

Corneille's *Le Cid* and Crying Blood

by
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Son sang sur la poussière écrivait mon devoir;
Ou plutôt sa valeur en cet état réduite
Me parlait par sa plaie, et hâtait ma poursuite;
Et pour se faire entendre au plus juste des rois,
Par cette triste bouche elle empruntait ma voix. (2.8.676–
80)

In this scene, Chimène describes her father's blood speaking to her as she pleads with the King for justice.¹ While it might be tempting to gloss her description as a conventional symbol of her familial duty, the heroine's account of blood here is more than mere poetic device. Chimène's language not only emphasizes blood's material presence spilt in the dirt, but also figures blood as an agent which calls for action, and seemingly does so literally since "sang" is the speech's subject with its own "bouche," the wound. Her father's blood speaks to her due to their consanguinity but then borrows ("empruntait") her voice to speak for itself in a public forum. Blood has agency in this drama, at least as the characters imagine, an agency that Chimène recognizes when she calls on "le sang par le sang" (2.8.692). Her actions are not hers alone, but are instead compelled by her bloodline, a force larger than herself. Blood hastens her pursuit and she does not believe that she has the capacity to refuse its directive. The familial blood dictates her actions and commands her to speak for it, just as a god might speak through a possessed human host. In her mind, blood calls for blood seemingly despite human volition.

Curiously at odds, then, with Chimène's belief in the inescapable directive of bloodshed — and the fact that "sang" is mentioned no less than forty times throughout the play — is the play's close which seeks to foreclose blood's demands. The King promises that the blood feud will cease, that the two lovers can be wed, and that all will live together happily

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thereafter.² And yet, despite the attractiveness of this promise, Chimène's "point of honor" described in graphic detail — "d'avoir trempé mes mains dans le sang paternel"(5.7.1838) — appears to be neither an arbitrary point of contention that she cites to hide her true feelings, nor a mechanism for Corneille to appease the critics of the French Academy.³ Rather, her complaint carries enormous weight if the theories of blood are taken seriously, as she clearly does. If one's blood physically determines one's character, and blood is mixed in the consummation of marriage, then husband and wife ultimately come to share both the traits and the crimes of one another. In this case, if Chimène's blood were to mix with Rodrigue's, then she would be guilty of patricide.⁴ Chimène clings to these reservations because for her, though the King can pardon Rodrigue's crime in a legal context, his blood cannot be changed by royal sanction. She thus

² I will set the genre debate aside for the purposes of this project, but its ambiguous character is a matter of contention. The fact that Corneille changed the genre label, from a tragicomedy to a tragedy after the *Querelle du Cid* only heightens this debate. For more information on this play's formal relationship to the mixed genre tragicomedy, see Peter Bürger's article as well as Serge Dubrovsky's Lacanian reading. R.J. Nelson, on the other hand, characterizes *Le Cid* as a romance, and Cordell Black contends that the ambiguity of genre mirrors the play's central theme which is "the fragility and impermanence of the state of happiness seemingly achieved by the protagonists" (73). Moreover, aside from generic considerations, much hinges upon one's reading of this ending. There is a great deal of disagreement about whether the marriage ever takes place and, if it does, is it a happy occasion? If one interprets Chimène as actively desiring the marriage with Rodrigue and only voicing dissent due to social pressure, then one can read into *Le Cid* the desired, albeit morally scandalous, comedic conclusion (see William Kibler, R.C. Knight, Georges May, and Mohammed Kowsar). On the other hand, one can seriously consider the inconclusive nature of the marriage as well as Chimène's concern and silence at the play's close, likely signifying a lack of consent (see Octave Nadal, H.C. Ault, David Clarke, Mitchell Greenberg, and John Trethewey). Some critics also hold that the reading may vary depending upon the edition (1637 or the revised, final edition of 1660). While these critics emphasize the differences between the two versions due to the *Querelle*, I am inclined to agree with C.J. Gossip who holds that the changes made to the denouement in the second version don't amount to much. This is especially the case for my purposes since the attention to blood and conflict remains the same in both texts. Thus I will be using the 1660 edition as Corneille's final word on the subject.

³ Helen Harrison, rather than cast the *Querelle* as preoccupied with the propriety of the impending marriage as most scholars do, argues that the concerns of Scudéry and others pertain to the King's authority and his use of royal gratitude, in particular the use of Chimène to extend thanks to Rodrigue as a potential abuse of royal power (245–6).

⁴ Certainly, other scholars like Ralph Albanese have made this point — viewing in her silence "l'impossibilité radicale de réconcilier à ses yeux le parricide et le mariage" — though Albanese doesn't understand it in the visceral way that Chimène seems to (369).

embraces this ultimately destructive discourse in order to save both herself and her entire bloodline from “reproche éternel” (5.7.1837). If we recognize in this moment the seriousness of the characters’ ideological framework of blood — namely that blood is a substance that literally determines identities, duties, and affinities and that explicitly makes demands — then Chimène’s final speech and the uncomfortable nature of the dénouement becomes clearer.

As historian David Sabeau notes of blood ties in the period, “blood transmits essential properties from parent to child and constructs a material identity among individuals of the same lineage” (154). As far back as the thirteenth century in the *supplementum* to his *Summa*, Thomas Aquinas maintains that blood is an “immutable essence” and thus does not change as it is passed down from one generation to the next (Teuscher 86). And this basic belief persists at least as late as the seventeenth century, for the legal dictionary, *Nouveau dictionnaire civil et canonique* (1697) insists on blood’s primacy outlining that “only blood is capable of contracting kinship and alliance” (11 qtd. Gager 4).⁵ In addition to materializing shared character traits, this discourse of family lineage also privileged the preservation of a bloodline over and above its individual members. This logic intensifies in the context of a blood feud, which, as Stuart Carroll has explained, is never an individual matter. The blood feud, rather, entails collective liability since the vengeance taker need not be the kinship member who was most wronged; individuals are fundamentally vessels for the bloodlines that carry both traits and responsibility, and the bloodline is the primary target of vengeance. Furthermore, the notion that blood might cry for action has biblical origins, when God says to Cain that Abel’s blood is crying to him from the ground (*Gen.* 4:10, Cherpack 12).

Kinship ties then expanded based on marriage, for in the period the saying that two would become “one flesh” (*unitas carnis*) (*Gen.* 2:24) appears to have been taken literally. The vocabulary of shared flesh changed to one of blood likely due to Old Testament references that con-

⁵ See Kristen Gager on the growing importance of blood to the definition of family, at least nominally, in early modern France. This emphasis coincided with legal restrictions on adoption, including denying adopted children the same inheritance rights afforded to biological ones (1–15). Blood likewise carried or dictated feelings of sympathy for kin. As Malbranche explains of the *cri du sang* phenomenon in his *De la recherche de la vérité*: “On voit dans une compagnie une personne dont l’air et les manières ont de secrètes alliances avec la disposition présente de notre corps, sa vue nous touche et nous pénètre, nous sommes portés sans réflexion à l’aimer et à lui vouloir du bien” (qtd. Cherpack 8).

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nected the soul to blood (Delille 136–7). Evidence for the belief in equal blood mixing comes in part from incest proscriptions in canon law, particularly the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which counted degrees of consanguinity equally through both paternal and maternal bloodlines (Sabeau and Teuscher 5). At the same time, the vocabulary of sexual intercourse changed from *copula carnalis* to *commixtio sanguinis* (the mixing of blood), and authors working within the Galenic, humoral framework began to explicitly equate semen with blood and posited that a woman might also need to ejaculate blood of sorts (Teuscher 95–6). Yet as Sabeau reminds us, these “widespread assumptions about the exchange of fluids in intercourse always point to a substantial, carnal, physical link that carries moral weight” (156). Hence viewing the talk of blood in this play as not merely metaphorical, but as embodied or fleshy gives new force to Chimène’s refusal; in this framework her marriage to Rodrigue could not be morally permissible since she will assume his faults physiologically. Moreover, attending to the materiality of blood’s call also prompts us to re-examine the play’s standard gloss as a conflict between two conflicting ideologies: that of the nobility and that of the monarch. Chimène’s “point d’honneur” highlights that these assumptions about blood’s nature, if earnestly believed, are more powerful than either the aristocracy or the monarchy that cite them to substantiate their authority.

The classic political reading of *Le Cid* characterizes the play’s struggle as one between two different value systems: the emergent absolutist monarchy and the older feudal structures of the aristocracy — characterized by Chimène’s point of honor and her obsession with blood. This gloss is understandable given the role that blood played in the debates around nobility in this moment. Arlette Jouanna’s book, *L’Idée de race en France*, lists seventy-seven authors who debated a nobility of “race” (i.e., hereditary bloodline) versus a nobility of virtue between 1550 and 1615. And André Devyver has shown that the self-conscious equation of nobility with blood purity increased after 1560 when the Count of Rochefort called for the end of ennoblements in an attempt to limit the increasing number of *parvenus* amongst them. Rochefort claimed the ancient prerogatives of blood, claiming that it was the medium of psychic and moral virtues including bravery and strength inherited from the ancient conquering Franks.⁶ In yet another example, Cardin Le Bret as *avocat général* insisted

⁶ Ellery Schalk in her touchstone work emphasizes the role of demonstrated military prowess and other virtuous activities in the Middle Ages as more indicative of nobility than biological lineage or pedigree, which she believes only became explicit in the 1590s. Likewise important to note is that the nobility continued to be martially important during

in the Cour des Aides (1598) that “nobility depends less on the law than on nature, that is to say, on the law of nations and on a series of degrees of consanguinity” (qtd. Descimon 97). This myth gained more force towards the end of Louis XIV’s reign, but the embrace of this vocabulary incited a great deal of debate and gave rise to a legal definition of nobility.⁷

Yet the need to prove a nobility of blood wasn’t merely a way to assert noble identity independent from royal authority, it was also a reaction to the state’s fiscal interests, specifically looking for exemption from the *taille* after the declaration of Francois I in 1543 (Haddad 151). While investigations into noble genealogies to create a *noblesse de race* (1661) would seem to support noble interests on a symbolic level by supporting the notion of imprescribibility, it in fact decreased the number of “true” nobles (i.e. those not conferred by the King) because it increased the amount of proof necessary. Nobles now had to prove nobility as far back 1560, and this law became even stricter overtime as investigators like Alexandre de Belleguise and André de la Rocque insisted that if one found evidence of *roture* even before 1560, then the nobles could no longer

both the Hundred Years War and the Wars of Religion. However as many scholars have since noted, this may be partly due to the fact that biological membership was simply taken for granted in the Middle Ages, but which became complicated in the early modern period with the increasing ranks of the *noblesse de robe*. Constance Bouchard, for instance, tracks the rise of this concern as early as the 12th century, when nobility begin to avoid unequal marriage pairings because “knights and burghers began to pose a challenge to the integrity of the noble class which viscounts and castellans had not posed a century earlier” (56). Yet Bouchard holds that nonetheless each order, generally speaking, would look to one order below them (royalty to counts, counts to viscounts, etc.) in order to avoid incest prohibitions. They ordinarily only looked to the order below for marriage partners for their daughters, whereas men needed to marry within their class or slightly above (57). For a history of one particularly notable upstart Italian family in France, the Gondi, see the recent monograph by Joanna Milstein.

⁷ See Robert Descimon and Elie Haddad on the debate over from whence nobility came and the question of imprescriptibility; namely, did nobility arise from the office, or was this nobility imprinted on the person (i.e., prescribed) as a result of holding the office which could then become hereditary? In the first camp, Gilles-André de la Rocque claims that those nobles of the office can live ennobled, but they die as non-nobles since these aren’t permanent elevations in status and do not change the man’s nature (100). Moreover, scholar Jacques de la Guesle (1598) insisted that one should be of hereditary nobility (*ex genere*) rather than noble by mere office (*ex officio*) in order to be a judge, for otherwise it would be unseemly for them to judge the actions of those above their original (non-elevated) station (99–100). This issue is later complicated further by the notion of gradual nobility; offices given by the chancery did not bestow true nobility on the holders but those from sovereign decrees did, and bestowing “dignity” could then be hereditary (106–7).

claim *noblesse de race*. Ultimately this gave the King more control to give out noble status according to merit and to decide on limit cases exposed by his genealogists (Haddad 159–63).

Corneille scholars have consequently understood *Le Cid* as part of this historical story of noble decline, with the language of blood squarely on the side of the aristocracy. Paul Bénichou, for instance, understands Corneille's dramatic corpus as embodying "l'esprit aristocratique," which includes rebelling against the aristocracy's humiliation by royal authorities. For Bénichou, although *Le Cid* reinstates the King's power at the close, it nonetheless reflects a certain nostalgia for this older feudal system.⁸ Bénichou and other scholars generally speak of these competing value-systems in a disembodied way. Elliott Forsyth, for example, underlines the "puissance transcendante" of the feudal honor code in *Le Cid* (the "devoir se venger") though he views this discourse as a disembodied one of ideals, especially glory (393). Peter Bornedal's reading depends on his basic assumption that the code of honor is fundamentally about debts paid and maintaining a "name" (synonymous with honor), a value which outweighs all else. These systems, however, are very much attached to bodies; and when examined in this light, the two opposing sides are not so antithetical as most readings assume.⁹ Rather than understanding this phenomenon as a story of the nobility's decline,¹⁰ one could view this appeal

⁸ See Paul Bénichou's *Morales du grand siècle* (68–73). See also John D. Lyons's *The Tragedy of Origins* in which he maintains, "*Le Cid* exemplifies a tragic structure in which attention is drawn to the modification of values rather than to a modification in the knowledge available to the society of the play" (9). David Clarke more recently has expressed a similar view: "*Le Cid* offers neither an unqualified apology for the pretensions of a centralizing monarchical order nor an exaltation of the values of those who oppose that process," although the lovers represent an idealism that is admirable though untenable (164–6). Mitchell Greenberg likewise casts the play in this light, though this resistance is isolated to Chimène. Paul Scott views Don Fernand as an enfeebled monarch according to traditional measures (political, military, and judicial), but still reads his role as sympathetic since the contemporary audience would have identified him with Louis XIII who successfully ruled nonetheless.

⁹ Other critics who consider blood in *Le Cid* generally hint towards my reading but don't explore its fullest implications, for instance, see Octave Nadal (163). Paul Scott also speaks about blood when discussing Rodrigue's fight against the Moors, but he takes it in a sacrificial direction: "The warrior's participation in the salvific economy endows him with a Christ-like status, consolidated by references to blood" (297).

¹⁰ This story cites various reasons for this decline, but most include pressure from the rise of the bourgeoisie, the nobility's impoverishment, and the emergence of a strong centralized monarchy in Versailles court culture.

to blood as part of their attempt to negotiate new institutions by using vocabulary in new ways as many recent historians have encouraged. In this negotiation, therefore, the King might likewise make use of this vocabulary.¹¹ More recently Marcus Keller has noted in the play the King's usurpation of the nobles' blood discourse (of lineage and race) to construct a new absolutist state and a national identity defined by a common ethnicity.¹² Yet Keller's analysis treats blood metonymically, connected to kinship and ethnicity with little reference to its literal purchase in both the play's action and in the characters' conceptions of their respective identities. In short, he fails to note that these blood discourses actually demand and involve literal blood through blood spillage and violence. And though in this case the blood may not be visible onstage, it is graphically imagined nonetheless.¹³ I thus maintain that Corneille's persistent emphasis on blood emphasizes the violence necessary to perform this ideological framework on both sides of the political divide. While, as Rebecca Zorach has noted, the early modern

¹¹ See the edited collection *Contested Spaces of Nobility in Early Modern Europe*.

¹² Keller's point is the foundation for his larger argument that, "Rodrigue experiences the unconditional subjection to the king and the defense of Seville against the Moorish invasion as a liberation from the constraints of the traditional code of honor. He transfers his allegiance from his father and aristocratic family to the king and to Castile, which becomes his new symbolic family. Rodrigue's aristocratic identity and his strong sense of filial allegiance predestine him to become the hero of Castile and to personify a form of patriotism that becomes the condition of an increasingly centralized monarchical state and a growing national consciousness among Corneille's imaginary Castilians" (131). In general, Keller sees Corneille's *Le Cid* as ideologically participating in the creation of an absolutist nation-state. This is another difference between our readings for I see Corneille's portrayal of blood's discourse as quite critical. Additionally, the remainder of Keller's argument focuses not on blood but on the creation of identity and community via language and mutual recognition: the community's creation of a hero and the transformation of Rodrigue into "Le Cid," as well as the transformation of "Castile" into the more nationalist (if anachronistic) *Espagne*. Yet as I will note later, the Infante makes it clear that this is a bloody transformation as well as a linguistic one, or that at least it was imagined as a physical transformation first then reflected in the nominal change.

¹³ See the work of Pierre Giuliani for a history of blood onstage. He outlines its dramaturgic evolution from truly bloody violence to primarily verbal representations of suffering and the force of passions. Blood onstage — marked by the stage direction "ensanglanter la scene" — was standard practice in drama of Henry IV but faded during the time of Louis XIII and was officially prohibited by the time of Racine's theater. Giuliani notes that the *Querelle* may have effectively put an end to blood onstage (308). Thus though Giuliani never says so explicitly, blood at least *could* have been present in early stagings of *Le Cid*. For work on this earlier "bloody" theater, see the monograph by Christian Biet.

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French court also used blood to symbolize power and vitality more positively,¹⁴ in *Le Cid* the blood that embodies honor and identity demands blood spillage to preserve these characteristics — whether in the context of the aristocratic blood feud or in the King’s new body politic. Otherwise stated, even though the aristocracy and the monarch cite blood discourses towards contradictory ends, they invest in similar assumptions with similarly violent consequences.

Corneille’s play reveals that blood discourses, when taken seriously, can only produce more violence as the physiological material purportedly dictates these actions regardless of individual will: Rodrigue must salvage the honor in his father’s veins; blood likewise demands violence from Chimène, mandating death to the man responsible for spilling her blood (indistinguishable from her father’s); and King Fernand is equally dependent on blood spillage for his own identity and authority as (absolute) monarch. King Fernand can attempt to argue that his royal blood (the blood of the nation as he puts it) matters *more* than that of the nobility. But if he holds the same premise, that blood matters, then *all* blood matters; and the King cannot convincingly apply this principle to his body alone. So long as these characters depend upon and invest in these discourses, regardless of their side in this political divide, blood will not change. Blood will demand more blood, and future generations will be determined by the same violent requirements and demands. The alternative to this dialectic, to have a future without blood, necessitates rejecting this bloody ideology entirely; as *Le Cid* intimates, defining others by their bodies here only yields violence, whether in a blood feud or in a holy war against the Moors.

To briefly rehearse the violent consequences of this belief in blood, the nobility clearly espouse blood’s agency, which incites the blood feud. The two patriarchs, and Don Diègue in particular, quickly invoke the conviction that blood materially dictates both characteristics and affinities. And with these affinities come violent duties to one’s bloodline, despite the independent feelings of its particular individual members. Don Diègue rehearses several assumptions about how blood functions when he calls upon his son to avenge him. He importunes,

Je reconnais mon sang à ce noble courroux,
Ma jeunesse revit en cette ardeur si prompte,

¹⁴ See Rebecca Zorach’s *Blood, Milk, Ink, and Gold*.

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Viens, mon fils, viens mon sang, viens réparer ma honte;
Viens me venger. (1.5.264–7)

Don Diègue here not only equates his blood with his son, marked by the parallel construction “viens, mon fils, viens mon sang,” but also because his son carries his blood, he likewise must have inherited the same personality traits, his “noble courroux” and “ardeur.” Just as Rodrigue’s blood has dictated his identity and personality, so too it must dictate his actions. It is, after all, ambiguous as to which entity is “coming to avenge him” [“Viens me venger”]; is it “mon fils” or “mon sang”? Revenge, moreover, demands spilling blood to wash away dishonor as Diègue spells out, “Ce n’est que dans le sang qu’on lave un tel outrage, / Meurs, ou tue” (1.5.274–5).¹⁵ Diègue’s argument relies on the assumption that Rodrigue inherits the stain of his offense due to their consanguinity, and therefore to avenge his father is to avenge himself: “Enfin tu sais l’affront, et tu tiens la vengeance, / Je ne te dis plus rien. Venge-moi, venge-toi” (1.5.286–7). Don Diègue does not frame his request as merely something that a son should do out of duty to his father, but rather their consanguinity means that his son likewise requires vengeance.¹⁶

Both Rodrigue and Chimène assume this blood-determined duty, and though conflicted, when blood is understood as the physiological foundation of one’s person, it must trump erotic love. In other words, blood conceived in this way necessarily dictates and determines without concern for any other social or emotional considerations. For instance, Rodrigue

¹⁵ Kalervo Räsänen expresses this conundrum understood through the stain metaphor: “quand nous voulons nous débarrasser d’une souillure d’un objet physique, nous pouvons soit le laver soit le plonger dans une substance de sorte que la tache disparaisse” (87). In this case, one has to get rid of the stain by plunging it in a different material: blood of the enemy family.

¹⁶ After the Count’s death, Don Diègue further foregrounds his own body that has been cleansed by his son’s action, telling his son “Touche ces cheveux blancs à qui tu rends l’honneur” (3.6.1036). Here the grammatical construction makes clear Diègue’s emphasis on the body; his honor *belongs to* or *resides in* his white hairs since the white hairs are the vessels of adulation and not himself. Diègue’s engagement with this discourse here, and as a whole, stresses his belief that blood operates literally. He praises his son for the act that confirms their blood or lineage, “et ton illustre audace / Fait bien revivre en toi les héros de ma race” (3.6.1029–30). Though a moment of praise, Don Diègue’s compliment also functions as a hefty demand. The heroes of his entire lineage, “ma race,” depends on Rodrigue; they live on only “in him.” His body, his blood is of utmost importance not only for himself and his father, but for an entire family history. Marcus Keller claims that Rodrigue’s desire to protect his aristocratic family which he calls a “race” hints at his eventual transference of allegiance to the monarch and nation (132).

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voices this reasoning after a lengthy internal debate: “Que je meure au combat, ou meure de tristesse, / Je rendrai mon sang pur comme je l’ai reçu” (1.6.343–4). Rodrigue must put love aside because his blood won’t change; his basic nature, his integrity as an individual endures no matter the manner of his death. Moreover according to blood’s logic, material purity of the family honor must be his primary concern since his blood belongs not only to himself. It is a force greater than himself which cannot be changed by either his love for Chimène or the King’s absolution.¹⁷

Once completed, Rodrigue’s subscription to the logic of the blood feud incites Chimène’s response in kind, for she must likewise accept its violent injunctions. Chimène cannot reject familial duty that has been physiologically determined, not even for the love of Rodrigue or devotion to her country. Blood’s ideology equally implicates her noble body even if she lacks the capacity to act on it as Rodrigue does by taking his life. As a woman, it would be considered unseemly for Chimène to affect Rodrigue’s death by her own hand; and lacking any other male family members, she must continue to call on the King for justice/vengeance (Forsyth 394). Moreover, Chimène cannot find a place in the King’s discourse of blood: spilling Moorish blood for that of her nation. As Barbara Woshinsky notes, gender accounts for the protagonists’ respective success:

he [Rodrigue] can say almost anything and be believed.
He not *she*. For the guarantee does not work for heroines.
 While men can both act and speak, women can only speak,
 a disparity which will ultimately deny Chimène heroic
 stature (154).¹⁸

¹⁷ Rodrigue fully internalizes these assumptions regarding shared blood and even (re)cites them back to the older generation. He berates Chimène’s father for his actions, asserting that his blood is the source of the ardor which the Count once admired, the same blood that he shares with his father: “Cette ardeur que dans les yeux je porte, / Sais-tu que c’est son sang? le sais-tu?” (2.2.401–2). Repeating twice “sais-tu,” which is especially brash since he addresses his elder using the more informal pronoun, Rodrigue’s challenging tone highlights his internalization of this discourse.

¹⁸ William Goode casts this phenomenon as Chimène’s inability to fulfill the “ethic of gloire”: Corneille’s conception of heroism which combines hand (action/deed), heart (feeling/desire), and mind (rational/ethical deliberation/duty) in a unified whole. See also Milorad Margitic’s argument for a similar point and Mitchell Greenberg on the absolutist repression of femininity. Lastly, for a literature review of feminist readings of *Le Cid*, see Claire Carlin (8–12). In Carlin’s book, each chapter engages with a different contemporary feminist framework through which to read the play (Carol Gilligan, Jessica Benjamin, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva). In the first of these readings, Carlin claims

Chimène is thus at the mercy of the king's justice to satisfy blood's demand, but this blood, an intractable part of her, cannot be denied or set aside. When asking the King for justice with Rodrigue's death, she forcefully underlines blood's power:

Sire, mon père est mort; mes yeux ont vu son sang
Couler à gros bouillons de son généreux flanc,
Ce sang qui tant de fois garantit vos murailles,
Ce sang qui tant de fois vous gagna des batailles,
Ce sang qui tout sorti fume encor de courroux (2.8.659–63)

The first feature to note is that, after proclaiming her father dead, his blood remains her first concern. Secondly, her description of this blood is extremely visceral, flowing in “gros bouillons” from his flesh. While one might argue that this gruesome description acts as rhetorical flourish to underline the violent nature of Rodrigue's crime, the physical nature of the blood discourse throughout this play demands that the audience take this bloody description more seriously. Thirdly, Chimène's use of anaphora repeats the word “sang” three times over. Blood here becomes the subject of her proclamations: it protected the kingdom's borders; it won battles; it still fumes with rage. And, of course, as we saw in the opening quotation, the blood speaks and makes demands. When Don Rodrigue asks to be killed by Chimène with his own sword, she exclaims, “Quoi! du sang de mon père encor toute trempée!” (3.4.858). And only a few lines later she insists that this is likewise her blood, “Il est teint de *mon* sang” (3.4.863, italics mine). Like Rodrigue's acceptance of this discourse outlined by his father, if Chimène assumes this discourse, then she has no choice but to suppress any love for her enemy and plead for his blood to cleanse her own.

These lovers thus understand this mandate as a matter of personal integrity in part because it literally comes from within themselves, the very substance/essence of their (noble) beings. As other scholars have noted, the young lovers accept this “devoir du sang” in part due to a double bind (5.2.1592). For in order to be worthy of the beloved's love, the lover must

that Chimène is attempting to express this female voice or an “ethic of care,” “though her partial espousal of the male model based on the aristocratic code of honor places her in an awkward position” (24). However, while gender certainly inflects the characters' actions, their values appear to be based on class and the struggle for power. For it seems that this “female” ethic does not properly belong to Chimène but more so to her servant Elvire. Consequently, this kind of reading could be indicative not of gender but of the franchised versus the disenfranchised, which often coincides with gender but does not always map cleanly along gendered lines. Notably, Elvire is not a concern for most feminist readings that focus their attention on both Chimène and the Infante.

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maintain his/her honor, even if doing so entails violence towards the beloved or his/her family.¹⁹ According to this line of reasoning, Rodrigue begs Chimène to kill him, insisting that only her hand can do it. Rodrigue pleads, “Plonge-le dans le mien, / Et fais-lui perdre ainsi la teinture du tien” (3.4.863–4). The stain of her family’s blood and thus hers, “le tien,” can be washed away by spilling his own blood. Like the language’s parallelism, the system is one of perfect parity, and cruelly, what is best both for her and their love is that he be repaid in kind. Rodrigue later explicitly reframes this demand in terms of honor, “Immole avec courage au sang qu’il a perdu / Celui qui met sa gloire à l’avoir répandu” (3.4.903–4). A sacrifice must be made to her father’s blood spilt, and with this premise she agrees. But the command “immole” takes on an even more disturbing tenor in this scene. The blood of the father assumes a quasi-divine status, which requires that one sacrifice *to* it, threatening some measure of retribution if she were to refuse. But only Rodrigue appears to have a means out of this bind: he can kill the Moors and subscribe to the King’s new economy of blood in order to gain his favor, but Chimène lacks this recourse.

In contrast with the protagonists, the Infante views the love between Rodrigue and Chimène as a possible means to end the feud and its violence. The Infante proposes that this marriage (*commixtio sanguis*) could cleanse the bad blood between them. The marriage would establish new ties of affinity between the families and consequently would “snuff out” the discord. The Infante tries to comfort Chimène,

Le saint nœud qui joindra don Rodrigue et Chimène,
Des pères ennemis dissipera la haine,
Et nous verrons bientôt votre amour le plus fort
Par un heureux hymen étouffer ce discord. (2.3.473–6)

The Infante’s hope is quite explicit; it is the marriage tie—described as “the sacred knot,” and the power of Hymen—that would dispel the hatred between the two families. If the reference to this sacred tie is at all ambiguous, then the allusion to Hymen clearly implies a sexual bond with its mixing of flesh and blood (especially in the form of the maidenhead) upon entering married life. Otherwise put, by mixing bloods in marriage (*commixtio sanguis*), the two feuding families would now be members of the same extended kinship group, thereby determining new affine relations that could overturn the stains to family honor. Yet, Chimène knows that a

¹⁹ See especially Octave Nadal and Mary Jo Muratore.

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marriage would not absolve her duty, for to incorporate his blood into her own would mean to incorporate his character and liabilities, which was not a problem, of course, until he killed her father. Chimène frankly acknowledges this problem when speaking of King Fernand's command that she marry the victor of the duel between Don Sanche and Rodrigue. Whoever wins, "De tous les deux côtés on me donne un mari / Encor tout teint du sang que j'ai le plus chéri" (5.4.1659–60). Regardless of the outcome, when married, she would be held guilty for and thus tarnished by ("tout teint du sang") the blood of the one that she most cherishes, either her father or Rodrigue. Her strain against the King's order, therefore, reflects the seriousness of her investment in blood's laws and agency.

Thus as the play concludes, Chimène worries that she will be *forced* to take on the horrifying consequences of marrying Rodrigue. She asks the King if she *must* marry him,

C'est trop d'intelligence avec son homicide,
Vers ses Manes sacrés c'est me rendre perfide,
Et souiller mon honneur d'un reproche éternel,
D'avoir trempé mes mains dans le sang paternel?
(5.7.1835–8)

Chimène's language reflects that this marriage would be no small compromise because it would defile her honor with an "eternal" reproach. This contamination of her blood has implications both for the status of her own soul ("vers ses Manes sacrés"), and for all of her future kin. Needless to say, she does not conceive of this stain on her honor as a metaphorical one. Her hands would be soaked in "sang paternel"; though not visible to the audience, she nonetheless believes that her body would be compromised in a very visceral sense. If two become one in the sanctity of marriage and their bloods mix, then she is guilty of patricide, *as though* she herself had stabbed her father. And if this principle of contamination is true, if blood in fact determines and signifies in this way, then the King does not have the authority much less the capacity to absolve it. The King's final pronouncement at the play's close, however, utterly ignores these implications. He effectively turns a deaf ear to Chimène altogether and calls on Rodrigue to hope: "Espère en ton courage, espère en ma promesse" (5.7.1837). As Cordell Black notes, despite the King's trick that forces Chimène to expose her feelings publicly, "to acknowledge [Chimène's] love for 'le Cid' is not at all tantamount to making the ultimate concession: marriage" (79). Her "point d'honneur" holds far more weight than the King will acknowledge; for her it is not some small point

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of pride. Despite the King's appeal to time to assuage her concerns ["laisse faire le temps" (5.7.1840)], blood's material will persist from one generation to the next. If the material of her body, the demigod blood, has a power and force outside of her reach, then it is likewise beyond King Fernand's purview. Namely, the King's sanction cannot change the physiological character of Rodrigue's blood. This belief poses a serious problem for his authority. He cannot deny the power of blood to the aristocracy because he likewise depends on the assumption that blood embodies power and authority, particularly his own blood.

Although King Fernand advocates for this marriage, his command that Chimène relinquish her convictions betrays a double standard rather than a uniform critique of blood's framework. His command conflicts with his own investment in blood, his royal blood and that of the nation, which both depend upon the same assumption as Chimène's "point of honor," namely that blood signifies. The King calls upon his own power and authority to mandate that others relinquish this assumption when it pertains to the blood feud ("un sanglant procédé" as he calls it) simply because it suits his purposes and national interests (4.5.1452). Yet if his blood signifies power, authority, and identity, then this pronouncement is incongruous with his insistence that the nobility's blood does not.²⁰ The King's stance, therefore, doesn't fully accord with his promise for a peaceful conclusion, and, as it turns out, shoring up his own authority and identity likewise proves to be a "bloody practice." To illustrate, the Infante insists upon maintaining her blood's purity allied with her father's investment in his blood's authority. Her status as a princess impedes her love for Rodrigue since her union with a noble would debase her royal blood. Despite some inner turmoil at the beginning of the play, she resolves, "Oui, oui, je m'en souviens, et j'épandrai mon sang / Plustôt que de rien faire indigne de mon rang" (1.3.85–6). The Infante would rather *spill* her blood than do anything unbecoming of her blood's quality (rank), which is the key to the power of the monarchy. However, the Infante wavers once Rodrigue has returned victorious. Once he has been named "Le Cid," Rodrigue has theoretically obtained worthier blood by violence. She muses to herself, "Et ce grand nom de Cid que tu viens de gagner / Ne fait-il pas trop voir sur qui tu dois régner?" (V.2.1587–8). As she conceives it, this new name reflects a change in person, and one which is

²⁰ The editors of the collection *Contested Spaces* make a very similar point in the introduction regarding the struggles of the nobility in early modern Europe more generally: "If a monarch could claim charismatic authority with signs and symbols of power, so too could the nobles" (10).

founded in blood. Admitting to her maidservant, “Si j’aime, c’est l’auteur de tant de beaux exploits, / C’est le valeureux Cid, le maître de deux rois” (V.3.1635–6). According to the Infante’s formulation, she loves an altogether different man, the author of these exploits, a new blood-borne identity.

The King adamantly expresses his own investment in “Le Cid” and other heroes who can spill Moorish blood for the safety of the body politic and who can likewise bleed for it. For this blood is central to his royal identity. King Fernand first exposes this reliance on blood after news of the Count’s death; King Fernand laments the loss of his life but especially his loyal career measured in blood spilt for his country, “Après un long service à mon État rendu, / Après son sang pour moi mille fois répandu” (2.7.643–4).²¹ The diction here further emphasizes his personal investment, since the blood was spilt not for his nation or crown but their equivalent, “pour moi.” Earlier in the play, the Infante echoes this attitude towards blood when daydreaming of a Rodrigue who would be worthy of her, “Porter delà les mers ses hautes destinées, / Du sang des Africains arroser ses lauriers” (2.5.542–3). The very visceral “watered” or even “soaked” of the verb “arroser” marks the somewhat grotesque and violent nature of the action needed to transform Rodrigue’s nature; it is literally dipped in blood and dripping from the laurel crowns on his head. This repulsive image highlights the destructive center of even blood’s positive symbolism. Moorish blood will be spilt for the preservation of the nation’s lifeblood and that of its King.

King Fernand further paints his subjects’ blood as his primary concern, although only as part in parcel of his political body.²² He explains to his adviser,

²¹ Don Diègue likewise emphasizes this value when he tells Rodrigue that he has a greater duty to his country, to spill Moorish blood, than to protect the honor of his beloved, “vaillantes mains / Se tremperont bien mieux au sang des Africains” (3.6.1093–4).

²² Marcus Keller similarly notes, “Not only does he [Fernand] consider himself the head of the body politic, he also perceives his kingdom as a collective household whose most precious good is the blood of his subjects. The king protects this blood which flows in each member of Castile and through which the Castilian community is bound together” (135). Yet one should add that the King doesn’t value blood merely *as such*, but as blood which can *fight* and *be shed* for him and his body politic. In other words, this isn’t a purely benevolent act but a rather self-interested one. Furthermore, the King apparently is willing to risk a great deal of violence to his body politic, these noble bodies, for his sake.

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Un roi dont la prudence a de meilleurs objets
 Est meilleur ménager du sang de ses sujets,
 Je veille pour les miens, mes soucis les conservent,
 Comme le chef a soin des membres qui le servent.
 (2.6.5958)

Caring for his subjects' blood and well-being is the primary aim, the *best* ["meilleur"] object emphasized twice over, of the prudent ruler. And via metaphorical extension, their blood becomes his blood as "le chef" of the body politic. But as he admits earlier, his concern for his subjects' blood does not pertain to their sense of honor or individual blood purity, but rather the material blood that could be spilled in violent combat, in service to his nation.²³ Rodrigue too seemingly invests in the King's economy of blood in this moment as he credits the King and his empire for his own blood:

Je sais trop que je dois au bien de vostre Empire
 Et le sang qui m'anime et l'air que je respire,
 Et quand je les perdrai pour si digne objet,
 Je ferai seulement le devoir d'un sujet (4.3.1243–6).

Rodrigue recognizes that his blood, and more specifically his blood that can or will be lost for his King, effectively belongs to the King. Moreover, the third scene of act four exhaustively renders this bloodshed in Rodrigue's narrative as "des champs de carnage où triomphe la mort" (4.3.1310). Further describing the surprise ambush, Rodrigue recounts, "Nous les pressons sur l'eau, nous les pressons sur terre/ Et nous faisons courir des ruisseaux de leur sang / Avant qu'aucun resiste, ou reprenne son rang" (4.3.1300–2). The streams of blood recounted here, after all, are no different than those streaming from the body of Chimène's father. Despite the notable political change, both the feudal and monarchical structures invest in a common ideology. Both sides of this power struggle between the aristocracy and the monarch depend upon the premise of blood's signification, and in both cases this investment is destructive.

²³ Emmanuel Minel notes that Rodrigue's martial prowess, while used in the service of the State, is a potential threat to the King's power: "l'usurpation du pouvoir royal par le héros: du renversement de la gloire du sang par la gloire des armes" (308). Minel notes that thankfully for King Fernand, Rodrigue is not ambitious, "Dans *Le Cid*, [...] c'est le discours amoureux du héros qui vient fournir la solution. L'amour du héros est à la fois gage de son absence d'ambition politique et occasion de rétribution du service héroïque" (300).

Yet, by way of conclusion, Corneille's play does make a small space for hope, although not in the form of a prospective marriage between Chimène and Rodrigue. Instead, Chimène's servant Elvire provides an opportunity for the audience to recognize that because blood does not literally operate in the way that the characters imagine, there is a way out of its violent consequences. She alone, apart from the play's conflict, suggests that rejecting this framework entirely might be the only escape from its violence, and the only potential for a peaceful conclusion. One cannot merely insist that the blood feud cease (as the King declares in the interest of his own power), but one must explicitly *recognize* the violent byproducts of defining others, or oneself, by blood. Elvire might look like merely a stock character, playing the role of the confidante and sometimes chorus; and in fact most critics ignore the cast of supporting characters since they don't garner much sympathetic attention from the audience.²⁴ But upon closer examination, Elvire articulates the only bloodless option. Elvire's question to Chimène articulates the ultimate critique of the blood feud's nonsensical logic:

Que prétend ce devoir? et qu'est-ce qu'il espère?
 La mort de votre amant vous rendra-t-elle un père?
 Est-ce trop peu pour vous que d'un coup de malheur?
 Faut-il perte sur perte, et douleur sur douleur? (5.4.1689–
 92)

Rather than look to bodies and who or what they determine, she instead belabors the physical consequences of maintaining these discourses, loss on loss and woe on woe. Elvire's concern should resonate for Corneille's audience given the enormous bloodshed caused by the civil wars of religion, a conflict of not only faith but also of noble factions, as well as King Charles IX's probable role in the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre.²⁵ While blood's discourse might permit the nobility and monarch to maintain and stabilize power, providing a material foundation for their virtues and privileges, it also, as Elvire notes, produces more hurt and gives very little in return.

²⁴ Mohammed Kowsar remarks that "to be sure there are the two confidantes [...] but their personalities reflect the expediency of convention so faithfully that not a single perception of any consequence is emitted by either character" (291).

²⁵ For more information on these historical narratives, see Kristen Neuschel and Arlette Jouanna. See also Penny Roberts on the King as physician of the body politic, a metaphor that became particularly relevant during the Wars of Religion since Catholics characterized the Protestants as bad humours which required purgation.

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Elvire's moment of resistance, though brief, resembles speeches of earlier humanist heroes, for instance, Agamemnon's call for peace in Robert Garnier's *La Troade* (1579).²⁶ Placing the voice of peace in Elvire's mouth is both to place an enormous emphasis on this brief moment and to render it inconspicuous. Giving Elvire the critique of blood, in one sense, is most fitting; for unlike her mistress Chimène, Elvire is not implicated in the power struggles supported by this framework. However, on account of her social position, her voice is also muted and ignored, preventing her words from having any immediate impact on the plot. Blood's voice overpowers her own. Nevertheless, Elvire's critique underscores that defining others by their bodies can only yield violence, whether that be violence to the bodies of an opposing family (as mandated by the nobility) or excessive violence upon Moorish bodies (charged by the monarchy). As Corneille's *Le Cid* seems to suggest, if both the aristocracy and the new monarchy invest in blood, then only blood can follow.

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²⁶ In this moment, Agamemnon staunchly opposes Pyrrhe who is intent on sacrificing Polyxene to fulfill his father Achilles's will. Agamemnon exclaims, "Quelle execrable horreur? Qui veit jamais cela / Qu'un homme trespasé dans sa tombe eust envie / D'un autre homme vivant, de son sang, de sa vie? / Vous rendriez vostre pere à chacun odieux, / Le voulant honorer d'actes injurieux." (3.1451–56).

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Le Cid is a five-act French tragicomedy written by Pierre Corneille, first performed in December 1636 at the Théâtre du Marais in Paris and published the same year. It is based on Guill on de Castro's play Las Mocedades del Cid. Castro's play in turn is based on the legend of El Cid. An enormous popular success, Corneille's Le Cid was the subject of a heated polemic over the norms of dramatic practice known as the Querelle du Cid (Quarrel of The Cid.) Cardinal Richelieu's Acad mie fran aise Publication date. 1895. Topics. Cid, ca. 1043-1099. Publisher. Le Cid. Pierre Corneille. Le Cid Tracklist. 1. Le Cid [Acte I] Lyrics. Le Cid (Acte II, Sc ne 2) Lyrics. About Le Cid. Le Cid Q&A.