

insisted he not be given any “nigger blood.” We scoff at this now, but consider how future generations may view prohibitions on blood donation by men who have sex with men, another topic Hill explores at length. Hill offers special insight into blood and otherness when he relates his experience traveling in the Republic of Niger. Drawn there as a young man wanting to know more about his ancestry, Hill became ill enough to require a blood transfusion. Lying in the hospital bed watching the blood drip into his arm might have made him identify even more strongly with his African heritage. Instead, he found he cared little for the identity of the donor and more about the donor’s generosity. Hill’s perspective as a self-identified biracial man, and as someone who has received — and reflected upon receiving — a blood transfusion, seems to give him special licence to explore

the idea of blood and what it may and may not mean.

I’ll admit that I was surprised to find, when I closed the book, that childbirth had not made an appearance. My own practice as a family doctor means that the delivery room is one of the few places where I see the blood of others, so I am surely biased. Although sex plays a leading role throughout the book, and Hill discusses the blood of menstruation and the blood associated with the tearing of the hymen (and even hymen reconstruction surgery), as well as the purported absence of blood in a witch and although he references motherhood on a number of occasions (Hill and his wife have a blended family of five children), childbirth is not discussed. I would venture to put this on a wish list for a second edition of the book, but this omission is the only thing about which I felt a little let

down, as every human life begins with the spilling of blood.

In curating these stories, Hill exercises an expansive licence, using blood as a metaphor for genetics and illness, valour and evil; perhaps blood is his metaphor for the human condition in general. He certainly pushes the boundaries for physician readers, who tend to be a literal bunch, especially when it comes to their medical turf. Those who choose to be more lateral than literal, and to follow Hill on his critical journey through the multiple meanings of blood, will be richly rewarded.

Monica Kidd MD

Assistant professor
Department of Family Medicine
Faculty of Medicine
University of Calgary
Calgary, Alta.

CMAJ 2014. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.131681

POETRY

Ethopoiesis

Girl meets boy, X meets Y
A panoply of not-so-hapless variables combined and reduced
A courtship and then, la petite mort
And her secret collection: a yoke, a mulberry, a sprout, a swelling
A year in the universe only nine months
Convolution — ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny
All the soft machinery building a utopia
For unrolling from stardust to Adam
A new assemblage of indivisible particles not created but born
And borne with the constant threat of growing out of place,
growing big, growing through
And the senseless randomness of error: You; not you.
Crowned by departure from the anti-Parthenon, perfected in tears
Or such is the hope, to be delivered through imperfect origins
Without intercession by chance or by hand or by word
To spend a lifetime avoiding une mort subite
And hope for a good death?
The task of the doctor, as required
To take in the sick
Or bring out the dead.

Daniel James MD MA

Resident, Department of Emergency Medicine
Ottawa Hospital
Ottawa, Ont.

CMAJ 2014. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.131370



Lorenzo Rossi/Hemera/Thinkstock