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Mutable bodies and wills : the implications of humoral discourse in literature

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MUTABLE BODIES AND WILLS: THE IMPLICATIONS OF HUMORAL
DISCOURSE IN LITERATURE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English and Comparative Literature

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Heather Stanger

May 2009

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MUTABLE BODIES AND WILLS: THE IMPLICATIONS OF HUMORAL
DISCOURSE IN LITERATURE

by

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ABSTRACT

MUTABLE BODIES AND WILLS: THE IMPLICATIONS OF HUMORAL DISCOURSE IN LITERATURE

by Heather Stanger

This thesis examines early modern notions of the humoral body and its interaction with the soul. Early modern subjects believed their bodies were composed of four humors—blood, phlegm, choler, and bile—real fluids that were then assigned functions and psychological states. They also understood their bodies as permeable, affected daily by external and internal forces, forces that could arouse their internal passions and excite them to sin. The humoral understanding of the body problematically also implies that initial free will to commit a sin is questionable; if a subject's body could entice one to sin due to unseen internal and external forces, then one's soul could be potentially spoiled against one's will. Moreover, this understanding has grave implications for the rape victim because she could be altered against her will, and this physical pollution could spoil her soul. Many early modern philosophers argued that a woman could remain innocent in mind, but socially she was shamed, demonstrating a great disjunction between theory and practice. The following chapters look at early modern representations of rape that provide a gateway into discussing problems concerning early modern notions of will and the subject's physical experiences with sin. The first chapter will examine Middleton's and Shakespeare's versions of the infamous Lucrece and their interpretations of Lucrece's guilt. The second chapter looks at Milton's Sin in *Paradise Lost*, exploring the implications of viewing Sin as a rape victim on his theodicy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Stephen Greenblatt argues that, in the early modern period, “there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of the human identity as a manipulable, artful process.”¹ Moreover, not only was identity understood as manipulable, but the body was also understood as changeable, greatly affected by its environment and internal organs. The process of self-fashioning was not only concerned with an abstract formation of a psychological identity but also included a literal, physical understanding of the self. In other words, identity was understood both physiologically and psychologically; early moderns regarded their existence physically, understanding their selves corporeally. The internal workings of the body and external encounters impacted one’s emotional and psychological state, underlining the body’s physical role in the development of the self. In the introduction to *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England*, Michael Schoenfeldt asserts that for the early modern person the “bodily condition, subjective state, and psychological character are fully imbricated.”² Furthermore, early modern subjects believed that self-knowledge was a way to know God; thus, one was required to know his or her internal spaces to know himself or herself and God, making physical self-awareness a spiritual imperative.³ The physical body was a text that was read and then interpreted as part of one’s identity, psychology, and spirituality.

¹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 2.

² Michael Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 12.

Informing these perceptions was Galenic physiology, or the idea that the body was composed of four humors—blood, phlegm, choler, and bile—real fluids that were then assigned functions and psychological states.⁴ These fluids were then “dispersed throughout the body by spirits, mediators between the soul and the body,” and the balance of these fluids determined one’s mental state.⁵ According to Gail Kern Paster in her study of the humors, “every subject grew up with a common understanding of his or her body as a semipermeable, irrigated container in which humors moved sluggishly.”⁶ The body was “open and fungible” like a sponge and could be manipulated by the surrounding environment.⁷ The humoral fluids had to be properly maintained and purged not only to protect health but also one’s emotions and mental state. However, the fluids were not only affected by internal functions, but humoral balance could also be altered by gender and age as well as vary daily according to diet and even weather. Heat was thought to enable fluidity whereas cold would stifle it, causing one’s temperament to vary accordingly and by degrees; “hot” bodies were thought to be easily impassioned while “cold” bodies were aloof. Also, illness was thought to be a result of a humoral imbalance, so the early modern subject was constantly attempting to control his or her bodily functions in order to maintain health, ultimately making the subject the “agent rather than the victim” of his or her health.⁸ Thus, subjects strove for an ideal balance of fluids to avoid ill health and emotional extremes, which depended on the “body’s capacity for

⁴ Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 8.

⁵ Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 2.

⁶ Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸ Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 7.

transpiration and evacuation—the exchange of elements with the surrounding water and air.”⁹ Because the slightest change in one’s environment could affect the body, and subsequently the self, any aspect of the environment could become significant. The body was in constant danger of radical dissolution, which caused the early modern subject to always closely read his or her bodily experience.

Humoral physiology also gave organs their own purpose and personality; each part of the body had its own place and function spiritually and socially, working together for the whole.¹⁰ However, since organs had their own personality, internal processes could be unstable and unpredictable.¹¹ This subsequently gave the physical body agency in altering emotions and in the constructing of the self. Organs were “emotionally charged” and thus could affect the person without his or her intervention.¹² Because these beliefs constructed a self with permeable boundaries between the physical body and the soul and the mind, the self was very unstable; it could be altered by a slight change in a person’s environment or his or her own organs. More importantly for this thesis, the humoral understanding of the body created a very unstable and dangerous space for one’s soul. If internal organs as well as external environment could alter one’s state, then a subject could act or feel unwillingly, thus endangering not only one’s physical health but also spiritual health.

⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰ David Hillman and Carla Mazzio, *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1997), xv.

¹¹ Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, 10.

¹² Ibid., 11.

Adding to the instability of one's soul and self are the passions, liquid elements also moving within the body that have the capacity to stir human emotion and initiate action; the humors had the capacity to excite the passions and vice versa. In her study of the passions, Gail Kern Paster asserts that:

[Early modern people understood] the nature of the passions as liquid—contained or uncontained, clear or muddy. The passions are like liquid states and forces of the natural world. But the passions—thanks to the four bodily humors of blood, choler, black bile, and phlegm—had a more than analogical relation to liquid states and forces of nature. In an important sense the passions actually were liquid forces of nature, because, in this cosmology, the stuff of the outside world and the stuff of the body were composed of the same elemental materials.¹³

Thus, the passions, along with diet, organs, humors, and environment, played an essential role in a person's health, psychology and even spirituality. Because the passions and emotions were connected to one's physical body, health was an ethical issue. As health took on this role of "moral imperative," illness was then seen as a sign of moral failing.¹⁴ Temperance became the necessary strategy for not only physical but also psychological and moral maintenance. Early modern spirituality called for control over one's desires and a mastery over one's humoral body and passions.

However, neither passions nor the humors were innately dangerous—they only had the potential to be dangerous if not properly tempered. The passions were thought to be divinely bestowed and a faculty of the sensitive soul present in humans and animals. Following Aristotelian philosophers, early moderns defined the soul as "the life principle of the individual body—that which differentiates living from non-living things."¹⁵ It was

¹³ Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespeare Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4.

¹⁴ Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 7.

¹⁵ Paster, *Humoring*, 136.

divided into three parts and organized hierarchically: vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual. The vegetative was responsible for growth and thus common to all things; the sensitive “controlled perceptual, motive, and appetitive faculties; and the intellectual was particular to humans and angels and “governed intellect, will, and memory.”¹⁶ For humans, the sensitive soul mediated between the physical experience of the senses and that of reason and intellect. Furthermore, the sensitive soul used the passions to temper experiences between sense and reason. Thus, the passions had the ability to entice the subject to good or to ill.

In summary, the passions and the humors flowed through the body, affecting and being affected by the different internal workings of the body. The passions had the capacity to physically change the body, and the body could also alter the passions, potentially damaging the soul. Since self-experience was regarded physically, any emotion or passion was also felt and explained in corporeal terms. Because the soul could also be affected by this internal narrative, subjects found it even more essential to look for outside markers of internal workings as a way of knowing themselves. Schoenfeldt argues that both Renaissance self-fashioning and spirituality required inwardness, and a constant examining of one’s interior physical body. Daniel Featly, a popular early modern divine, claimed to his contemporaries that “the way to God is by our selves.”¹⁷ Thus, self-knowledge and reading of the bodily functions were a way to God. Blushes, tears, sweat, etc. indicated both emotions and internal functions because

¹⁶ Paster, *Humoring*, 136.

¹⁷ Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 12.

the physical and the physiological were inextricably linked. The organ in command of the emotions was the heart (which was also the seat of the sensitive soul), and emotions were felt physically as the heart experienced them; for example, it would enlarge with joy or contract in sadness.¹⁸ Strong passions of any kind (like the humors) could excite the body to varying degrees and alter it in some way, which could cause not only physical illnesses, but a disease of the soul. Thomas Wright, an early modern English Jesuit, explains in his treatise of 1604, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall*, that *all* diseases are caused by “the excess of some inordinate passion.”¹⁹ Early modern self control meant tempering the diet, controlling the humors and mastering the passions because all were interrelated and connected to both the body and the soul.

It is important for my study to understand the capacity of the passions; they were necessary for good, but had the dangerous ability to corrupt the soul. Thomas Wright, in his work, explains: “Passions [are] acts or operations of the soule, bordering upon reason and sense, prosecuting some good thing, or flying some ill thing, causing therewithall some alteration in the body.”²⁰ As the passions were mediated between sense and reason, stirring a person emotionally into action (good or bad), they were at the same time altering the body. Furthermore, Wright maintains that passions were God-given as an aid for self-preservation and understanding so that “we might thereby be stirred up to attempt those actions which were necessary for us, or flie those inconveniences or harmes which

¹⁸ Paster, *Humoring*, 13.

¹⁹ Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (1904; repr. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

might annoy us.”²¹ However, Wright is very clear that the passions need to be directed and used as “instruments of virtue” invoking Christ as the paradigm of this control; Christ was also a subject to His passions, but they were “prevented by reason, and guided by virtue.”²² Passions must be used rightly, though not necessarily stoically controlled. John Milton throughout his works stresses this importance of rightly used passions, which could lead one to fervently honor God or passionately lead one into battle against Him.

In addition, the early modern period’s understanding of the body changed as new theories furthered or discounted Galenic thought. Although much of the period was still informed by the humoral understanding of the body, new discoveries by Descartes and William Harvey expanded or changed how people conceptualized their bodies. The relationships between (and definitions of) the body and passions, body and soul, and mind and soul fluctuated throughout the time period as scientific and religious studies influenced early modern thinking. In the Renaissance, there was a philosophical and linguistic split dividing the period into two movements: the pre-Cartesian and post-Cartesian.²³ Pre-Cartesian “psychophysiology” has been previously described: the belief that the body, mind, and soul are influenced by their environment and each other.²⁴ The post-Cartesian movement, promoted by Descartes and Locke, tried to separate the body from the mind, “refashioning ... the Galenic body into an arena of self-possession,

²¹ Wright, *Passions*, 12.

²² *Ibid.*, 15.

²³ Mary Floyd-Wilson, Gail Kern Paster, and Katherine Rowe, *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

volition, and executive control.”²⁵ My project looks at both movements; the first chapter addresses Shakespeare’s and Middleton’s conflation of body and soul and the second chapter focuses on Milton’s attempt—problematically limited by humoral physiology—to separate the body and soul. Although in *Paradise Lost* and *Comus* Milton attempts to separate the body, mind, and soul, his emphasis on the passions and the subject’s corporeal experience complicates his distinctions. As the period progressed, the relationship between language and emotion was constantly reshaped, as evidenced by the literature. Throughout the early modern period authors, “repeatedly responded to scenes of emotional or physiological alteration by redefining the term [alteration] itself, through a pun or misreading—a linguistic abstraction that succeeded in affirming the agency of the self beyond the physiology of passion.”²⁶ Literary art plays a huge role in how we understand the development of emotions because it is here that we find “vocabularies of feeling.”²⁷

Although there has been much study concerning the early modern humoral body and how the corporeal experience fashioned the early modern concept of self, less scholarship has been conducted regarding the body’s relationship to the soul. Many of the authors quoted touch the subject briefly, admitting that Galenic ethics had serious implications for the soul, especially if one was the agent of a person’s illness. If health determines morality and personality, this suggests a certain degree of predestination, and

²⁵ Ibid., 16.

²⁶ Ibid., 19.

²⁷ Ibid., 20.

the early moderns were certainly aware of those implications.²⁸ However, these implications are rarely discussed; the soul's role in this very corporeal experience within the early modern world is still relatively vague. Although the ultimate interests and implications of humoralism for us 21st century readers may be furthering our sociological and historical understanding of western thought, the early modern implications of understanding humoralism centered more on religious concerns. For them, humoral physiology not only revealed how the subject functioned within a physical world, but a spiritual world as well. And, studies written in the Renaissance on the passions, such as *The Passions of the Minde in Generall*, suggest that their ultimate concern was their spiritual state. This thesis explores the spiritual implications regarding a fluid, volatile body that was inextricably linked to the soul and passions. My study also attempts to map out the early modern conceptions of sin as it intersects with and fashions the humoral body.

In *Humoring the Body*, Paster describes sin as “dirt and mire”; in the humoral body, sin was illustrated as “the stirring of sediment in the ocean” while sinlessness is “pure water that can move without becoming muddied.”²⁹ The passions are linked to this “stirring,” and produce the purity or pollution. In Paster's reading of Wright, she sees a distinction between how the soul and body experience the sin: where the humors cause disease in the body, excess of passions disease the soul.³⁰ However, I interpret Wright as saying that besides external forces, passions caused *all* disease because they are

²⁸ Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 9.

²⁹ Paster, *Humoring*, 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

completely linked to the four humors, and that which “lodgeth in the soul can alter the body, and move the humors from one place to another.”³¹ The soul and body experience the change together not separately. Because the early moderns did not see in dualistic terms, the body and soul seemed to be at once separate and apart.³² Thus, the soul and body have potentially separate wills and desires, and can potentially act together or separately. The soul can lead the body to good, the body can lead the soul to sin, or they could work together for either good or ill. Many authors within the early modern period do attempt to define the soul and its relation to the liquid body and mind because of its dangerous vulnerability. If the organs, humors or passions can be stirred by unseen external or internal forces, then the subject could potentially be aroused to commit acts that were considered immoral despite their initial will. And, once the body sinned, it was thought that the passions had been muddied, which only led to more sin. Many Renaissance authors were greatly concerned with these implications. While Juan Huarte is at the beginning of the period endorsing Galenic ethics conceding that the soul depends on the temperature of the body, Edward Reynolds is in the middle attempting to address the problem of predestination in humoral discourse.³³ He says that the soul can act apart from the body and redeem itself despite the body’s temperature (although he does not completely depart from Galen’s theory).³⁴

Although neither of my chapters directly engages with the early modern conceptions of the soul, they are concerned with the implications of the soul’s

³¹ Wright, *Passions*, 4.

³² Floyd-Wilson, *Reading*, 18.

³³ Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

vulnerability. Humoral discourse creates dangerous implications for a body that can potentially excite the soul to sin by unseen external and internal forces. This discourse becomes even more problematic for the early modern rape victim, which I will expand on in my first chapter. During the period, rape laws were beginning to expand and punishments increased for offenders, but the woman's culpability in the act was still questioned and her consent uncertain. Although early moderns, following Augustinian thought, tried to make distinctions between the innocence of mind and body, socially a woman was still thought to have some guilt in the act. The concept of the humoral body implied outside forces could alter one's body, and this claim had literal implications for the rape victim. An external force literally altered her body, which was thought to infect her soul. Thus, even if she remained innocent in mind, her body was changed and had great potential to infect her soul. Socially, a woman raped was a woman altered and her future was greatly affected. In my first chapter, I look at Shakespeare's and Middleton's treatment of the legendary rape of "Lucrece" and how they imagine the iconic rape victim. The chapter puts their poems in dialogue to discuss the problematic early modern notions of rape and will in regards to the humoral body.

My second chapter concerns another rape victim in Milton's *Paradise Lost*: Sin. Called Sin before she sins and damned for the transgressions of another, her story can reveal problematic inconsistencies in early modern thought as well as Milton's notions of free will and the mind. Although much Milton study has been devoted to the problems of free will in the poem, almost every study overlooks Sin, her creation, her multiple rapes, and transformation into evil. However, it is the nature of her sin, her altered form, and

perpetual (seemingly undeserved) torture that provides a gateway into discussing problems concerning early modern notions of will and the subject's physical experiences with sin.

The great implication of my study is ultimately, free will is questionable given early modern notions of the humoral body. Or at the very least, that subjects could be enticed to sin regardless of their initial will. This discourse is tragic for the rape victim who, already a popularized literary device to mediate male concerns, must forever be literally and perhaps spiritually altered for an act committed to her.

II. THE PARADOX OF LUCRECE

1. *Contextualizing Lucrece*

Nearly forty years after the publication of Shakespeare's "The Rape of Lucrece," George Rivers published *The Heroinae: or, The Lives of Arria, Paulina, Lucrecia, Dido, Theutilla, Cypriana, Aretaphila*. His text retells the stories of several women of ambiguous chastity and arguable innocence. In the chapter on Lucrece, he recounts her story, a version very closely aligned with Shakespeare's, and then offers two additional sections titled "Pro" and "Contra" debating the extent of her guilt and subsequent suicide. The pro argument obviously relieves her of any fault arguing that though "her body [was] conquer'd," "her mind" proved "truly heroicall."³⁵ Her suicide confirms her innocence and removes any suspicion of guilt that "maligne censure might imprint upon the act."³⁶ He maintains that by calling her suicide murder, it would condemn her of adultery also because her suicide proves that she did not consent. However, ultimately Rivers emphasizes that this verdict is derived from Roman values and standards, not Christian. The "Contra" segment, on the other hand, judges her from a Christian perspective, and thus condemns her for her suicide stating that "the body might be purg'd by the adultery: not soule of the adultery by murder."³⁷ Ultimately, this argument does not only rebuke her for her suicide, but also questions her culpability in the rape, interpreting her suicide as evidence of her fault in the act and proves adultery. He argues that she chose suicide

³⁵ George Rivers, *The heroinae: or, The lives of Arria, Paulina, Lucrecia, Dido, Theutilla, Cypriana, Aretaphila* (London: Printed by R. Bishop, for John Colby, and are to be sold at his shop under the Kings head Tavern, at Chancery-lane end in Fleet-street, 1639), 64.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

because she must have yielded “to some secret enticement,” which “might staine her thought.”³⁸ The section concludes that she chose honor over chastity and killed herself for her own glory.

River’s debate is closely aligned with Augustine’s. In his famous treatment of Lucrece in *City of God*, Augustine also asserts initially that if a woman does not consent to the rape, her soul remains clean and the rapist takes the blame, maintaining that “when a woman is violated while her soul admits no consent to the iniquity, but remains inviolably chaste, the sin is not hers, but his who violates her.”³⁹ However, in spite of his claim, he too finds guilt in Lucrece’s suicide, asking the very same question early moderns asked: “how is it, that she who was no partner to the crime bears the heavier punishment of the two?”⁴⁰ He concludes that she must have secretly enjoyed the act, and being ashamed, she killed herself, constructing her dilemma as: “if you extenuate the homicide, you confirm the adultery” and “if you acquit her adultery, you make the charge of homicide.”⁴¹ Importantly, both authors do not merely question the sin of her suicide; instead, they are more concerned with how her suicide speaks to her culpability in the rape. Although both men provide arguments pro and contra, neither makes a definitive judgment on her guilt and character. Furthermore, this ambivalence and unwillingness to establish a definite judgment demonstrates their own doubts and inability to either condemn or absolve. These doubts are only furthered by the multiple versions of Lucrece’s story, which, depending on the author, either highlight her blame or innocence.

³⁸ Ibid., 67.

³⁹ St. Augustine, *The City of God* (New York: Barnes and Noble Publishing, 2006), 26.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 26.

⁴¹ Ibid., 28.

This ambivalence and fascination with her culpability is only further illustrated in early modern discussions of rape and William Shakespeare's and Thomas Middleton's versions of Lucrece's narrative, which not only reveal their personal biases but can also reveal much about the society's of which they were a part.

Rivers' book and Augustine's commentary exemplify the early moderns' obsession surrounding the moral question of Lucrece's guilt, and female rape and consent more generally, which pervaded the period's discussion on the female body. In fact, the law's "efforts to contend with rape were contextualized by the story of Lucrece and by St. Augustine's commentary upon her."⁴² During the period, she was constructed as both the paradigm of Christian chastity as well as a product of the Roman, pagan shame culture, thus becoming a paradoxical figure and occupying an ambiguous position: a Roman ideal judged according to Christian sensibilities. Also, the ambiguity surrounding the nature of her consent in her story's many versions only works to further complicate her character's moral standing, and illustrates the early modern concern with female culpability. Rivers' text characterizes the questions early moderns were asking about Lucrece and the female's role in rape: How guilty is a woman in her rape? How far is her body tainted by the act?

As established in my introduction, the early modern body was already a complicated space because of the nature of the humoral body, which only worked to further obscure the lines of innocence and intent when a sin was committed. The soul

⁴² Barbara J. Baines, *Representing Rape in the English Early Modern Period* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), 87.

inhabited a mutable body that could be greatly affected and enticed due to external and internal forces, such as weather or emotionally charged organs, making the subject's will, at the very least, questionable. Early moderns experienced life and emotions in corporeal terms, so sin was also felt materially and thought to physically manifest itself and alter the body. Within this discourse, rape becomes even more problematic because it literally alters the body regardless of the victim's consent or will. And, though many, like Augustine, tried to distinguish the innocence of the body from the mind, socially a woman raped was a woman altered and thus was shamed. The implications of humoral discourse to rape are substantial given that penetration and the exchange of sexual fluids modified the female body, but it has rarely been explored.

It is in this context that I turn to Shakespeare's and Middleton's poetic treatments of Lucrece, which both engage with this discussion concerning the issues surrounding Lucrece's narrative, female rape, and the humoral body. Importantly, Shakespeare's version emphasizes Lucrece's innocence, leaving no cause for doubt. His Tarquin will either rape and kill her and ruin her reputation or just rape her; the reader cannot blame her and in her subsequent lament does not speculate any secret pleasure. Problematically though, when she publically commits suicide, her spilled blood is partially stained black. Although this validates her suicide, it also demonstrates that her body was indeed tainted by the act. Shakespeare then constructs her as the catalyst for political change, from which Rome will benefit. In contrast, Middleton wholly ignores the political aspect, underlining the meaninglessness and wickedness of both Tarquin's rape and her suicide. He confronts Christian anxieties over her suicide by placing her in hell for her untimely

existence as a pagan. By continuously conflating Christian and Roman images throughout, Middleton illustrates the contradiction inherent in the judgment on her in the first place: she is a Roman unfairly being judged by Christian standards—standards of which she has no knowledge, making Lucrece an ironic figure. Ultimately, Middleton’s “Lucrece” reflects the “immorality of his society,” more generally, because she is a rape victim literally and figuratively “infected by the diseases of society.”⁴³ Although Shakespeare and Middleton both explore the dilemma of Lucrece and possibly rape victims in general, their narratives still paradoxically perpetuate an ambivalent discourse. Both poems are much attuned to the woman’s dilemma (and the body’s) but paradoxically work to further complicate Lucrece’s predicament and perpetuate the ambivalence surrounding her guilt. These poems engage with the rape, from both the male and female perspectives, as it intersects Galenic discourse as well as the effects of the volatile inner-body on the soul. Both only further the ambivalence concerning Lucrece’s story and rape in general. Furthermore, although the poets create a voice for the female rape victim, she ultimately is still used as an object for male consumption and means, reflecting the impossible paradox of the literary and real early modern rape victims.

The major problem with narrative poems concerning female rape is that not only do they exemplify and perpetuate the conflicts resulting from the above stated issues, they also demonstrate the major disjunction between how men addressed rape

⁴³ Laura G. Bromley, “The Lost Lucrece: Middleton’s *The Ghost of Lucrece*,” *Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature*, 21.3 (1985), 264.

hypothetically or fictionally and in actuality. In reality, although the implications of the act were obviously greater for women, men controlled the discourse, and the meanings of rape were constructed according to how it affected them. Indeed, rape was perceived as a “crime of property and as the site of rivalry among men,” which is only further evidenced by rape’s etymology.⁴⁴ It derives from the Latin “raptus,” or theft, and was considered a theft from a man, i.e. an abduction of the daughter’s or wife’s chastity.⁴⁵ During the 16th century, law took a real interest in the meaning of rape for both women and men, socially and spiritually; however, though it might have been understood as a horrible offense, it was still relatively unpunished.⁴⁶ The awful reality was that “male judges and juries were loath to punish in any way other males for any sexual offence against females.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, it was extremely difficult for a woman to prove her rape, especially when her innocence hinged on her modesty, which required her silence on the subject of sexual relations. If the woman was actually modest, she would have difficulty speaking about the act; thus, a woman could not speak of her own rape or else her innocence would become questionable, and it is obviously difficult for a woman to convict her rapist through silence.⁴⁸

A victim’s innocence was also determined by the extent of her consent, creating yet another difficulty for the silent rape victim. Usually she had to emphasize her

⁴⁴ Baines, *Representing Rape*, 88.

⁴⁵ Jocelyn Catty, *Writing Rape, Writing Women* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1999), 1.

⁴⁶ Carolyn Williams, “Silence Like a Lucrece Knife: Shakespeare and the Meanings of Rape.” *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 23 (1993), 100.

⁴⁷ Nazife Bashar, “Rape in England between 1550 and 1700,” *The Sexual Dynamics of History: Men’s Power, Women’s Resistance*, ed. The London Feminist Group (London: Pluto, 1983), 40.

⁴⁸ Williams, “Silence”, 106.

potential danger and the lengths at which she struggled and screamed in order to prove her lack of consent. For instance, in a 1688 account of marital rape, the victim, Mary Aubrey insisted repeatedly she “made a ‘hue and cry’ and thus had not consented.”⁴⁹ Indeed, in Shakespeare’s “Lucrece,” Tarquin attempts to manipulate Lucrece’s consent in order to lessen his own guilt; and, in order for Shakespeare to maintain Lucrece’s innocence and the reader’s sympathy, he must stress her struggle, Tarquin’s force, and potential for a fate worse than rape, demonstrating throughout the poem the complexity of establishing feminine innocence. In Middleton’s poem, Lucrece’s innocence in the act becomes irrelevant because she is pagan, but Tarquin is still importantly demonized and she victimized. Yet these importantly are poems, and as most rape cases in reality, and the commentaries on Lucrece’s story, prove, ultimately, “coerced consent, however horrible the coercion, was simply viewed in the practice of law as consent.”⁵⁰ What the poets do demonstrate, however, is that despite the relative disregard for actual acts of rape in their own society, men took great interest in writing narratives about rape and debating the innocence of female victims. Making their innocence ambivalent obviously works to the benefit of the man’s position as well as the poets (who are oftentimes conflated) because it generates interest and the need to write more. By creating female characters like Lucrece who are the heroines of their rape narratives and male aggressors who are definitely perceived as evil, it creates a great disconnect between men’s actions and their thoughts and writings. These narratives were written by men, dedicated to men,

⁴⁹ Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700* (London: Cornell UP, 1994), 34.

⁵⁰ Baines, *Representing Rape*, 87.

and written for a male audience, so why is female chastity and honor the main subject? Because the notions and meanings of rape were constructed by men, these narratives reveal more about the concerns of the patriarchal societies of which they were a part rather than the females that they discuss. And, as Elizabeth Robertson and Christine Rose argue, representations of rape “make manifest the specifics of a given culture’s understanding of the female subject in society.”⁵¹

Mark Breitenberg, in his book *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*, argues that identity (male and female) as a social construction is paradoxical because “one is one’s reputation, but one’s reputation must derive from others.”⁵² He continues by asserting that masculinity is “figured through female chastity (or its absence)” and the reputation of husbands, “despite considerable effort to the contrary,” depended on “their wives’ reputation for chastity...something ultimately beyond their control.”⁵³ Although I do not think his theory works across the whole spectrum of early modern issues concerning masculinity, femininity, and texts, his notion is an interesting starting point for the discussion on the ambivalent treatment of rape throughout the period and serves as a possible reason for the extensive narratives concerning the subject constructed by men. Female chastity concerned men because their own bodies and lineage were at stake. Furthermore, chastity as an unseen quality was/is hard to identify, and this difficulty could also explain the male concern with finding/constructing external markers, i.e. the blush, downcast eyes, etc., which were constructed as natural but paradoxically also

⁵¹ Baines, *Representing Rape*, 89.

⁵² Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 98.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 98.

conceived as artifice. Because of the pervading “no means yes” mentality, this female duplicity was at once wanted and feared, expected and problematic.⁵⁴ Men created narratives that explored this female duplicity, which only perpetuated men’s ambivalence towards rape: if her no means yes, then her consent becomes even more unclear. Furthermore, these narratives also explore how this duplicitous female body interrupts and works with male relations. It is through female bodies that male power and desires are defined and measured. For instance, Tarquin’s ability to reign as king is measured by his ability to control his desire for Lucrece; he fails, thus he fails to reign. Breitenberg reads Shakespeare’s “Lucrece” in terms of these paradoxical conditions by which one gained honor as well as the destructive force of male desire. And, it is Shakespeare’s text’s engagement with uncontrollable male desire that the story also engages with the concerns of the humoral body.

2. *Shakespeare’s “Lucrece” and Willful Parts*

Shakespeare’s narrative becomes a fascinating intersection of these issues because it addresses not only men’s concern with the female body but the male’s as well. Galenic as well as religious dialogue regarding the male member only affirms that men were thought to have little control over their acts and desires, perfectly exemplified by Tarquin’s “hot burning will” that leads him to Lucrece’s bed.⁵⁵ Tarquin’s “everlasting

⁵⁴ Williams, “Silence”, 102.

⁵⁵ William Shakespeare, “The Rape of Lucrece”, *The Riverside Shakespeare* 2nd ed. Eds. Herschel Baker, Anne Barton, and Frank Kermode (New York: Houghton, 1997), 247.

banishment” serves as a warning to men: control your passions.⁵⁶ Not only do the relationships between men and women rely on tempered affections, but so do the relationships between men, and, as “Lucrece” shows, by extension the health of the state as a body itself. Tarquin is not only vilified for his act, but also loses his kingdom due to his weakness, which becomes an act of treason.

In Shakespeare’s “Lucrece,” both the bodies of Lucrece and Tarquin are continuously fragmented until they appear composed of pieces, not distinct wholes, like the humoral body was configured. Although scholars address Tarquin’s fragmentation of Lucrece’s body as his effort to dehumanize her to validate the act, his own divided body is rarely explored.⁵⁷ His body is portioned off to such an extent that he is almost lost among his ruling parts. Before Tarquin commits the rape, the narrator describes in detail the inner drama of Tarquin’s body, a battle between his members, nerves, organs and reason, which early moderns would read as a literal internal conflict. The fragmentation, although it may dehumanize, was also a common trope in the early modern period and influenced by Galenic discourse: “Because corporeal parts have individual functions, locations, and differentiated relations to the body as a whole, they can become concentrated sites where meaning is invested.”⁵⁸ From the moment Tarquin decides to seek her, each of his members and organs plays a different role, becoming characters in his destruction.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 1855.

⁵⁷ Williams, “Silence”, 104.

⁵⁸ Hillman, *Body in Parts*, xii.

Tarquin's desire starts in his liver, and spreads like a disease through his body to various parts. Although his mind and reason attempts to deter him from pursuing Lucrece, his body and lustful will force him to continue. He condemns himself for becoming "soft fancy's slave"⁵⁹, but his mind's attempts to dissuade his body fail and his "hot burning will" kills "all pure effects, and doth so far proceed/ that what is vile shows like a virtuous deed."⁶⁰ He surrenders himself to his affections, or passions, and forgoes reason, her innocent blushes and loyal fears for her husband only enticing him further. Ironically, typical evidence of her innocence works only to rationalize his desires and rape; the more she pleads, the more he becomes enticed, demonstrating that her great struggle that would prove her innocence only works to paradoxically undo it. His new logic is constructed by his youthful passions:

Respect and reason wait on wrinkled age!
My heart shall never countermand my eye
Sad pause and deep regard beseems the sage;
My part is youth, and beats these from the stage.⁶¹

This temperament follows several early modern notions about the body and the passions. Firstly, that as a youthful male he was associated with cholera, which meant he was easily excited, either to lust or anger, and secondly, that the body, in its humoral existence, not only had the capacity to change the passions/affections (i.e. Tarquin's youth making him choleric), but strong passions of any kind could excite the body to varying degrees and alter it in some way.⁶² This unpredictable relationship between the body and the passions

⁵⁹ Shakespeare, "Lucrece", 200.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 247-51.

⁶¹ Ibid., 275-78.

⁶² Paster, *Humoring*, 13.

is illustrated by Tarquin's internal debate previously discussed and in his own reaction to his deed:

I have debated, even in my soul,
What wrong, what shame, what sorrow I shall breed,
But nothing can Affection's course control,
Or stop the headlong fury of his speed.⁶³

When he finally reaches, his body parts lead him to act: his eyes "tempt his veins...and they like Lucrece straggling slaves for pillage fighting...swell in pride" with sexual innuendo, his "drumming heart" then "gives the hot charge," "cheers up his burning eye," and finally his eye "commends the leading to his hand; his hand...march'd on, to make his stand."⁶⁴ These ideas about the male member and his unrestrained body are typical to how men perceived their role in rape, making the act itself seem unavoidable and merely a result of their inflamed desires. Although Shakespeare emphasizes the role of Tarquin's body in his action, it is not to reduce his culpability or excuse his offense but instead expose the dangers of the humoral body if not properly tempered as well as to engage with the problematic unresolved issues of this very unstable relationship.

This early modern belief in man's inability to control his member is not only derived from Galenic notions of willful organs, but also developed from Augustine's writings on the necessity of bridling anger and lust. According to Augustine, as a result of the fall, the soul lost the "command it had formerly maintained over the body," and therefore men could no longer manage their sexual members.⁶⁵ And, without divine grace and conscious temperance, lust would rule the body and "this lust not only takes

⁶³ Ibid., 499-501.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 427-39.

⁶⁵ Augustine, *City*, 505.

possession of the whole body and outward members, but also makes itself felt within, and moves the whole man with a passion in which mental emotion is mingled with bodily appetite.”⁶⁶ And, this is precisely how the narrator describes Tarquin’s internal narrative. However, Augustine also makes it clear that flesh is not the only cause of vice, but it is the “sinful soul that made the flesh corruptible,” which is a very important distinction because it ultimately makes man wholly responsible for his acts.⁶⁷ The difficulty with Augustine’s theory, and the humoral body in general, is that it does not explain how one controls a member (or a body) that cannot be controlled. Regardless, Shakespeare would have been familiar with Augustine’s writing, especially how it intersects these notions of the uncontrollable body, and closely engages with the potential concerns and anxieties of his male audience. However, Shakespeare is not concerned with moralizing to his audience about Christian values. Instead, he finds the tempering of one’s affections as essential for maintaining one’s identity as well as preserving relationships between the king and his state. Tarquin’s uncontrollable desire is wrong in its excess, and his inability to control himself speaks to his inability to rule; if he cannot rule his body, then he cannot rule the Roman body. Shakespeare frames the rape as a trial of his kingship.

During Tarquin’s premeditation on the implications of his act, he realizes the detrimental effects it could have on his relations with other men. Although it is problematic that he disregards the effects it could have on Lucrece, this is only inevitable and reflects the contemporary attitudes towards a woman as property. Despite this, she

⁶⁶ Ibid., 555.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 531.

plays a notable role as the intermediary in their relations and serves as a signifier of his honor; his decision to rape her will affect the relationship between him and his kinsman as well as his self. His desire for her also becomes a symbol of his own morality and misplaced priorities: When a man replaces “honor for wealth, and oft that wealth doth cost/ the death of all, and all together lost.”⁶⁸ She signifies the wealth for which he sacrifices his honor, and not only will his transgression cause his destruction, but potentially the ruin of his state. His lack of self-control will not only hurt his own reputation but has greater consequences:

Such hazard now must doting Tarquin make,
Pawning honor to obtain his lust,
And for himself himself forsake.
Then where is truth, if there be no self-trust?
When shall he think to find a stranger just,
When he himself himself confounds, betrays
To sland'rous tongues and wretched hateful days?⁶⁹

It is not just his honor at stake but his very self; if one does not control his own desire and passions, he loses his very self to his affections, implying that this act will alter him. More importantly, the stanza also implies his act will have great social repercussions. “Self-trust” is wrapped in one’s ability to temper his uncontrollable members, and if he cannot trust his own self to maintain restraint, then how can he trust others? Thus, temperance of male desire structures male relations. Moreover, Shakespeare identifies the virtuous qualities not only for men but for kings, and Tarquin’s rebel will put his kingship and his kingdom at risk. Tarquin’s place in society renders his actions more important because they happen in a social sphere, and they become the model: “For

⁶⁸ Shakespeare, “Lucrece”, 146-47.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 155-61.

princes are the glass, the school, the book,/ where subjects' eyes do learn, do read, do look."⁷⁰ Because Tarquin lacks control, it becomes a marker for tyranny and his incapacity to rule. By raping Lucrece he acts unlike what he should be: "a god, a king" because "kings like gods should govern every thing."⁷¹ His inability to govern his passions marks his inability to govern his people. Shakespeare's version of Tarquin's character intersects Roman political values with Christian virtues of temperance where they intersect the male anxieties caused by the uncontrollable Galenic body. Shakespeare measures these ideals in Tarquin's (in)ability to refrain from enacting his will on Lucrece's female body.

Although Shakespeare characterizes rape much like other men in that it is a material offense against men and makes a woman's body serve as an intermediary for male relationships and concerns, his version is very sympathetic to the female's dilemma in rape defined by a patriarchal society. Previous versions of Lucrece's narrative, such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, depict her consent as questionable; because she "let" him rape her out of fear for her and her husband's reputation, she is viewed as consenting in some form.⁷² However, Shakespeare relieves her of all faults by leaving no cause for doubting her innocence. In other words, Tarquin will rape Lucrece either way, but if she doesn't resist he won't kill her and spoil her reputation. And, Shakespeare also emphasizes that it is not just her reputation at stake, but Collantine's and more importantly the purity of their familial line:

⁷⁰ Ibid., 615-16.

⁷¹ Ibid., 601-02.

⁷² Williams, "Silence", 96.

So thy surviving husband shall remain
The scornful mark of every open eye;
Thy kinsmen hang their heads at this disdain,
Thy issue blurr'd with nameless bastardy.⁷³

Her chastity defines her husband's honor also, returning us to Breitenberg's point: a man's identity partly depends on the inviolate female body. In reality, the literal physical implications are many. Not only is her body physically changed through the exchange of fluids and otherwise, she could become pregnant, damaging her family's future. For an unmarried woman, the sentence would be harsher; no one would marry a violated woman despite her consent.

Although Shakespeare does construct Lucrece as a signifier for men's honor, he also importantly explores the implications of this act for her; the latter half of the poem narrates and explores her feelings thoroughly, leading the reader to wholly sympathize with her dilemma. She is truly alone in her plight, which would have been the situation for the silent rape victims of the early modern period. In her soliloquy, she addresses the problematic paradoxical relationship between the humoral body and the soul. Although sin entered Lucrece's body against her will, it still physically altered her, and following early modern thought, can spread throughout her body, infect her soul and entice her to more sin. Lucrece worries in her soliloquy that she has been stained and soon her soul will become polluted also: "in thy shady cell, where none may spy him,/ sits Sin, to seize the souls that wander by him."⁷⁴ Augustine attempts to separate the mind from the body in his assessment of Lucrece's story, but early moderns did not see in dualistic terms and

⁷³ Shakespeare, "Lucrece", 519-23.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 881-82.

the body and soul would not have been considered completely separate entities, yet working together and apart.⁷⁵ And, though many authors try to maintain that a victim can be innocent in mind, the construction of the humoral body implies that one cannot maintain an innocent soul once the body is infected, despite her consent in the sin. Because the exchanging of sexual fluids was thought to alter the body, regardless of one's assent in this exchange, Lucrece's notions of feeling tainted would have been understood as reality by Shakespeare's contemporaries. For a rape victim, the discourse of the humoral body is especially unnerving; a woman is socially shamed because her body is altered, regardless of her culpability.

A body could be considered sinful despite a woman's will, and a rape victim represents the tragic consequences of this problematic spiritual structure. Lucrece addresses the tragedy of her seemingly "fated" soul during her lament; she truly believes her soul is contaminated by the transgression done to her body and slowly decays: "Ay me, the bark pill'd from the lofty pine,/ his leaves will wither and his sap decay;/ so must my soul, her bark being pill'd away."⁷⁶ (1167-69). She insists that though her soul's "house" was destroyed by Tarquin against her will, it does not stop its decay, and grieving for "Her sacred temple" that is now "spotted, spoil'd, corrupted," Lucrece decides must "make some hole/ Through which [she] may convey [her] troubled soul."⁷⁷ Her suicide becomes a necessary purging to maintain her honor:

My honour I'll bequeath unto the knife
That wounds my body so dishonoured.

⁷⁵ Floyd-Wilson, *Reading*, 18.

⁷⁶ Shakespeare, "Lucrece", 1167-69.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1170-76.

'Tis honour to deprive dishonour'd life;
The one will live, the other being dead:
So of shame's ashes shall my fame be bred;
For in my death I murder shameful scorn:
My shame so dead, mine honour is new-born.⁷⁸

If she remains alive, she worries that sin will take control of her soul; her suicide is thus constructed as a necessary act to maintain her honor and by extension her husband's. Although Augustine as well as the men in her poem may insist on her innocence, the nature of the humoral body validates to her worries. Shakespeare also proves her concerns correct when upon her death her blood confirms the corruption: "Some of her blood still pure and red remain'd,/ and some look'd black, and that false Tarquin stain'd."⁷⁹ Her suicide proves her innocence and the necessity to kill herself; her previous "unseen shame" has now been made visible.⁸⁰ Shakespeare complicates her physical innocence when the men maintain her mind is untainted, but his depiction of her death and tainted blood demonstrates how rape was treated in reality. Although men thought and said that she was innocent in the context of law, a woman was really thought to bear some invisible impression of the act and thus was shamed socially.

What obviously becomes problematic for Christian readers is Shakespeare's treatment of her suicide. Indeed, he seems to be excusing it as her only option. However, it is merely the option constructed by men's contradictory notions of rape and the nature of the humoral body's relationship to the soul. Thomas Middleton's version of "Lucrece," confronts these Christian anxieties by placing her in hell, making her dilemma

⁷⁸ Ibid., 1184-90.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 1742-44.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 827.

even more impossible. Middleton constructs her as this paradigmatic figure for Christian chastity and virtue, but then places her in hell for her untimely existence as a pagan, again a characteristic outside of her control. However, this placement in hell for her heritage “neutralizes” the constant debate concerning her innocence, and in doing so frees her from the issue of guilt during the act.⁸¹ He exposes the contradiction inherent in the judgment in the first place: she is a Roman (unfairly) being judged by Christian standards. Ultimately, Middleton uses Lucrece as an ironic figure to exemplify the case for all condemned, unheard rape victims punished for acts beyond their control.

3. *Middleton's "Lucrece" and Rape's Hell*

In his introduction to the recent edition of Middleton, G.B. Shand asserts that “Middleton, like Shakespeare before him, seizes the opportunity to personalize an icon of violated chastity, taking an important early step toward the sympathetic evocation of the female subject.”⁸² And, though this sympathy is obvious, his poem is problematic in that he, like Shakespeare, is a man profiting from publicizing a raped woman’s horrific encounter. In Shakespeare’s version, the publication of Lucrece’s shame is, at least within the poem, her choice and makes her a mover within the political and social spheres; her tragedy is perceived as at least meaning something: progression to a better government. Middleton ignores this aspect by concentrating wholly on Lucrece, making the actual tragedy the meaninglessness of her rape and suicide. The tragedy is only

⁸¹ G.B. Shand, “The Ghost of Lucrece”, *Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 1988.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 1985.

further exacerbated by the fact that, even if she remained chaste, her fate would still be to end up in hell. By conflating Christian and Roman images throughout, Middleton shows the problem of his contemporaries' problematic dealings with Lucrece's story. They use Lucrece's story as a context to deal with rape, assign her Christian values to place her in their context, and then judge her for having Roman ideals about shame. By evoking her to tell her story to an audience of "rape-slaughtered Lucreces" with a stage full of Tarquins as the actors, Middleton's version illustrates how although rape affected women more, men controlled the discourse.⁸³ Also, because the poem stages her publically through its entirety, this version also symbolizes how publicized her character had become and how often she was evoked for the subject of rape, only to be condemned.

Middleton's version seems to be closely influenced by Shakespeare's poem because he explores many of the same issues. Not only does he condemn Tarquin for his uncontrollable lust but emphasizes the carnal desire signified in his act of rape. Indeed, Middleton's version is pervaded with carnal images as Lucrece fragments herself into body parts and offers Tarquin the blood that spills from her chest.⁸⁴ Middleton's Tarquin, similar to Shakespeare's Tarquin, was "struck" with desire and "begot/ A child of fire, a firebrand, and so hot/ That it consumed [her] chastity to dust,/ And on [her] heart painted the mouth of lust."⁸⁵ Tarquin's "untutored lust,"

Bribes the flesh to war against the spirit
With tickling blood must'ring in every vein.
It weans the conscience from her heavenly merit

⁸³ Middleton, Thomas. "The Ghost of Lucrece." *Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 40 & 47-8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 90-94.

depraving all chaste thoughts her maiden train.⁸⁶

Again we see the effects of a fragmented body and untamed lust. Furthermore, like in Shakespeare's "Lucrece," his ruling lust changes his identity; he was Tarquin the "kinsman" and "prince," and his lust turns him into Tarquin the "traitor," "lecher," and "night-owl." His act of treachery and lust, as the images throughout imply, clearly stains Middleton's Lucrece.

Although Shand asserts that Middleton put her in hell for *only* her pagan heritage, I read it slightly more ambiguously. Just like Shakespeare's Lucrece, Middleton's Lucrece clearly sees Tarquin's lust as her soul's disease, not her pagan identity; she tells the reader that her "chastity's white-snow attire/ Dissolves in blood at Tarquin's lustful fire."⁸⁷ She also sees her body as physically changed: "Rape, in his paws of blood and fangs of lust,/ Hath stained th' immaculate lily of my field."⁸⁸ Her soul has been lost with her chastity, which is why she thinks she's in hell. Addressing the Christian heaven, she says, "'Twas thou, O chastity, m' eternal eye,/ The want of thee made my ghost reel to hell."⁸⁹ It is immediately after this address to heaven that, Shand explains, her apostrophe to chastity leads up to a "climatic stanza where at last she prays for explicit Christian redemption" and the answering stanza "pulls back to assert her pagan ineligibility."⁹⁰ While I do not discount this interpretation and I agree it is evident that she is clearly asking for Christian salvation, I do think that the reason she is in hell was

⁸⁶ Ibid., 422-25.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 197-98.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 255-56.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 507-09.

⁹⁰ Shand, 1988.

meant to be more ambivalent. Shand's evidence of her "pagan ineligibility" is the line reading, "Lucrece, I say, how canst thou Lucrece be, wanting a god to give a life to thee?"⁹¹ which could be interpreted as something other than her pagan stain. From this stanza until she is pulled off stage by the goddess of tragedy, she continues to lament her lost chastity and rage at Tarquin's devastating lust, which according to Shand's reading, is no longer the cause for her fate in hell. Shand's interpretation is definitely more tragic because it also makes Lucrece's anger inconsequential, and the whole poem serves no ends; her situation is hopeless. However, considering early modern discourse about rape, her place in hell could be due to her rape's stain and not her suicide nor her pagan background; at the very least, that is how Middleton's Lucrece sees it.

Shakespeare's and Middleton's versions are symbolic of a rape victim's impossible dilemma: although she is innocent she is condemned and stained because of the act of another. A rape victim, unless she was of extremely high standing, would not have been listened to and would have been thought of as stained despite men's claim that she is innocent in mind. Although Shakespeare and Middleton both explore Lucrece's and subsequently all female rape victims' impossible dilemma, their narratives still paradoxically perpetuate an ambivalent discourse. They construct Lucrece as victim and sympathize with her, but imagining her as tainted or putting her in hell for reasons beyond her control only further complicates her problem. If her body is definitely tainted, the potential implications for her soul are devastating. This suggests that some early modern victims could be thought sinful despite their wills. Middleton (maybe) solves

⁹¹ Middleton, "Lucrece", 561-62.

Lucrece's particular issue by putting her in hell for her pagan roots, but the ambivalence surrounding Christian victims remains. Part of the tragedy is that men controlled the discourse and women could rarely defend themselves. Furthermore, both stories ultimately use rape to mediate a man's purpose; in both versions Tarquin's inability to control his lust is a measurement of his kingship. Middleton's Lucrece highlights the irony that men have control over the construction of her story and the meaning of rape, lamenting:

He writes himself the shamer, I the shame,
The actor he, and I the tragedy.
The stage am I, and he the history,
the subject I, and he the ravisher.⁹²

The real rape victim and Lucrece are ultimately still used as objects for male consumption and means, reflecting their impossible and tragic dilemmas.

⁹² Ibid., 396-401.

III. SIN'S STAIN: RE-READING MILTON'S SIN AND FREE WILL

1. *Contextualizing Milton and His Free Will Defense*

After the Reformation, different theological systems competed for their place as truth in the Christian doctrine in order to create a more clearly defined religion. In England, Protestantism became institutionalized and, as Benjamin Myers asserts in his study on Reformation theology, the “increasing sophistication of philosophy and logic...led to more systematic and philosophical approaches to theology, while the humanist advances...led to a more refined and scholarly engagement with the biblical texts.”⁹³ Moreover, this approach resulted in a “more scholastic, dialectical form of theological reflection,” relying on logical reasoning to support competing doctrines.⁹⁴ The period emphasized the importance of closely examining scripture and the early works of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and others in order to establish a scripturally correct doctrine. Also, the period’s concern with the individual particularly stimulated an examination of the individual’s role in salvation as well as a person’s culpability in sin. Much of early modern theological debate centered on reconciling God’s omniscience and a subject’s free will, questioning the ways individual salvation is constructed in regards to God’s grace and prescience. In this context of theological contest, John Milton attempts to justify God’s ways in his grand epic. Not aligned with any one doctrine, he is guided

⁹³ Benjamin Myers, *Milton's Theology of Freedom* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 35.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

by many, relying heavily on his own readings of the scriptures.⁹⁵ Because there are some doubts about the extent of Milton's authorship of *Christian Doctrine*, it is impossible to tease out with certainty Milton's specific religious principles, especially since his approach may have changed over the course of his life. Despite this uncertainty, one can pull from local readings of his epic possible theological leanings. In his construction of free will in *Paradise Lost*, Milton seems to draw from several theological traditions, his approach deriving from Arminian and Augustinian doctrines in the context of Reformed theology.⁹⁶

Augustine, in *City of God*, confronts the basic dilemma underlying free will: If God is all-knowing, how do we have free will (a question under much debate during the Reformation with many conclusions)?⁹⁷ Augustine, whose writings impacted many theologians, attempts to clarify: "Our wills themselves are included in that order of causes which is certain to God, and embraced by His foreknowledge, for human wills are also causes of human actions; and He who foreknew all the cause of things would certainly...not have been ignorant of our wills."⁹⁸ God's omniscience seems to account

⁹⁵ For a more complete treatment of Milton's theology see *Milton's Theology of Freedom* by Tobias Gregory and *Milton's Good God* by Dennis Danielson; both critics have researched extensively to contextualize Milton's theology as well as attempt to clarify the multiple belief systems constructing it. Gregory's text also briefly outlines the range of previous criticism debating Milton's theology, which for my purpose is unnecessary to rehash here. He also writes "a short history" of freedom as defined in Christianity from the 4th century to post reformation. Danielson does the latter as well, but not as extensively and their ultimate achieved ends are different. I am particularly interested in the aspects of Milton's theology concerning free will and responsibility, which are the aspects of their works to which I refer.

⁹⁶ Myers 112; Dennis Danielson, *Milton's Good God: A Study in Literary Theodicy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), chapter 3. In this chapter Danielson outlines Reformed theology in order to differentiate Milton's beliefs concerning free will and that of the reformers who debated Luther's and Erasmus's versions of free will.

⁹⁷ Danielson, *Milton's*, 66.

⁹⁸ St. Augustine, *City of God*, 184.

for human wills; however, Augustine also importantly asserts that He is not responsible for human action despite this foreknowledge. He stresses that when God made humans, He made them perfect and to desire only good, giving them the ability to discern good from evil; thus, humanity's perfection was mutable. In other words, God made humankind perfect, but a subject's perfection could be altered due to his or her own will and actions. Thus, humanity's free will was corrupted by its own action, not God's.⁹⁹ Milton's treatment of this question in *Paradise Lost* is closely aligned with Augustinian thought. God's speech near the beginning of Book III echoes *City* when God announces humanity's eventual fall. God acknowledges that He has omniscience, but maintains His own lack of fault in Adam and Eve's disobedience: "If I foreknew/ Foreknowledge had no influence on their fault"; humans are "authors to themselves in all/ both what they judge and what they choose; for so/ I formed them free."¹⁰⁰ Labeled as the "Free-Will Defense" by Danielson, it seems to have become an accepted part of Milton's theodicy as well as upheld by some contemporaries: God's foreknowledge and humanity's actions coexist because God gave human beings freedom to choose.¹⁰¹ As Raphael explains to Adam, humanity is left "to his own free will, his will though free, / Yet mutable."¹⁰² Thus, God gave man a will that is not only completely free, but one that is also changeable according to human actions, allowing for the potential for danger and a fall. Of course, Augustine's work is not without inconsistencies; Augustine's construction of irresistible

⁹⁹ Ibid., 455-58.

¹⁰⁰ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Scott Elledge (New York: Norton, 2004), III. 117-24.

¹⁰¹ Dennis Danielson, "The Fall and Milton's Theodicy", *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. Dennis Danielson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), 148.

¹⁰² Milton, *Paradise Lost*, V.237-38.

grace seemed to contradict these notions to a point where free-will is nearly obsolete. Furthermore, it is these contradictions concerning grace, salvation, and human culpability that become the center of debate for the competing theologies during the Reformation.¹⁰³ In order to maintain God's goodness do we need ultimate free will in salvation, or is our will irrelevant to God's goodness?

Arising out of these debates was the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius who dissented from Calvinism in order to emphasize humans' free will in salvation; Arminius' doctrine exploits the contradictions in the Augustinian system in order to undermine the emphasis on the elect in Calvinism.¹⁰⁴ Calvinism follows closely Augustinian thought in its belief that salvation is only found in God's irresistible grace, but adds that "God saves whom he wills of his mere good pleasure."¹⁰⁵ In other words, people have no control over their own salvation. Furthermore, Calvinism also stressed original sin and its control over the human will; the will was thought to be "bound with the closest chains of sin" and was only free in the sense that humans are not "forced to be the servant of sin" (even though we are compelled toward it).¹⁰⁶ In response to the seeming lack of free will in Calvinistic doctrine, Arminius argued for "conditional election", which stated every man has the *choice* to reject or accept salvation, and though it is enabled through God's grace *only*, it is *not* irresistible grace.¹⁰⁷ Arminius emphasized the necessity of grace

¹⁰³ Danielson, *Milton's*, 70.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 72. For further reading about the similarities between Calvinistic and Augustinian grace, see Danielson's outline of Reformed theology in *Milton's Good God*.

¹⁰⁵ Calvin qtd. in Myers, *Milton's Theology*, 34.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

while also maintaining the necessity of human action and decision. And, human action is essential in Milton's version of salvation as constructed in *Paradise Lost*.

Although Milton's belief system does seem to have changed over time, first agreeing with Calvinist beliefs, he seems to settle on Arminian salvation in his own theodicy because of his emphasis on Adam and Eve's choice in their fall. *De Doctrina Christiana* clearly has Arminian sympathies, and despite its questionable validity as Milton's personal doctrine, at least shows his possible leanings. It is not to say that *Paradise Lost* is strictly Arminian nor that these assumptions about his theological approaches should be "imposed uncritically,"¹⁰⁸ but it seems obvious that Milton does follow Arminian examples of salvation in his emphasis on human action. Readers are led to understand that Adam's and Eve's wills are ultimately free, but Adam and Eve can only find and do good through God's grace and Raphael's instructions. Adam and Eve choose whether to obey God's commands and then later accept his salvation. In God's speech in Book Three, He outlines how grace is achieved and offered for fallen humanity, which is the essence of Armenian thought:

Some I have chosen of peculiar grace,
Elect above the rest; so is my will:
The rest shall hear me call, and oft be warn'd
Their sinful state, and to appease betimes
The incensed Deity, while offer'd grace
Invites; for I will clear their senses dark,
What may suffice, and soften stony hearts
To pray, repent, and bring obedience due.
To prayer, repentance, and obedience due,
Though but endeavour'd with sincere intent,
Mine ear shall not be slow, mine eye not shut.
And I will place within them as a guide,
My umpire Conscience; whom if they will hear,

¹⁰⁸ Danielson, *Milton's*, 82.

Light after light, well us'd, they shall attain,
And to the end, persisting, safe arrive.¹⁰⁹

God has called a particular few, but the rest still have the choice to receive God's grace. Furthermore, the tools necessary to achieve His grace are within humanity, and it is up to each subject to choose to accept or deny it.

It is true that *Paradise Lost* is a poem and not doctrine, but it is impossible to ignore the religious implications of the piece. Milton is indeed engaging with religious myth as well as using doctrine and his own beliefs to inform this engagement. Furthermore, understanding Milton's conception of free will and grace is essential in order to examine human culpability in sin. Milton obviously emphasizes the freedom of his characters while retaining God's goodness and the inevitability of goodness triumphing over evil. However, his theodicy is not without inconsistencies. As Danielson points out, in a narrative work, the question of God's foreknowledge becomes problematic; a non-linear temporal structure is confusing "because narrative is a time-bound medium, a God thus narratively presented cannot help but sound prejudiced" when he relates the story of the ultimate fall.¹¹⁰ Danielson argues that Milton does successfully prove God's goodness by creating balance; he built a narrative that created "necessary conditions for Adam and Eve's falling and the necessary conditions for their standing"; again it is a narrative that stresses human action and responsibility.¹¹¹ Myers, in his study, also maintains Milton's ultimate stress on human freedom, "drawing from Arminian concepts of self limitation":

¹⁰⁹ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, III.184-98.

¹¹⁰ Danielson, *The Fall*, 152.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 152.

God is portrayed in the poem as a free being whose principal concern is the authentic freedom of his characters. To this end he predestines the freedom of human nature, and allows this nature, as his own image of humanity, to predestine and actualize its own future. Far from negating the freedom of his creatures, the God of *Paradise Lost* creates room for creaturely self-determination by withdrawing his own being from that of his creatures in the act of creation.¹¹²

But perhaps it is not necessary to impose complete unity on a poetic structure that is relying on an eternal temporality, which is supposed to be beyond human comprehension.

Thus, this chapter does not work to create a logical system of understanding the entirety of the poem or “fix” inconsistencies. The final critical end is to reveal local meanings while understanding the religious conceptions informing the local narratives. More specifically, this chapter examines the inconsistencies of Milton’s conception of free will in relation to the early modern notions of the body. In particular, it is in Sin’s experience and her character as well as the physical experiences of the human characters that these inconsistencies become particularly problematic. Sin’s narrative has been relatively ignored in the studies concerning Milton’s notions of free will, even though it is her apparent lack of will that creates problems within the poem’s theodicy. By looking closely at Sin’s narrative and the physical manifestations of sin throughout the poem, this chapter will demonstrate the problematic boundaries of (or rather lack of) the early modern humoral body. In the poem’s treatment of the nature of Sin’s sin, Milton confronts the conflicting early modern discourses around rape, culpability, and the Galenic body. Furthermore, it does not overcome those conflicts but elides them, calling into question the actual free will of the subjects despite Milton’s intentions. First, it is

¹¹² Myers, *Milton’s Theology*, 163.

essential to explore Milton's construction of the body/soul relationship by examining his *Mask at Ludlow*.

2. *Problematic Bodies and Spoiled Souls: Reading Milton's Comus*

Milton's *Mask at Ludlow*, or *Comus*, imagines a Lady who faces a predicament very similar to the one Lucrece faces in Shakespeare's and Middleton's narrative poems, inviting the same question: If her mind stays pure, does her body stay pure? The mask also engages with the key question of my project: How linked are the body, mind, and soul in the early modern period? Unlike Lucrece, however, Milton's imperiled Lady is not ruined, leaving these questions partially unanswered. The Lady is rescued before she is spoiled, and her rescue only further complicates the text's questions about the body/soul connection: Is she rescued because a spoiled body can harm her soul? These unanswered questions represent the problems of the early modern rape victim: A raped woman is said and claims to be innocent in mind and safe spiritually, like the Lady insists in her arguments with Comus; however, in reality, a rape victim was still considered spoiled and socially disparaged. Although we do not see this in the mask itself, we do see this in the Castlehaven scandal that haunts the mask. Also, the early modern notions of the body's blurry relationship to the soul, as also constructed in the mask, only work to further complicate notions of innocence when bodies are forcibly spoiled. The action of the mask is situated in the dialogue between Comus and the Lady, wherein she attempts to maintain the innocence of mind and soul; however, when the debate turns to force, her

arguments become problematically insufficient and divine spirits must rescue the endangered Lady.

Significantly, in Milton's mask Comus is not explicitly attempting rape. Instead Milton situates his Lady in temptation and a battle of rhetoric; Comus is tempting the Lady's body *and* mind. At first, their debate is meant to "charm her judgment" and lead her to excessive pleasure by her own will. However, due to her repeated refusal, Comus considers forcing her to drink, a drink that would lead her unwillingly to desire sexual pleasure, which could be interpreted as a type of rape. Importantly, her body will be spoiled once she tastes his drink—despite her will in the act. Up until this point, the Lady has maintained the innocence of her mind even though her body is captured, claiming that Comus can have no power over her mind: "Thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind/ With all thy charms, although this corporal rind/ Thou hast immanacl'd, while Heav'n sees good."¹¹³ Furthermore, she proves her mind's freedom as she gains power through her rhetoric. In her final speech against Comus's "Wit and gay Rhetoric" she calls on the "serious doctrine of Virginitie" to empower her words and spirit to overcome Comus's temptation. At first, her words appear to conquer him as he trembles, claiming her words indeed are "set off by some superior power."¹¹⁴ However, he does not cease, instead he decides to "try her yet more strongly" and force her to drink, which would ultimately and literally change her body.¹¹⁵ Regardless of her ability to

¹¹³ John Milton, "Comus", *John Milton Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Hughes (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2003), 663-65.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 787-802.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 805-10.

defeat him in debate and demonstrate her mind's free will, she would not be able to prevent a physical act that would alter her state.

Moreover, despite the Lady's insistence that the innocence of mind is separate from acts against her body, her argument asserts that there is still a significant attachment between the body and soul. In fact, the very cultivating of the soul is connected to the nurturing of the body. The Lady's main argument in her debate against Comus is the necessity of spiritual *and* physical temperance; her example is that subjects must be temperate in all things, including food, in order to maintain a strong soul.¹¹⁶ Indeed, the sibling's victory dance celebrates her rescue from "sensual Folly and Intemperance."¹¹⁷ Furthermore, throughout the mask, outside forces attempt to work their way into the body in order to corrupt the soul as symbolized in Comus' drink. The brothers also recognize the body/soul relationship; the elder brother, concerned about his sister's spiritual and physical well-being explains how a soul is damaged:

...But, when lust,
By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,
But most by lewd and lavish act of sin,
Lets in defilement to the inward parts,
The soul grows clotted by contagion,
Imbodies, and imbrutes, till she quite lose
The divine property of her first being.¹¹⁸

This very physical explanation echoes early modern thoughts about the soul's very corporeal experience. The soul is contaminated through the body by outside forces that importantly are not necessarily willed and that one cannot control. The Lady again shows the body/soul connection as she calls on Chastity and Virginity to empower her,

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 775-780.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 975.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 463-69.

which can both be very physical states as well as spiritual. The figurative cleanliness of the soul is reflected in the literal cleanliness of the body and vice versa. Furthermore, it is partially her virgin state that is evidence of her soul's purity; in fact, it is her chastity that becomes her identity as she repeatedly is referred to or addressed as "Chaste" and "Virgin." Indeed, her brothers, the Attendant Spirit, and Sabrina are all more concerned with her sexual state *because* it is connected to the state of her soul. Therefore, despite the Lady's insistence that the mind and body are separate, the mask also emphasizes that the experience of the body can impact the soul, and the body can (potentially) literally contaminate the soul. Comus' drink will indeed change her body physically and potentially spoil her soul regardless of the Lady's will and innocence of mind.

When the Lady and Comus's interaction turns to force, the Lady's argument becomes problematically insufficient. Will her mind remain innocence if her body is physically altered by Comus through force? Because the soul's cleanliness is linked to the body's, it is unclear if her soul would have remained pure if her body were to become damaged. And, due to Sabrina's timely rescue, the mask leaves the question unresolved. Furthermore, considering it was performed shortly after a very public sex scandal involving relations for whom it is written, the mask's ending paradox is even more problematic. Although it is arguable whether the Castlehaven scandal, which concerns the rape of two women and their guilt in the act, is indeed Milton's basis for the mask, one cannot help, as Nancy Miller argues, but partially analyze the text in the light of the

scandal's conclusions about rape and female culpability.¹¹⁹ In the scandal's court proceedings, Castlehaven was convicted, and the published newsbooks popularized his story, attempting to make it a moral lesson often embellished for dramatic effect. The reader was called to "reach the properly religious moral conclusion concerning the life and death of the sinner," using all those involved in the scandal, including the women raped, as moral examples.¹²⁰ Legally the two women, Lady Anne Audley, the countess of Castlehaven, and her daughter Elizabeth, are considered "as victims of evildoing, but the newsbooks do not allow them to be morally guiltless victims."¹²¹ As explained in the previous chapter, the victims' perceived guilt is consistent with early modern dealings with rape. Although laws were attempting to create harsher consequences for the rapist, a woman's body was still considered in some way spoiled by the act. She could not remain completely spotless because the body's alteration could lead to the corruption of her soul. As John Creaser points out, "it was not unreasonable of contemporary observers and gossips to assume that the woman and girl became corrupted and inured to their violation," which is only further evidenced by the very fact the Castlehaven ladies were pardoned for the act, implying "they had committed offences that required pardons."¹²² Although part of the Lady's tainted reputation came from Castlehaven's accusations that his wife was a whore, it shows that their innocence in court was not enough to save their social character. In fact, "their contamination seems also to have been acknowledged

¹¹⁹ Nancy Miller, "Chastity, Rape, and Ideology in the Castlehaven Testimonies and Milton's Ludlow Mask", *Milton Studies*, 32 (1995), 153.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 154-55.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

¹²² John Creaser, "Milton's Comus: The Irrelevance of the Castlehaven Scandal." *Milton Quarterly*, 21.4 (1987), 30.

within the family”; young Elizabeth’s husband refused to live with her after the scandal was publicized, even though the king compelled him to do so, and at fifteen Elizabeth was labeled as a whore.¹²³ Her own grandmother refused to accept her until she was publically pardoned, worried that the act done to her had spoiled her soul and made her wicked. The fact remains that the two victims, although eventually pardoned for their “crimes,” were at first perceived guilty and forever held “morally accountable.”¹²⁴ Their bodies and souls were considered polluted, despite their lack of will in the act, which only follows other early modern discourses on rape. Although in law and in religious texts, such as Augustine’s, many tried to maintain a woman could remain innocent in mind, in reality due to the nature of the humoral body, a woman was considered spoiled.

Although it is unclear whether Milton was engaging with the public scandal’s narrative and attempting to clear the Castlehaven Ladies’ reputations, one can see *Mask* as Milton’s entrance into his contemporaries’ dialogue concerning rape victims, their bodies and their guilt. He seems to employ much of the same logic as his contemporaries; he understands the social and spiritual importance of a woman’s preservation of her chastity, which was interpreted as her responsibility and affects both her social and spiritual future. Milton seems to agree that spiritually a woman can remain innocent in mind, but the admitted close relationship between the body and soul complicates his conclusions about a physically forced woman, again showing a disjunction in the period between theory and practice. Because a spoiled body was thought to increase the

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹²⁴ Miller, “Chastity”, 158.

potential for sin (regardless if one willed the sin), a woman could be damaged and soul altered even if she had an innocent will during the act. Milton also agreed with the “contagion of sin,” especially in the destructive powers of lust: “To Milton and his contemporaries, lust, whatever its source, has a direct effect upon the rape victim and blurs the distinction between the sinner and the one who is sinned against” (which is echoed in the previously quoted words of the elder brother).¹²⁵ For Milton’s Lady, since she remains innocent in mind during the temptation, she is able to receive divine intervention that saves her body. However, this resolution only complicates his conclusions about a woman whose chastity is forcibly taken away. Because the boundaries of the body and the soul are usually blurred, one can assume the Lady’s body is not only what Sabrina rescues, but more importantly her soul—as well as her social standing. It is in *Paradise Lost*, however, that we see the devastating consequences of these notions in the experience of Sin. She is forcibly taken, and indeed her form is altered.

3. *Sin’s Stain: Questioning Free-Will in Paradise Lost*

Milton’s Sin has been long interpreted as a mere allegory for what she is called, and by ignoring her presence as a character, the many implications of her narrative have been disregarded. Although she can be interpreted and is probably meant to work on some level as an allegory, upon her first appearance in the text, one cannot deny her as a character whose horrific narrative has many implications on Milton’s theodicy. Called

¹²⁵ Miller, “Chastity”, 163.

Sin before *she* sins—she is the embodiment of Satan’s disobedience—her story becomes a framework for our own understanding of sin itself and how it works within the poem. Furthermore, by examining Sin’s narrative, her story can reveal problematic inconsistencies in early modern thought as well as Milton’s notions of free will and the mind. Although much Milton study has been devoted to the problems of free will in the poem, almost every study overlooks Sin, her creation, her multiple rapes, and transformation into evil. However, it is her very physical experience that provides a gateway into discussing problems concerning early modern notions of will and the subject’s physical experiences with sin.

Sin’s very physical experience, grotesquely violent in her narrative, particularly represents the problematic early modern notions of physiology and psychology and the notion that sin physically manifested itself in the body once committed. Also, within this understanding of early modern experience, the body could alter unintentionally due to unruly humors and passions, which could lead one to sin involuntarily. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton does attempt to explain the source of the passions and how they operated before the human fall, following Augustinian thought; both, Augustine and Milton insist that individuals have responsibility over his or her passions and transgressions, regardless of inner parts. He also stresses that the inability to control the passions is merely a result of the fall. However, this assertion is complicated by the many internal movements of each character, and the very existence of this active internal narrative complicates the subsequent falls of each subject. However, it is important to separate Milton’s intentions from the actual narrative and instead focus on the problematic interpretations of Sin,

reading/focusing on her as a subject and not merely an abstract concept equated to sin itself. Ultimately, Sin can be read, at first, as a victim forever damned and continuously tortured for reasons perceived to be beyond her control. Her character represents the dangers of the volatile body that humoral physiology implies, which disrupts Milton's justification for evil and the potential for sin pre-fall as well as complicating his theodicy's insistence on free will.

Many scholars read Sin's character as the epitome of evil, an explanation for evil, or the physical manifestation of Satan's disobedience, and take her exactly for what her name reads: sin. Stephen Fallon, for instance, concludes that "the nature of Sin and Death is consistent with Milton's Augustinian ontology of evil, and that Milton naturally turns to the 'lesser reality' of allegory to present characters who are the negation rather than the expression of substance."¹²⁶ However, by viewing her as merely an allegorical personification, critics like Fallon miss some key moments within the text that have the potential to change our understanding of sin and how it functions in Milton's epic. Moreover, defining her through an allegorical reading even fails because she does not truly embody what she is called, unlike Death who does perfectly personify his name. Sin's recounting of her origin and history causes empathy not hate while the many disturbing details of her past and present evoke pity. She does nothing to implicate herself as personification of evil until after her damnation. As John Carey asks, if she is just an allegory what is her story in hell an actual allegory of? What does her narrative

¹²⁶ Stephen Fallon, "Milton's Sin and Death: The Ontology of Allegory in *Paradise Lost*", *English Literary Renaissance*, 17.3 (1987), 329.

correspond to?¹²⁷ Her present state is one of a (rape) victim not the epitome of evil, and her account diminishes her fault while complicating her culpability.

Some scholars have examined her as a character and not a concept, but do not consider the implications of viewing her as such. For example, Alexander Myers reads Sin as a rape victim, yet ultimately argues that her tragic narrative and damning is only evidence of Milton's "understanding of the causes and effects of rape in society."¹²⁸ Another interpretation by Louis Schwartz reads Sin as a parody of motherhood, tying "Sin to Eve proleptically" who will become the mother of all humankind and thus "subject to the very fears, pains, and dangers to which Sin's nightmarish experience refers."¹²⁹ He argues that Sin's role as a "mother" experiencing the dreadful pains of birth is "a parody of human relations with concrete contemporary resonances."¹³⁰ Early modern readers would have recognized and identified with the dangers of childbirth, which were thought to be a result of and punishment for Eve's disobedience, but ironically are absent from Raphael's final report of the pain Adam and Eve's disobedience created. However, ultimately Schwartz brings Sin back to an allegory just

¹²⁷ John Carey, "Milton's Satan", *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. Dennis Danielson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 171. It is important to note that Carey does not answer these questions. He sees that the problematic readings created by this confusing allegory only works to further the ambiguousness of Satan's character. He explains, "The status of the sequence in terms of the poem's 'reality,' and the level on which we are to read it, are not matters which we can obtain any firm directives. This means that, in this strange episode as in much else, Satan slips from our knowledge."

¹²⁸ Alexander Myers, "Embraces Forcible and Foul: Viewing Milton's Sin as a Rape Victim", *Milton Quarterly*, 28.1 (1994), 11. Although it is a very interesting study arguing Sin's victimhood (and probably one of the first to do so), Myers mostly ignores the implications of this reading to the poem's theodicy only considering the reading as evidence of Milton's sympathy.

¹²⁹ Louis Schwartz, "'Conscious Terrors' and 'The Promised Seed': Seventeenth Century Obstetrics and the Allegory of Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost*", *Milton Studies XXXII*, ed. Albert Labriola (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), 81.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

with an enlarged role that “expands to encompass the natural conditions of the created world.”¹³¹ Although many scholars have indeed explored Sin’s psychology as a victim of incest, rape, and physical pain, their conclusions do not satisfy or further our understanding of reading her as such within the poem’s theodicy. In other words, they do not explore the implications of reading Sin, who is typically understood as the embodiment of Satan’s disobedience and the explanation for the creation of evil, as a victim of another’s transgression to our understanding and reading of sin and free will in Milton’s epic.

Any interpretations of Sin’s victimhood created by her grotesque history are usually halted by our understanding of Milton’s intentions: Sin, like Satan at first, obtains to some degree our pity because we are fallen also and identify with her state.¹³² Despite Milton’s intent, this reading creates inconsistencies within a poem that attempts to emphasize each subject’s free will and guilt in his or her fall. Allegorically, Sin is read as Milton’s explanation for evil and sin in Heaven, an otherwise perfect space. Yet, read as a *subject* in the poem with her own history, her role as personified evil becomes uncertain while more importantly her lack of free will in that role is problematic. In the relation of her history to Satan (who has forgotten her), she recounts: “Out of thy head I sprung: amazement seized/ All th’ host of heav’n; back they recoiled afraid/ At first, and

¹³¹ Ibid., 82.

¹³² Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 4. In his introduction, Forsyth discusses how Satan gains our admiration because he is “our point of access” into the poem and paradise. Also, he gains our sympathy because we are so familiar with his state: “he is damned,” but knows the terrors of love and beauty.

called me Sin, for a sign/ Portentous held me.”¹³³ She is a product of another’s transgression and is labeled Sin, at her creation, before she commits a sin herself. She is seen as a “Sign” by Satan and his followers and labeled monstrous and threatening partly due to her monstrous creation, which is importantly beyond her control. Furthermore, her original disposition in Heaven shows no inclination for evil; she is likened to Satan’s original nature as an angel “in shape and count’nance bright” and is described as “shining heav’nly fair, a goddess armed.”¹³⁴ Sin, who is unfortunately named so, does not embody the nature of her name until after she is placed at hell’s gate. Also, problematically, unlike the other creatures of the poem, her sin physically manifests arguably before she sins, altering her form into that of a monster after giving birth to Death, the fruit of her sinful copulation with Satan. She changes before Satan and his followers, whose physical states alter when Satan successfully returns from earth, though it is for them that she is damned. Her evil is recognized in her physical state before her nature is actually evil, which she eventually embraces at the poem’s conclusion when she and Death figuratively devour the earth—but this occurs only after and potentially as a result of her tormented state. Although Sin’s heavenly copulation with Satan is traditionally received as her damning sin, her will in this act is ambiguous as the line reads, Satan “becamst enamored” and he “took’st with [her] in secret.”¹³⁵ She never states an explicit desire for Satan and seems morally uninvolved in her passive description of Satan’s “joy” and not decisively her own.

¹³³ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II.758-61.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, II.756-57.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, II.765.

Damned to hell with Satan and the rebellious angels, Sin sits alone at the gate tormented by her growing womb. At this point in her narrative, Milton does not dismiss her agony but rather emphasizes it in the horrific language of her birth: She describes that Death “breaking violent way/ Tore through my entrails, that with fear and pain/ Distorted, all my nether shape thus grew transformed.”¹³⁶ Not only is she in agony, but her physical shape is grotesquely changed from fair to monstrous because of childbirth; she becomes a “snakey sorceress,” “a Sight detestable,” and “double-formed” not as a result of her sin but Satan’s procreation with her.¹³⁷ Unlike the other fallen creatures, her change does not come from disobedience, but the “fear and pain” of her son’s birth. Her grotesque history continues as she narrates Death’s subsequent pursuit of her through the caves of hell “more...inflamed with lust than rage”; then, in “embraces forcible and foul,” he rapes her.¹³⁸ From this horrific rape she births, “yelling monsters” who, as she relates:

...With ceaseless cry
 Surround me, as thou saw’st, hourly conceived
 And hourly born, with sorrow infinite
 To me, for when they list, into the womb
 That breed them they return, and howl and gnaw
 My bowels, their repast; then bursting forth
 Afresh with conscious terrors vex me round,
 That rest or intermission none I find.¹³⁹

This excerpt from her narrative emphasizes the grotesqueness and horror of her current state; she receives no “intermission” from her torture. Not only has Death raped her, but hounds continually enter her body (in a kind of rape) and torture her. As O’Keefe points out, “Sin is repeatedly involved in gruesome sexual activity, although she does not seem

¹³⁶ Ibid., II.784-7.

¹³⁷ Ibid., II.723, 746, & 742.

¹³⁸ Ibid., II.790-5.

¹³⁹ Ibid., II.795-803.

to have much moral choice in the matter.”¹⁴⁰ Considering this scene in the context of the early modern rape victim and Milton’s previously mentioned beliefs of a woman’s possible culpability in the act, this particular passage imagines the internal experience of an actual rape victim. She symbolizes the altering consequences of the act and the hounds “are a materialized form of the long-living internal suffering of the rape victim.”¹⁴¹ Literally, if a woman’s rape resulted in a child, it would be a reminder of her pain as well as a manifestation of the act, not the least a public pronouncement of her lack of chastity. A woman would have been thought to be internally altered by her rape, and Sin tragically, by being placed in hell for her relation with Satan, represents the paradox for the early modern rape victim’s suffering socially and spiritually for another’s transgression. She is cast out and forgotten by Satan and God. At the end of her account, she declares her terrors and state as “fate pronounced” with a lack of individual will or purpose. Sin’s lack of will is usually read as “restating the notions of free will that predominate *Paradise Lost* by showing that sin must be acted upon and will not come to those who do not desire it.”¹⁴² But this does not explain her lack of will as a subject within the poem. By observing her as a rape victim in particular, in the context of early modern understanding of the humoral body, one can see the problematic notions of a permeable body. If the body and soul are connected, and an outside act can physically change a person, then the soul can be damaged regardless of will. Although Milton in *Comus* tries to maintain that a woman can remain pure of mind though her body captured,

¹⁴⁰Timothy O’Keefe, “An Analogue to Milton’s Sin and More on the Tradition”, *Milton Quarterly* 5 (1971), 76.

¹⁴¹Myers, “Embraces”, 12.

¹⁴²Ibid., 13.

in *Paradise Lost* Sin is literally altered for another's transgression on her form. Sin ought not to be guilty because she did not explicitly will any sexual corruption, yet despite the theoretical innocence, she suffers in practice. In a poem and theodicy that are contingent on the subject's free will, it seems gravely problematic to create a character who has no will, but bears responsibility. And, unlike the human fallen subjects of the poem, she has no chance of salvation just like the Satan and his followers to whom she has been linked since birth.

Although Sin does not stay guiltless through the poem's entirety, her first recognizable, definite sin seems almost justifiable in light of her current state. Given the key to the gates of hell upon her fall, she is instructed by God to never open them. However, Satan tempts her with freedom from that "dark and dismal house of pain," promising her a place where she and Death "shall dwell at ease."¹⁴³ Satan's alluring speech of liberty for her and her son results in her surrender of the key and disobedience to God's commands. Sin's failure to resist Satan's rhetoric and promising images of the future is much like Eve's own fall, despite their different consequences. Both are released from subordination and persuaded that their disobediences will result in a better life. However, while Eve's disobedience causes her exile from paradise thus proving Satan's words to be false, Sin's disobedience releases her from undeserved perpetual torture and makes her the temporary ruler of mortal humankind. In this juxtaposition, Sin's disobedience is almost excusable, if not understandable where Eve's is tragic. Furthermore, Sin's disobedience will not seemingly result in any punishment worse than

¹⁴³ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, II.823 & 840-1

the state she is already in. While Eve has obvious reasons to remain obedient to God, Sin will only benefit by following Satan; she knows her fate and she already suffers it: she is a monster and suffers without pause- a fate worse than Satan has yet received. At this point it seems the epitome of evil is given an excuse to be so. From this point of her first identifiable sin, she does become the true embodiment of her name. Her sinful act just seems problematically permissible echoed in her own questioning of her current God-given state: “But what owe I to his commands above / Who hates me, and hath hither thrust me down / Into this gloom.../ To sit in hateful office here confined, / Inhabitant of heaven and heavenly born, / Here in perpetual agony and pain.”¹⁴⁴ Although this is the perspective of Sin, who is by no means an unbiased narrator, her story remains problematic. Ultimately, she is punished for sins she did not commit, but were committed upon her; she is raped and exiled for another’s offense.

Furthermore, it is unclear why God thrusts her down with the others when she is seemingly guiltless in Satan’s rebellion. Indeed, she is condemned while her role in Satan’s war is dangerously unclear. In Raphael’s retelling of the war, Sin is never mentioned, unless we consider Michael’s condemning of “Satan’s offspring” as a reference to Sin. If this is a reference to Sin, she is already considered by the heavenly host evil by association but not in act. This denial of her individual character by God and the other angels is even evidenced by her exile. Satan and his followers threw themselves down into hell whereas Sin’s arrival is relatively ambiguous. She even separates her fall rhetorically, saying “down *they* fell driven from the pitch of heaven, down in this deep,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., II.856-861.

and in *general* fall, I also.”¹⁴⁵ She is damned in a *general* fall without judgment or guilty action, only damned because she is Satan’s offspring, something over which she has no control. And then she is physically altered, just as the serpent, because of the act of another. Damned for the sin of her father, Sin symbolizes a theme that resonates in Adam and Eve’s fall also: Adam and Eve’s offspring will suffer because of their act of disobedience. Although Milton does point out that Adam and Eve’s descendents will be accountable for their own sins and in a sense Adam’s and Eve’s sins only prefigure that, in Raphael’s recounting to Adam of humankind’s future, Raphael explains that Adam’s offspring will suffer for Adam’s and Eve’s crimes:

... behold
Th’ effects which thy original crime hath wrought
In some to spring from thee, who never touched
Th’ excepted tree, nor with snake conspired,
Nor sinned thy sin, yet from that sin derive
Corruption to bring forth more violent deeds.¹⁴⁶

Because Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s command, humankind will only be more inclined to sin and forever be shut out of paradise. Raphael even stresses that despite the descendents lack of fault, they will still experience the consequences.

Thus, when Sin finally embodies her allegorical name it is largely due to her tormenting damnation as well as a felt internal connection, pulling her towards Satan; a connection she embraces because she is damned with him, a “fatal consequence” uniting Satan, Sin, and Death.¹⁴⁷ Her heart “which by secret harmony” moves with Satan joins

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., II.771-773. (my emphasis)

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., XI.422-28.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., X.364.

them in “connection sweet.”¹⁴⁸ This felt connection is echoed Adam’s feelings for Eve, a connection to Eve that causes Adam’s own fall. As Sin’s heart moves with Satan, upon returning from his successful journey, she now embraces her fate as evil personified, leaving hell to destroy man and earth. However, despite her allegorical fulfillment, it remains problematic that she is at first blameless yet damned and physically altered, suffering on account of as well as becoming a physical manifestation for another’s transgressions. By becoming evil only due to God’s initial disregard for her individual character and an association with Satan she cannot control, she is fated to be Sin. Then, at the poem’s end, Sin and Death become the tools for God’s punishment, making all the things on earth mortal with Death’s “scythe of Time.”¹⁴⁹ How then do we read a “fated” character who suffers another’s transgressions into Milton’s theodicy, which emphasizes free will and personal responsibility?

Because she is damned and physically altered due to another’s sins, she calls into question the amount of control subjects have over their own sins and bodies and ultimately the sins of Adam and Eve. Sin is physically changed because of evil deeds enacted on her while unintentionally being a physical manifestation of Satan’s sin. As a rape victim, she ought not to be punished, but not only is she damned, she is also exiled to be forever tortured. She represents a guiltless body that can be violated and changed by an external sin, which in her case as a rape victim is lust. Her vulnerability represents the ultimate implications of the volatile body conceived by early modern notions of

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., X.358-9.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., X.606.

humors and passions as well as the understanding that the body and soul were linked, thus making sin a corporeal experience. This corporeal understanding of and consequences for sin are witnessed in the many characters of *Paradise Lost*: Satan and Sin change externally whereas Adam and Eve undergo their changes internally, also sensing the altercations initiated by Sin and Death in the very earth after the fall. Also, the subjects' initial sins lead to more, i.e. Satan continually wants revenge, and Adam and Eve succumb to lust and gluttony. Indeed, *Paradise Lost* deeply engages with early modern notions of the corporeal experience as well as the very dangerous implications of this internal narrative involving one's passions.

William Hunter labels the poem as “a passionate epic” and indeed the passions are experienced and discussed repeatedly, altering many of the characters who experience them, including Satan and Sin and Adam and Eve.¹⁵⁰ Adam's passions are stirred by Eve and Eve's passions are stirred by Satan in a dream. Importantly however, the passions are not only present in paradise but are also constructed as an important, “divinely sanctioned” function of mankind and even the angels: rightly directed and tempered passions can lead a subject too good because passions were a faculty of the soul.¹⁵¹ However, following Thomas Wright and other early modern theologians and philosophers, Milton also maintains that the passions have the capacity to corrupt the

¹⁵⁰ William Hunter, “*Paradise Lost*: Passionate Epic”, *Milton Studies* 31, ed. Albert Labriola (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994), 73.

¹⁵¹Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 52. Schoenfeldt here quotes an excerpt from Areopagitica: “Wherefor did [God] creat passions within us, pleasures around us, but that rightly temper'd are the very ingredients of vertu?”

soul.¹⁵² *Paradise Lost*, while showing the “capacity for rightly directed emotion to move one to virtuous action,” it also demonstrates in the fall the “loss of control passion can entail.”¹⁵³ Both the positive and negative consequences of the passions are explored throughout the poem in heaven as the good angels direct their passions to defeat the rebels and Satan’s passions rouse him to disobedience. Thus, Milton reveals that the passions can be used for good or for ill, but they must be controlled and guided by virtue. Milton, following Augustinian thought, also stresses that the inability to control one’s humors that leads one to sin is only a consequence of the fall. However, problematically, despite Milton’s insistence on human responsibility, Adam and Eve’s ignorance of their passions and the constant internal experience of all the characters generate potential uncertainty in Milton’s explanation.

Each described internal occurrence of Adam and Eve has serious potential for danger, especially because the subjects are unclear on what their feelings mean. There are several moments within the poem wherein the characters are educated on how to properly mediate their body and soul. Raphael stresses in both Books V and VII that Adam and Eve must temper the body and the mind in order to improve the soul. In the former chapter, he claims that “Man’s nourishment” properly tempered gives “both life and sense,” and “from these corporeal nutrients perhaps/ [Their] bodies may at last turn all to spirit.”¹⁵⁴ Then, the angel also underlines the importance of controlling the mind’s desire to know:

¹⁵² Wright, *Passions*, 9.

¹⁵³ Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 46.

¹⁵⁴ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, V.484-497.

But knowledge is as food, and needs not less
Her temperance over appetite, to know
In measure what the mind may well contain,
Oppresses else with surfeit, and soon turns
Wisdom to folly, as nourishment to wind.¹⁵⁵

The body and mind must and can be moderated in order to keep one's soul pure, but the passions, internally experienced, are felt without choice. And, though passions can be turned into good, these intentional workings have potential for corruption. Raphael tries to educate Adam to temper and use his passions for Eve, saying that "Adam should sublimate his bewildering internal commotion into an external motion aimed exclusively at heaven."¹⁵⁶ And Adam tries to justify Eve's dream of disobedience inspired problematically by Satan to her by maintaining that "Evil into the mind of god or man/ May come and go, so unapproved, and leave/ No spot or blame behind."¹⁵⁷ Because she "didst abhor to dream," she remains innocent. Although this upholds Milton's original assertion that one can preserve an innocent mind, it does not address the most dangerous feature of the dream: that it was caused by Satan, was beyond Eve's control, and had the *potential* for sin, *if* she actively and consensually enjoyed it. Moreover, this is only a precursor to Eve's ultimate temptation—initiated again by Satan when he appeals to her emotions—which she fails to overcome. In her dream, Satan was able to "reach/ The organs of her fancy, and with them forge/ Illusions" so that he might "taint" Eve's blood and spirit.¹⁵⁸ Eve is rescued by an angel who discovers Satan, but the potential for an outside source to taint one's spirit despite one's will has already been dangerously

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., V.126-130

¹⁵⁶ Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 55.

¹⁵⁷ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, V.119-120.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., IV.803- 805

suggested. Furthermore, at this point, we have already witnessed a character who is damned because of another's transgressions: Sin. Sin has borne the guilt without will in action, and here we see that Eve's pure state can potentially be altered as well. Although Milton insists it is the responsibility of the subject to turn passions into good deeds, the key predicament isn't addressed: passions are unintentionally experienced, yet can lead to sin if willfully acted upon, for which the subject can be punished.

After the fall, it is clear that the passions have become more unruly as Adam and Eve experience multiple perturbations and continue sinning; they give in to both lust and gluttony. However, despite the obvious distinction Milton is making about the pre- and post-lapsarian passions, it remains very problematic that Adam and Eve do not seem to be able to control their passions or understand their internal narratives in pre-lapsarian paradise. Adam unintentionally feels his "commotion strange" roused when he looks upon Eve, and it is this commotion that will lead him to follow Eve into a fall.

Furthermore, the magnitude of Satan's participation in Eve's fall is problematic as he clearly rouses the passions in Eve in her dream and by the tree. Although it is her choice to follow her passions into sin, it is still problematic that her passions are roused without her will, and leaves her in a weakened and confused state. Early modern notions of the passions and their dangerous implications are very real within Adam and Eve's fallen narrative.

Although it is not a new argument that the actors of the fall may problematically lack the free will the poem wants to emphasize, looking at Sin as more than allegory raises some new and interesting questions about free will. The early modern notions of

physiology that were used to discuss experience only further complicate the amount of free will the early modern subject had in a sinful act, which becomes especially problematic for the early modern rape victim. Although this lack of control over one's passions is seen as a product of the fall, the dangerous potential for uncontrollable sin was always already present-even in paradise. Milton may not purposefully construct characters whose sin is beyond their control, but it is interesting that the characters' internal experiences appear unmanageable and problematically dangerous for their soul. It seems to be Milton's point that internal experiences are manageable if one has the will to control them, but it still appears as if the subjects in paradise are dangerously ignorant as to how, especially if their passions are roused by evil. Although Milton attempts to stress culpability and free will, Sin is punished for something done to her. After Sin sins she quickly becomes the allegory we read her as, but her will to initially be so remains questionable. And, once we reconsider the culpability of our allegory, it leads to an examination of the ultimate fault of Adam and Eve.

The early modern body was a permeable space in which the body and the soul were influenced by the other. Outside forces could lead, though not force, the body to sin, and once one sinned, it manifested in the body dirtying the soul, leading to more sin. These conceptions have obvious problematic consequences for the rape victim who is actually forced to sin and was thought to physically change. And, these problematic notions, explored in an epic that is concerned with justifying God's ways, are not fully resolved. Perhaps as Peter Herman argues, "Milton is, in fact, a poet of deep

incertitude.”¹⁵⁹ Although Milton’s intent is to emphasize human responsibility and free will, the nature of Sin’s sin and her punishment only lead one to question the extent of free will the subjects have within the poem. She is damned for the sins of another and is fated to be a concept she does not embody. The implications of my reading of Sin’s character suggest that the epic’s engagement with early modern discourses around rape, culpability, and the Galenic body does not overcome those conflicts, but elides them.

¹⁵⁹ Peter Herman, *Destabilizing Milton* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 5.

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