them; they then stab the host and it bleeds and sticks to the hand of Jonathas, the chief Jew; the Jews resort to increasingly violent methods to destroy the host, symbolically re-enacting Christ’s passion; in the process they sever Jonathas’ hand, but he rejects the medicine offered by a drunken doctor, Master Brundyche. The host then becomes a vision of the bleeding Christ and the Jews are converted and Jonathas healed, while the

Christian merchant repents and is absolved.⁵ The present discussion of the *Play of the Sacrament* will demonstrate that its use of blood as proof, its exploitation of the possibilities of stage blood, and its attention to bloodied cloths and bloodied limbs anticipate much of what scholars have found remarkable about blood a century later, in the early modern playhouse⁶: this chapter will briefly consider how *Macbeth* may be illuminated by being read alongside the Croxton play.

Croxton has attracted considerable scholarly attention; it is significant for those engaged in the study of Jewish history, for those interested in sacramental theology, and also for those interested in theatre history. It gives us an early example of the stage Jew – a precursor of Marlowe’s Barabbas and Shakespeare’s Shylock. The establishment of the Jew as a figure on the early English stage follows from anti-Semitic mythologizing and from the fact that, throughout medieval and early modern Europe, Jews were forced to wear distinguishing clothes – usually red hats – which made Jewishness, conveniently for an acting company, a matter of costume. The Croxton play also gives us some intriguing evidence about just what a late 15th century or 16th century acting troupe could achieve onstage. The play requires: an onstage amputation, then reversed onstage; a cauldron of over-boiling oil; an oven which can crack, leak blood, and explode; an apparition of the bleeding Christ. It is clear that, in the words of the celebrated 16th century French miracle play stage direction, “There must be blood”.

The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* includes, for a fifteenth-century play, an unusual number of stage directions. Blood is explicit in these three:

Here the Host must blede

Here shall the cawdron byle, apperyng to be as bloode

Here the ovyn must ryve asunder and blede owt at the cranys, and an image appere owt with woundys bledyng

And blood is perhaps implicit in this stage direction, which indicates the amputation of Jonathas’s arm:

*Here shall thay pluke the arme, and the hand shall hang styll with the Sacrament*⁷

As I have discussed elsewhere in relation to the play's performance locations, the language of these stage directions apparently shifts in and out of recognition of the play's fictionality.⁸ Croxton asserts that it re-enacts real events (a miracle which occurred in Eraclea, in Aragon -- Banns, 11-12) and that those events were first represented in Rome in 1461 (Banns, 57-8); the stage directions sometimes refer to stage phenomenon as if they were real – “Here goeth the Jewys away, and the preste commyth home” (255, s.d.), and sometimes use frankly theatrical language – “Jonatas (shall) goo down off his stage” (148, s.d.). The stage directions for blood indicate that the Host “must bleed”, and the oven must “bleed out at the cracks”, and the image's wounds must be “bleeding”, but although the cauldron “shall boil” and the oven “must rive asunder,” the boiling oil must only “*appear* to be as blood”. The conventions for stage directions are far from fixed in the medieval and early modern periods, so it is possible that this variation is purely by chance: however, “appearing to be as blood” draws attention to an illusion within the story which the play presents, not simply a theatrical illusion within that presentation. Croxton claims that the original, historical events which it depicts included a host which actually bled, but the oil in which it was boiled did not, of course, bleed, or even turn into blood, but rather was turned to the appearance, the color, of blood by the bleeding host placed in it.

Stage directions might be for readers rather than those producing a play, and were not necessarily authorial but might also be based on an actor or audience member's memory of a production, for example.⁹ The modal verbs “shall” and “must” do suggest that these are instructions for a company staging the play, and it is perhaps useful to an acting troupe to know that their cauldron still contains oil, that they do not have to stage an additional miracle of oil turning to blood; when they place the bleeding host and hand in the exploding oven, the oven presumably “bleeds out at the cracks” with the blood of the wounded figure inside it.

Nonetheless, the stage directions seem to present any acting troupe with a huge challenge and hardly any help: there is no practical guidance as to the type of trick by which a host can be made to bleed, an oven to explode, or a bleeding image to appear miraculously. Again, this is not untypical: the approximately contemporary *Mary Magdalene* play, for example, includes such challenges as: “Here shall come a cloud from heaven and set the temple on fire”,¹⁰ and the *Conversion of St Paul* requires that Belial and Mercury “shall vanish away with a fiery flame, and a tempest”.¹¹ Fireworks might well have been used for these effects, and to make the Croxton oven explode, for all that there was perhaps a child,

playing the image of Christ, inside: a stage direction for the *Castle of Perseverance* instructs “he that shall play Belial” to “look that he have gunpowder burning in pipes in his hands and in his ears and in his arse when he goes to battle”, so there seems to have been limited concern about putting actors at risk. Perhaps the boiling cauldron was given a blood-red color using colored smoke, which, as Philip Butterworth has noted, was used on the medieval stage.¹² But to understand the technology for blood that might have been used in early productions of Croxton, we need to look either to the medieval French drama, or to the early modern English professional stage. There is much more blood in medieval French drama than in medieval English drama, probably because the bloodiest plays are always saints’ plays, of which many survive in French but very few in English.¹³ Early French theatre especially depended on spectacular visual effects, often bloody, and civic presentations of saints’ plays would employ a highly skilled technician to manage these *fainctes*. So we know, for example, that in order to make Christ sweat blood there were at least two techniques used -- in Provence:

Jesus must wear a wig and when he puts it on he must put underneath it two or three carefully positioned sponges, full of vermilion well diluted and ... when he prostrates himself on the ground he must put his hand on his head and press firmly so that the sponges spout forth the vermilion that they have absorbed.¹⁴

and at Revello:

Then he (Christ) shall stretch out on the stage (*zafaldo*) on his face, and underneath there shall be someone who shall paint his face and hands with crimson paint as if he were sweating. And when he has been like this for a time he shall rise. And one of the angels shall come and without speaking wipe away the sweat.¹⁵

The Provençal Director’s Notebook also gives practical advice as to how to make the blood flow when staging the nailing of Christ to the cross, a technique that might well have been duplicated by the Croxton players:

a large wooden nail should be made, hollow and filled with vermilion, and there should be a small hole at the end so that the blood flows over the hand.¹⁶

On the other hand (so to speak) since the hand which the Croxton Jews are nailing to a post subsequently has to be torn off, which implies that Jonathas has at some point to be wearing a prosthetic hand, it is possible that the dummy hand was already in use at the moment of nailing: the dummy hand could itself be filled with sponges soaked in vermilion of the type used for Christ's bloody sweat, so that when it was nailed to the post it would then inevitably "bleed" as the sponges were pierced.

What is noticeable about all of these instructions is that they are concerned with how to get blood on to the stage, or specifically on to the body of the actor, and in the case of Revello how also to get it off the stage, or off the actor, again. There is thus something fascinatingly parallel about stage blood and the 'real' blood it represents in host miracles, and perhaps in Christ's sweating blood: the point of host miracles is that blood, while itself natural, is seen to flow where it does not naturally flow – from bread. Illuminating comparison might be drawn here with the screaming, bleeding tree of epic tradition, discussed by Joe Moshenska: the blood from the bread, like that from the tree, "is not the marker of animal as opposed to vegetable life, but belongs to a being that hovers on the threshold between animal and vegetable, sentient and non-sentient, human and mere object."¹⁷ Precisely because this is unnatural, it is a miraculous proof -- and a challenge to the actors who must work out how to make it appear to happen.

These stage directions all indicate the use of paint, crimson or vermilion, rather than real blood taken from an animal, for example. There is some evidence suggesting the use of sheep's blood on the early modern professional stage, in Peele's *Battle of Alcazar*,¹⁸ and also in conjuring tricks: Reginald Scot describes how a juggler might appear to stab himself using a false belly filled with calf or sheep blood.¹⁹ But there are more references indicating the use of other substitute liquids: Lucy Munro cites stage directions calling for vinegar and red ink, as well as paint, on the English professional stage and in the Lucerne passion plays, in which Christ was made to "bleed" when a painter inside a mound splashed him with paint.²⁰ Scot's caution to his juggler that he should "in no wise" try to use ox or cow blood, "for that will be too thicke",²¹ has an almost comically solicitous tone, as if of the stage manager who has had a bad experience with a belly which failed to bleed: it is no mean trick to make blood flow convincingly, and it appears that paradoxically real blood (albeit animal) is harder to manage than paint.

Blood as proof

Host miracles all involve an unbeliever, and a bloody proof. The Jews, who did not recognize Christ as the fulfillment of their own prophecies, were, for the medieval church, the ultimate unbelievers: “the Jew” acquired a symbolism in Christian culture which was increasingly divorced from social or religious realities, and this play, written two centuries after the Jews had officially been expelled from England, is perhaps not really about Jews at all. The Jews here swear by Mohammed, but the play is not about Moslems either: this play is about the sacrament, and the doctrine of transubstantiation. The “Jews” stand for all those who do not believe that Christ is, as Jew Jonathas puts it, “in a cake”²² – really present in the Eucharistic host. In England in the 15th century the “Jews” are the ‘unbelieving’ proto-Protestant Lollards. But Jews are also mythically “bloody”, and blood is what proves guilt in the unbeliever: blood is what proves truth and creates belief. In *Croxtton*, there is both a bleeding host and an apparition of a bleeding body, which appears to be Christ – the Bishop apparently addresses it as “fili dei” (734) – but which is also described by Jonathas as “a chyld ... with wondys bloddy” (724). The Christian child tortured by Jews in imitation of Christ appears actually to have become Christ, contained in the Eucharistic host: a number of different bloody miracles have been combined to bring about the conversion of the unbeliever to faith in the Real Presence.

The Jews in the play explicitly discuss blood as proof. In a rather puzzling passage (362-8) the chief Jew, Jonathas, alludes to Isaiah’s prophecy of a hero coming *tinctis Bosra vestibus* (“with dyed garments from Bozrah”). Isaiah’s hero speaks righteous words and has salvific power, and his garments are stained as if he has been pressing grapes:

I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people *there was* none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment...

And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth. (Isaiah 63:3-6)

The garments from Bosra, dyed splendidly red, are a symbol of strength and power, but their color is then linked to the red of grapes and wine, and the red of blood. The apparently blood-stained garment identifies Isaiah’s hero; it is proof of Messianic status. It is easy to see why this passage was attractive to Christian exegetes establishing the connection between the

Eucharistic wine and the blood of Christ.²³ Jonathas, who as a Jew is conveniently familiar with Old Testament prophecy, suggests that they must test the Eucharistic host to see whether it is, in fact, the hero who comes from Bosra with stained garments – to test whether or not Christ is the fulfillment of the prophets. Malchus, in a loaded pun, declares that they will discover the truth through “clowtys” (372): *clowtys* here are both the blows which the Croxton Jews inflict on the host, and the cloth in which the host is wrapped – and by extension the blood-stained Bosran clothes of Isaiah’s hero. Iconographically the cloth in which Jonathas wraps the host and which, presumably, becomes bloody when the host bleeds (though no stage direction mentions the fact) suggests the bloody cloth displayed in Orvieto Cathedral, proof of the Real Presence to medieval Christians.²⁴

That some acting troupes managed their blood to great effect is indicated in the following account of a French host miracle play very similar to Croxton:

The treacherous Jew, wishing to find out if the Host were God... struck it with a knife then by a secret (*feincte*) great abundance of blood came forth and soared up high from the said Host as if it had been a child pissing, and the Jew was all blood spattered and stained by it ...²⁵

Here it may be observed not only that considerable skill is needed to make bread bleed so forcefully,²⁶ but also that the Jew is splashed and stained with the blood of the miraculous host. This perhaps indicates that the blood is a proof not only of the Real Presence in the host, but also of the guilt of the Jew as torturer of the host and thus, as a representative of the Jewish race to the medieval mind, as murderer of Christ.

Blood cannot, in the ordinary run of things, be found outside the body; once it is outside the body, it demands attention and explanation.²⁷ The blood which comes from the host is a proof *because it comes from the host*; it proves that the bread is not what it seems, but a body, and it proves that that body has been tortured and bloodied not just by the Jews’ stabbing of the wafer but also because of the crucifixion of Christ commemorated in the Mass which the Jews parody. Blood is a proof not only of life, injury and death, but also of guilt: blood is transferable, splashing and staining bodies from which it does *not* come, and so indicating a murderer. But blood is an unstable proof because it is so readily transferred. It is impossible to tell, from the appearance of blood, from which body it came, or who made it

flow. Lady Macbeth, for example, “gilds the faces of the grooms” with Duncan’s blood so that they appear to be his killers.

Blood as Theatre

Theatrical illusions depend on the deployment of material realities – actors’ bodies, costumes, props – in such a way that the audience will accept that they are at once real and fictionalized: a prop handkerchief is materially a handkerchief, but it is only fictionally the handkerchief Othello gave to Desdemona, and the fiction is only maintained while it is on stage. A stage crown may look like a real monarch’s crown, but even if it were materially valuable, decorated with real gold and gems, it could only be a crown fictionally, onstage, since it is not invested with real political power. The audience must also accept a fictional narrative about where the actor’s bodies, and their props, came from, and where they will go: Andrea Stevens argues that, just as bodies and props move on and off the stage through “entrance doors or stage hangings whose movements help create impressions of unseen interior spaces”, so “paint, when applied to or removed from a body, fosters effects of depth, gestures towards ‘hidden’ passions, and constructs and dismantles identities”.²⁸ Stevens points out also that paint was used elsewhere in theatre to create props and set, not only blood, and she argues that for early modern writers paint even embodied “the essence of theatricality”.²⁹ Whether paint or real blood is used, stage blood is at once material and fictional; it is a prop, but one that is transferable, and it cannot travel endlessly like other props, but can only be very physically transferred. Nonetheless, blood has inherently huge theatrical potential. When made visible, it implies a narrative that commands attention. Its materiality is indisputable, and its significance in one sense instantly recognizable; on the other hand, its fluidity and transferability ensure that there are numerous potential narratives behind its appearance.

In a discussion of blood on the early modern professional stage, Lucy Munro argues that the material quality of blood, most importantly its staining power, was a reason it was in fact used with care by professional companies: perhaps unlike spectacular civic productions like Lucerne, which were by their nature occasional and lavishly-funded, professional productions had to ensure that blood did not stain costumes which had to be re-used day after day. She discusses *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*, and I would like here to add a brief consideration of *Macbeth*, a play that suggestively draws attention itself to the staining powers of blood, although the stains are not on clothes but on hands.³⁰ “Out, damned spot” (5.1.33) – in one of the best-known lines in Shakespeare, Lady Macbeth tells us that her

hands are stained with blood which she cannot wash away. In every production I have seen, Lady Macbeth's hands are clean when she declares that the color and smell of blood remain on them: "all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." (5.1.47-8). Her words are taken as the product of delusion. But they echo Macbeth's anxious words after the murder of Duncan:

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas in incarnadine,
Making the green one red. (2.2.59-62)

And Macbeth's hands at this point are literally bloody.³¹ The hyperbole of the conceit, with its notoriously erudite coining "incarnadine", invites an interpretation of the literal blood as symbolic of Macbeth's guilt. But nonetheless there is literal blood, and Macbeth's conceit might also serve metatheatrically – even comically so – as a moment of anxiety about the practicalities of staging which involves painted blood. How can an actor get rid of a "blood" stain? How might the play be affected if these lines, along with "Out damned spot!" are taken as implicit stage directions, and the hands of both Macbeths are actually stained with blood – as might indeed have been the case given the difficulty for actors of quickly ridding their hands of stage blood between scenes? It is true that Lady Macbeth declares that "a little water rids us of this deed" – clearly the Macbeths, and the Macbeth actors, attempt to wash their hands after the murder of Duncan and his grooms. But perhaps Lady Macbeth's words are too optimistic: the actors might not have been able, with a little water, to rid their hands of every last spot of blood as quickly as the scenes would require, and indeed a "damned spot" or two might remain as proof of the protagonists' guilt. The murderers' stained hands would then be a theatrical necessity of which the playwright makes a virtue.

If the Macbeths' damned spots are indeed traces of stage blood, why would the characters around the Macbeths apparently fail to notice the blood stains on their hands? Three possible explanations might be considered. One is that they actually *do* see the stains, and ignore them either because they do not wish to upset Macbeth, the rising star, or because they do not know how to interpret them. After all, Macbeth achieves his promotion through gory violence on the battlefield, so the question within war-torn Scotland is not whether he has blood on his hands, but whose blood, and whether it was shed in the "legitimate" context

of battle. We first learn of Macbeth as the violent killer of the rebel Macdonwald: “For brave Macbeth...with bloody execution...unseam'd him from the nave to the chaps” (1.2.16-22). However, we do not at this point see Macbeth, but rather hear of his actions through the words of the “bleeding Sergeant” (1.2.1 s.d.) who is in some sense the visual substitute here for the protagonist whom we will not meet fresh from the battlefield. The practical reason for this is clear: were the Macbeth actor to appear at this point covered in stage-paint battle gore, it would be impossible for him to clean himself up in time for his encounter with the witches in the next scene, or indeed perhaps for the rest of the play. The stage direction also emphasizes, however, the rich ambiguity of blood as a stage signifier: that the Sergeant is “bleeding” implies that the blood is his, but the audience will not have access to this stage direction and so will perhaps be uncertain whether the blood on the Sergeant indicates his wounds or the wounds he has inflicted on others with a “bloody execution” like Macbeth’s. After all, when Macbeth later talks of Malcolm and Donalbain as their father’s killers, he calls them “our bloody cousins” (3.1.29), just as here Duncan calls the Sergeant “this bloody man” (1.2.1). Of course, Duncan refers literally to the presence of stage gore, and at the end of the scene it becomes clear that the Sergeant bleeds from gashes on his body, but later stage blood is worn by the killer, rather than the victim:

Macbeth

.... There's blood on thy face.

First Murderer

'Tis Banquo's then (3.4.14-15)

There is another possible reason that, if the Macbeths’ hands have stains of (stage) blood on them, those around them do not appear to notice, and it concerns the selective, and/or subjective, nature of ocular proofs. Just as the bearing of blood on hands or clothes can be a sign of guilt, so also the *seeing* of blood can be the sign of a guilty conscience. At a banquet Macbeth sees the bloody ghost of Banquo, whose murder he has ordered, but the other dinner guests, innocent of Banquo’s blood, apparently do not. Interestingly, it appears that the audience is situated with the guilty, if the stage direction for the appearance of Banquo’s ghost is authentic (3.4.41 s.d.). So also in the host miracles it is the party which is in some sense “guilty” who sees the bloody apparition of finger, hand, or whole body of Christ – the sceptical priest, the mocking baker, or the host-torturing (and, in medieval

thought, Christ-murdering) Jew. In Croxton, the whole audience see the child appear with wounds bloody, and indeed the (presumably faithful) Bishop can see it, too: in a sense, this is appropriate, since the audience and the Bishop will have seen the host which is merely a prop, unconsecrated, and have interpreted it as a prop, not as the sacramental symbol but as a substitute for that symbol. The “belief” of theatrical audiences is not like the “belief” of the faithful: the former is a willed belief in what is seen, the latter a willed belief in what is not seen.

So if we believe that the consecrated host in a church is Christ but the prop-host in Croxton is not Christ, we can enjoy, within the fictional world of the play, the spectacle of Christ’s bloody wounds with which the church would present the unbeliever. This brings us to a third reason that those onstage with the Macbeths might not comment on the (stage) blood on their hands. Stage convention is very potent and audiences are sophisticated in their ability to distinguish between what they should and should not “see”. If Macbeth tells the audience that it is a foul night then they will wilfully not “see” that it is a sunny afternoon; so also the Banquo actor, on stage with Macbeth, must see only what he is told to see. Sometimes an actor’s lines, or those of characters around him, imply ‘seeing’ different things, as when Macbeth sees Banquo’s Ghost in his seat and Lennox asserts that the seat is empty (III.4, 45): the audience is then able to see two “realities” at once through the eyes of different actors. But the actors have no lines with which either to support or contradict the Macbeths’ assertions that they have blood on their hands, and no stage directions to indicate reactions, either. Therefore their characters do not react, and the audience has no way to know whether to see or not see the blood stains, no way of knowing whether they are within or without the play’s fiction.

The transferability of blood as a prop marks its vital difference from severed heads or limbs, which can mark violence and murder by being apparently detached from one body, but which cannot then be attached to another. But if the Macbeths’ comments on their blood-stained hands are actually metatheatrical moments in which the actor ruefully references the difficulty of washing off stage paint, then blood stains would function a little like the severed body part which, left on stage, becomes “the focus of generic and tonal uncertainty”³² marking a moment where a play may veer between comedy and tragedy. The severed limb does this because it is a prop, with a “real” existence within and without the play’s fiction, and this existence is awkward. Special effects present challenges in the execution – how *did* the Croxton troupe sever Jonathas’ hand? – but also sometimes in their aftermath – what does

one do with the hand once severed? How does one clear the stage of fake limbs or fake blood?

The practical problem that the actors must face is in some way the same as that that confronts the characters they present, as Shakespeare gleefully indicates in *Titus Andronicus*. At the end of 3.1, Titus is left on stage with Marcus, Lavinia, and the severed heads of two of his sons, as well as his own severed hand. They need to clear the stage, and, Lavinia having also had her hands cut off, they only have three functioning hands among them with which to do it. Titus improvises instructions to deal with this problem of stage management, including the macabre order to Lavinia that she carry his hand in her mouth: “Bear thou my hand, sweet wench, between thy teeth” (3.1.283).³³ In the 2013 RSC production, directed by Michael Fentimen, Stephen Boxer as Titus played this to superb comic effect, presenting the exasperation and mild embarrassment of a stage manager caught short by an unanticipated practical problem. That this stage direction is, metatheatrically, an improvisation forced on the actors presenting mutilated characters apparently rendered it implausible to early printers: a variant reading in Q1 seems to indicate that “teeth” was altered to “arms” by an early corrector who could not believe that the hand was really supposed to be carried in the mouth. In fact, as Jonathan Bate notes, “*Pace* correctors and editors, the emblem of the hand between the teeth is perfectly appropriate: it accentuates Lavinia’s role as *handmaid* of Revenge”.³⁴ We could add that it accentuates Lavinia’s momentary role as -- somewhat inadequate -- *stagehand*. Shakespeare the man of the theatre makes a potent theatrical symbol out of a stage management contingency.

So also in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, when Jonathas loses his hand, his fellow Jews have to deal with the severed hand and a bleeding host both nailed to a post. The post, with its bloody load, apparently remains on stage during the scene between Master Brundycche and his sidekick Colle, whose promises of diagnosis through uroscopy and healing through herbs are patently inadequate for the situation: their absurdity is emphasized by the onstage presence of the severed hand, since Jonathas clearly does not need to ‘piss in a pot’ for medical analysis.³⁵ His complaint is material and obvious. Equally material and obvious is the “image” which appears “with woundys bledyng” when the Jews’ oven bursts, but the material difficulties of stage management which both image and severed hand present can, in the Croxton narrative, be miraculously resolved. Jonathas’ severed hand, exceptionally for severed body parts on stage, can be miraculously re-attached to its owner though the intervention of Christ, the Real Presence behind the Eucharistic host, represented

onstage by the bleeding image which emerges from the prop host. As the stage directions have it, “Here shall Ser Jonathas put hys hand into the cawdron, and yt shalbe hole agayn” (697 s.d.); and “the image” shall then “change agayn into brede” (745 s.d.): these stage directions at once assert the fictional narrative, stating that the hand “shall be whole” and referring to an image and bread, not to Christ and a host, and also offer a fictional resolution to the stage management problem – although no advice is given as to how these theatrical illusions are to be achieved, the reattached hand will not be difficult to get off stage, and neither will the bread. The Bishop simply picks up the bread and lays it on the altar, at which point even the stage directions refer to it as “the Host” (785, s.d.). The Eucharistic symbolism has been reasserted, and for the audience this prop is once again theatrically unremarkable.

The severed hand and the bleeding image, for all their potency as proofs, are objects that can be readily removed from the audience’s sight – though perhaps not their memory³⁶ -- through tricks of theatre craft. However, blood, or even paint used to represent it, can only be transferred, and is not readily washed away. The bleeding host of Bolsena left its mark on the stones of a church floor and the cloth of a church altar, as a witness to the Real Presence. The theatrical blood of the Croxton stage effects is likely to make its mark on the costumes of the Jews; it is also likely to leave traces in the playing area of the *Play of the Sacrament*.³⁷ How may these traces be interpreted; of what are they proof? Blood in the playing area marks the theatrical nature of the violence which has been enacted: comfortably, it is unreal; uncomfortably, the play insists on its imitation of reality, and the very fictionality of the stage blood ensures that it is not miraculously absorbed or cleared up, but nor can it shine as proof of any Real Presence, since it was always only theatre. Blood on the hands and clothes of Jonathas may be the proof of his “murder” of Christ, but may also indicate his own wounded hand, nailed like Christ’s: Jonathas the Jew and Christ, the victim of his violence, are curiously connected through the blood proof which, as we have seen, cannot always distinguish between perpetrator and victim.

¹ See Jacobs, “Little St Hugh”, for a comparison of the abbey annals’ account and that of Matthew Paris. I detail this history more fully in “The Blood Libel: Literary Representations

of Ritual Child Murder in Medieval England,” in *Children and Violence*, ed. Laurence Brockliss and Heather Montgomery (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010), 32-6.

² Many scholars have followed Joseph Jacob in pointing out, on religious grounds, “how impossible it is for Jews to use human blood” in their rituals, and that contact with a corpse “renders a Jew impure ... and incapable of performing any religious rite”. See “Little St. Hugh of Lincoln: Researches in History, Archaeology, and Legend,” in Jacobs’ *Jewish Ideals and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1896), 192-224. Edward I finally expelled the Jews from England in 1291 because of financial exigency: the Jews’ status as financiers to the crown ensured their royal protection but also made them vulnerable to this “single and arbitrary act of spoliation”. R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), 44.

³ Arnold of Villanova, *Opera Omnia, cum Nicolai Taurelli Medici et philosophi in quosdam libros annotationibus* (Basil, 1585), 1241-3, cited in Willis Johnson, “The Myth of Jewish Male Menses,” *Journal of Medieval History* 24: 3 (1998): 275 (289). For further discussion of male menstruation see Gabriella Zuccolin and Helen King, “Rethinking Nosebleeds: Gendering Spontaneous Bleedings in Medieval and Early Modern Medicine,” in this volume.

⁴ See William Tydeman, ed., *The Medieval European Stage, 500-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 192.

⁵ Citations from the edition of the play in Greg Walker, ed., *Medieval Drama: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 212-33, and are by line number. I have directed the play three times, most recently for the Oxford Blood Conference in January 2014. A (fixed camera) recording of this production can be seen at <http://www.thebloodproject.net/performance/>; it was staged in the chapel of St John’s College, Oxford, where the frisson created by the sanctified performance space compensated for the highly restricted use of stage blood dictated by the conservation requirements of a historic building.

⁶ See for example the essays by Dawson, Decamp, Parker, Lees-Jeffries and Lander Johnson in this collection.

⁷ 400, s.d.; 592, s.d., 632, s.d., and 435, s.d.

⁸ See Elisabeth Dutton, “The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*, ed. Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 55-71.

⁹ For an overview of stage directions in the early modern period, see Linda McJannet, *The Voice of Elizabethan Stage Directions* (Newark NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1999).

¹⁰ Digby, *Mary Magdalene*, 1561 s.d. b.

¹¹ Digby, *Conversion of St Paul*, 501 s.d..

¹² Philip Butterworth, *Theatre of Fire: Special Effects in the Early English and Scottish Theatre* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1998), 51.

¹³ Three plays of the Digby Manuscript, *Mary Magdalene*, *The Conversion of St Paul*, and *The Slaughter of the Innocents*, are saints’ plays, and the latter is of course bloody, but they contain little useful information about how bloody effects were achieved.

¹⁴ Provençal Director’s Notebook, cited in Tydeman, *Medieval European Stage*, 317.

¹⁵ Peter Meredith and John Tailby, ed., *The Staging of Religious Drama in Europe in the Later Middle Ages: Texts and Documents in English Translation*, Early Drama, Art and Music Monograph Series 4 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1983), 108.

¹⁶ Provençal Director’s Notebook, cited in Tydeman, *Medieval European Stage*, 317.

¹⁷ Joe Moshenska, in his essay “Screaming Bleeding Trees: textual wounding and the epic tradition,” in this collection.

¹⁸ The ‘plot’ of *The Battle of Alcazar* requires 3 vials of blood and the entrails of a sheep, which has led to the suggestion that the blood would also be sheep blood; however, the ensuing reference to “dead mens heads” presumably indicates that not all of these requirements are to be taken literally.

¹⁹ Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London, 1584), 350.

²⁰ Lucy Munro, “‘They eat each other’s arms’: stage blood and body parts,” in *Shakespeare’s Theatres and the Effects of Performance*, ed. Farah Karim-Cooper and Tiffany Stern, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 73-93 (79-80).

²¹ Scot, *The Discoverie*, 350.

²² Jonathas’s comment that the Christians beleve on a cake (120) invokes not only the bread of the Eucharistic Host, but also the medical meaning of “cake” as an abnormal growth on the inner organs, often associated with the action of elves – an image which suggests and debases the idea of Christ incarnation in a Virgin’s womb. See Dutton, “The Croxton Play,” 60.

²³ See Walker, *Medieval Drama*, 23, n.42.

²⁴ The bloody cloth as a proof is a recurrent trope, ranging from bloodied wedding sheets as proof of virginity, to Pyramus finding Thisbe’s bloody mantle: for detailed discussion see Patricia Parker, “Simular Proof, Tragicomic Turns, and *Cymbeline*’s Bloody Cloth,” in this collection.

²⁵ Vigneulles *Gedenkbuch*, 244-5, describing a performance in Metz, 1513, cited in Tydeman, *Medieval European Stage*, 349. The account continues, intriguingly: “Then, enraged, he took the host and flung it in a cauldron of boiling water and it rose up in the air in a cloud and became a little child as it rose and all this was done by pulleys and *secrets*.”

²⁶ I have experimented with various means, including pouches of blood inside bread, pouches of blood hidden underneath the bread, and even an actor underneath the table on which the bread is stabbed, with blood in a syringe. None has achieved anything like the effect of “a child pissing”, largely because the bread itself tends to soak up blood and prevent it from gushing.

²⁷ “blood is a substance whose physical nature and perceived significance is not intrinsic but unusually determined by its *place*. It is redolent of life and vitality so long as it remains

invisible: as soon as it appears, the very fact of its appearance betokens wounding, the possible dissipation of life, and the spectre of imminent death.” Moshenska, “Screaming Bleeding Trees’ p.7.

²⁸ Andrea Stevens, “Cosmetic Transformations,” in *Shakespeare’s Theatres*, ed. Karim-Cooper and Stern (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 94-117 (97).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 95. Stevens cites Thomas Heywood’s suggestion that the word “tragedy” derives from the Greek for “a kinde of painting”.

³⁰ For discussion of the identification of clothing with the body, see Lees-Jeffries, “Mantled in blood,” in this collection.

³¹ Lees-Jeffries, “Mantled in blood”, writes that: “It is in *Macbeth*, in contrast to *Julius Caesar*, that it is explicitly established that neither the blood nor the moment of assassination need be shown.” (??). However, apparently Duncan’s blood *is* shown, but on Macbeth’s hands.

³² Munro, ““They eat each other’s arms,”” 93.

³³ William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Jonathan Bate, The Arden Shakespeare. (London: Routledge, 1995), 205.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.1.282-3 n.

³⁵ Colle, Master Brundyche’s servant, invites Jonathas to seek treatment from his master: “In a pott yf yt please yow to pysse, /He can tell yf yow be curable” (568-9).

³⁶ The significance of this is discussed in Dutton, *The Croxton Play*, 70-71.

³⁷ This presents an argument for outdoor performance, or a reason for caution to those playing indoors: see above, note 5.