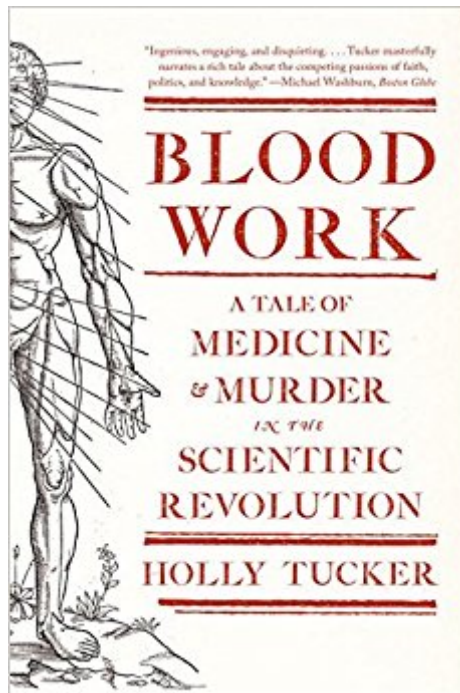


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# Blood Work: A Tale Of Medicine And Murder In The Scientific Revolution



## Synopsis

â œExcellent. . . . Tuckerâ™s chronicle of the world of 17th-century science in London and Paris is fascinating.â •â •The Economist In December 1667, maverick physician Jean Denis transfused calfâ™s blood into one of Parisâ™s most notorious madmen. Days later, the madman was dead and Denis was framed for murder. A riveting exposÃ© of the fierce debates, deadly politics, and cutthroat rivalries behind the first transfusion experiments, *Blood Work* takes us from dissection rooms in palaces to the streets of Paris, providing an unforgettable portrait of an era that wrestled with the same questions about morality and experimentation that haunt medical science today. 33 illustrations

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Tucker, associate professor in Vanderbilt University's Center for Medicine, Health and Society, does a marvelous job of chronicling the 17th-century controversy pitting science against religion and shows how much of the language used then against the new technique of blood transfusion mirrors language used today against stem cell research and cloning. In 1667, building on work done in England, Jean-Baptiste Denis, a self-promoting young Frenchman, transfused lamb's blood into a human. His work angered many, including those who believed that the soul was housed in the blood and transfusion was blasphemous; others who clung to bloodletting as a treatment rather than blood transfusions; and those protecting their own scientific reputations from an unknown upstart. When Denis's second transfused patient died suddenly, Denis was accused of murder. Exploring the

charge, Tucker unearths compelling evidence that the patient was murderedâby a cabal attempting to discredit Denis. The affair halted all experiments in blood transfusion for 150 years. Tucker's sleuthing adds drama to an utterly compelling picture of Europe at the moment when modern science was being shaped. B&w illus. (Mar.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved.  
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â Ingenious, engaging, and disquieting. . . . Tucker masterfully narrates a rich tale about the competing passions of faith, politics, and knowledge.â • - Boston Globeâ Tuckerâ TM's sleuthing adds drama to an utterly compelling picture of Europe at the moment when modern science was being shaped.â • - Publishers Weeklyâ Multilayered and engrossing . . . a riveting story.â • - Seattle Timesâ Smart and addictive.â • - Deborah Blum, author of *The Poisoner's Handbook*

This book is more about the controversy surrounding human blood transfusions than the actual history of transfusions themselves. I think that many readers (including myself) were expecting something else but after reading the epilogue for the book I have a better understanding of why the author was trying to do and why she wrote the book. I think that it would have been better to explain some of that in the beginning of the book so that the reader would have a better understanding of what the author was going for. That being said, this is still an interesting easy read. The author does a good job of making the time period come alive and the back stories explaining the intrigues of 17th century European politics was very well written. If you're looking for a detailed academic study of early work in blood transfusions, you will be disappointed reading this book but if you want to read an engaging story about the general state of medical science in Britain and France in the late 17th century this is a good book to read.

My science-focused book club read this and it was interesting. It was also really, really cringe-inducing for any animal lover. A LOT of the book is about guys taking strays, farm animals and even their own pets and transfusing them crudely, without anaesthesia. (It does a great job of illustrating the dichotomy between the attitude of the time that animals can't really feel or process pain and the refusal by some researchers to use their own companion animals due to the observable trauma - something our present-day scientists also struggle with). The book is pitched as showing the inner workings of the scientific establishment during the Enlightenment but I didn't find that part terribly well done. It sort of wandered...there aren't any good guys and the list of bit players gets confusingly long. While Holly has clearly done her research, the book doesn't answer

some of the questions one would logically ask. For example, it tells us dogs have many more blood types than humans, but doesn't explain why dog transfusions showed positive results in most of the canine transfusion recipients when the centrepiece of the book is the damage done to a human who received incompatible blood. OTOH this is a great distillation of the period and the early history of transfusion research. BTW Holly is extremely responsive to requests for information and interviews. In our case, she not only video conferenced with the book club (only 40 members and we'd already purchased the book) but is coming to the Decatur Book Festival on Labor Day weekend. I would probably give the book itself 3 1/2 stars, but Holly's responsiveness and charm made me bump it up instead of down. With better editing, her next book (and I hope there is one) should be awesome!

The book does a workmanlike job of covering the blood-transfusion controversies and fallouts from the mid-1600s. I did learn many new things on the topic, and would recommend that segment of the book for background information on the subject. The complex interaction between English and French scientists, private vs. government sponsorship, and the poisonous lengths some people went to in forcing their opinions on others are very instructive. There is no dramatic revealing of the murderer in court, but the narrative of the experiments are quite adequate for that. The insights into their concerns about what we would now call genetic engineering are similar to concerns today, though with a nonfactual background. Unfortunately, the author slipped into a highly partisan political commentary at the end of the book, which detracts from the effective history in the remainder of the text.

This book was a good read for medical history, but was not on the same level as other medical histories that I've read. It stalled in a couple of places, and I found that occasionally all the other extraneous information added not related to the story itself, would sometimes be confusing. I had no idea that transfusion was considered back in the 1600's. All it took was one arrogant physician, trying to push the envelope. And if you've been in medical school, you've seen a few of those. In this case, dealing with such an unknown (they did not know about the cell markers in blood at that point which would cause clotting reactions if people were given the wrong blood type). It's too bad that Jean-Baptise Denis couldn't see our use of blood today, and see how well his idea saves lives today. Now to be fair, he wasn't the first to try transfusion. That definitely belongs to the British. But he tried hard, in spite of religious and medical objections, to demonstrate the possibilities of transfusions. It boggles the mind to consider that if transfusions had been possible that far back (with continued research), the lives that could have been saved in all the wars. The research for this

book probably wasn't easily done. Especially if you had to get rare material in French, from the courts and royal records kept almost 500 years ago. Apparently, the author, Tucker, knows French as well as English, so that explains a lot. This is a great book to read if you want to understand how far back medical research goes, and many of the obstacles that are put in the way of those who do research.

Thoroughly engaging read. This is one of the few books I've picked up and read through without putting down. Ms. Tucker weaves an intellectual stimulating tale with rich visuals and quirky characters through the fabric of history in medicine. I highly recommend for those Early Modern era aficionados looking to learn about the practice of medicine and its evolution.

Well-written work about a era in the history of medicine that few people know about. I sure didn't.

I was surprised by this book. I expected a murder mystery. It is not. It is a review about the evolution of blood transfusion and view of medicine on that topic. After I had adjusted my expectations I enjoyed the book for what it was. It was a fascinating description of scientific thought. Some of what we used to believe about how the body works was jaw dropping.

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