

Zeitschrift: SPELL : Swiss papers in English language and literature
Herausgeber: Swiss Association of University Teachers of English
Band: 28 (2013)

Artikel: Diagnosing the body politic : Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part Two
Autor: Richards, Jennifer
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-390805>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 08.07.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Diagnosing the Body Politic: Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part Two*

Jennifer Richards

The language of disease dominates *Henry IV, Part Two*. Several characters, including Falstaff and Henry IV, experience illness and sickness also serves as a presiding metaphor to diagnose both the problems endured by the body politic and the means to cure these. With respect to the latter, the play accords a crucial role to the Lord Chief Justice. He emerges as a true political physician whose commendable and effective remedy for the distemper of faction and self-seeking is to uphold the rule of law. And yet this is not the only valid perspective in the play. As I will argue, there are counter-cures and diagnoses. Shakespeare explores medical discourse in complex ways to remind us why and how political diagnoses and cures are so difficult to achieve. One crucial context for this aspect of the play is Shakespeare's engagement with the way in which earlier Tudor political thinkers – among them Thomas Starkey, Thomas Elyot and William Bullein – explored the different healthy states that could exist, as well as the ills that imperil these and the range of remedies required. Like Elyot and Bullein, Shakespeare explores a wide-ranging set of implications deriving from different politico-medical discourses including an interest in the priority that needs to be accorded to the tongue and the stomach. This paper will trace the consequences of this specific discourse within the play and consider its implications for Shakespeare's understanding of political sickness and its cure.

The language of disease dominates the politics of *The Second Part of King Henry IV* (hereafter, *Henry IV, Part Two*). According to a Shakespeare concordance, there are more references to the words “sick,” “disease”

and “health” in this play than in any other in his canon.¹ This language draws attention to the way in which characters diagnose not only each other, but also the ills of the commonwealth of fifteenth-century England, and prescribe its cure. Medical language is called upon by the Archbishop of York to justify rebellion. “The commonwealth,” he argues, “is sick of their own choice;” the “over-greedy love” of the commons for their king, “hath surfeited” (1. 3. 87-88).² Later in the play he uses the same language to explain why he has rebelled, although he is a man of peace: “we are all diseas’d,” he reflects, “And with our surfeiting, and wanton hours, / Have brought ourselves into a burning fever, / And we must bleed for it” (4. 1. 54-7). He also uses this language to guide the (bad) political decisions he makes, i.e., when he foolishly agrees to disband the rebel army with this misleading simile: “Our peace will, like a broken limb united, / Grow stronger for the breaking” (4. 1.222-3).

Crucially, the metaphor of the sick polity is also called upon by York’s antagonists: the King, to lament the condition of the “body” of his kingdom, and the Earl of Warwick, to anticipate its cure:

King. Have you read o’er the letters that I sent you?

War. We have, my liege.

King. Then you perceive the body of our kingdom

How foul it is, what rank diseases grow,

And with what danger, near the heart of it.

War. It is but as a body yet distemper’d,

Which to his former strength may be restor’d

With good advice and little medicine.

My Lord Northumberland will soon be cool’d. (3.1. 36-44)

Still thinking of his kingdom as a living human body, the King is prompted to predict that under Hal’s profligate rule the polity will remain afflicted, opining “O my poor kingdom, sick with civil blows!” (4.5. 133).

This is the familiar metaphor of the body politic. Perhaps the most obvious point to make about the analogy between the body and the state at this stage in my argument, before I delve any deeper, is that it provides us with a narrative structure of diagnosis and cure that makes sense in this play. But what is the cure for the sick state, and who will apply it: the rebels or the King? In the end, it is the new King, Henry V, his brother John, and the Lord Chief Justice who apply this. And the

¹ <http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/concordance/>, accessed 19 November 2012.

² All references are to the A. R. Humphreys edition, which is based on the 1600 quarto, with additions from the Folio.

cure? Most obviously, it is the execution of the rebels and the upholding of the rule of law. However, the old order, the King's party, needs purging too. This is memorably signified onstage with the public chastisement of Falstaff, whose moral sickness is acknowledged even by his companions. "[H]ow doth the martlemas your master?" Poins asks Bardolph. "In bodily health, sir," he replies, to which Poins responds just as swiftly: "Marry, the immortal part needs a physician, but that moves not him; though that be sick, it dies not" (2.2.96-100).³

This argument, if I were to pursue it, would fit with the relatively recent critical emphasis on the disciplinary uses of medical discourse in social and political commentary. Since the late-1990s, literary critical interest in medical discourse has generally focused on its use to manage and discipline the body-politic. The shift from one medical paradigm to another, from Galenism to Paracelsianism is held responsible by Jonathan Gil Harris for a new conception of the cause of social ills: "infiltration by hostile, foreign bodies" (Harris 14). In contrast, Margaret Healy stresses the haphazard process of this epistemic shift, and attends instead to the way in which medical discourse is used to discipline the self. In the second half of the sixteenth century, she explains, "the English medical regimen entered full square into the arena of social control." For later medical writers health "is increasingly about social and national responsibilities, about collective initiatives and penal sanctions to subdue the 'enemie' within the castle" (Healy, *Fictions* 38; 39-40). Both scholars use the discourse of medicalization to offer sophisticated readings of the cultural work of early modern drama, including plays by Shakespeare and Dekker.

Nonetheless, I will not be pursuing this argument exactly. It is not just because this is an unsatisfying interpretation for many scholars. In one of his Oxford lectures (1909), A.C. Bradley argued that Falstaff's rejection "was meant by Shakespeare to be taken as a catastrophe" (Bradley 253). And while later scholars may not articulate their responses to Falstaff in quite such strongly-worded and personal terms, there is much sympathy for this subversive "carnavalesque" figure.⁴ There is a sense in which Falstaff has much to offer, comically, emotionally and politically.

I won't be pursuing this argument for another reason, though. In the sixteenth century the metaphor of the body politic worked in different

³ For this argument see Hutson. The chastisement of Falstaff, she argues, is central to this imagining of the body politic: it means that his "fantasies of dominating the law" – "the laws of England are at my commandment" – are no longer threatening" (182).

⁴ One of the most subtle readings of Falstaff's carnivalesque role in the play is Poole 1995.

and complicating ways that we have not readily recognized. I want to spend some time explaining how in order to move us away, decisively, from a dialectic of subversion and containment.⁵ I do so not to confirm the rebels' diagnosis of the body politic, but rather to make more of Falstaff's role in this play. I want to explore his tendency to play the physician, and think about what this adds to the play's political analysis.

Falstaff is quick to diagnose other characters, to explain diseases on the grounds that he has read "Galen" (1.2.116), and even to offer medical advice: the king suffers from apoplexy; the Chief Justice is "old" and should "have a reverend care for [his] health" (ll. 98-99); while John of Lancaster suffers from green-sickness (anaemia) and should drink more sweet wine (4.3.91). We may be unlikely to accept these judgements. Often Falstaff's attempts at diagnosis are a delay tactic – always they are self-interested. However, I will suggest that it is through Falstaff's diagnoses that Shakespeare appeals to a different medico-political discourse of the body politic, one which prioritizes the mouth and the stomach over the head. This is not to return to a defence of the carnivalesque body and to celebrate excess over constraint. It is not just the physical stomach along with its literal function that I am referring to. I am also noting that this most corporeal and medically-informed of plays is interested in, and indeed enacts, a process of thoughtful digestion; it is ruminative. In this respect, the presence of Falstaff and the diagnoses he offers provide a point of contrast and comparison that expands our view.

Falstaff's role is not just to provide a point of contrast, however. His diagnoses, flawed though they may well be, insistently remind us of the body, its pleasures and suffering, and the danger of forgetting this in political analysis. In both of these ways, I will argue, Shakespeare's play contributes to a humanist tradition which understands that the healthy body-politic needs governors who are not just sceptical of medico-political diagnosis, but who contribute to the *care* of the bodies of the polis.

One final thought before I go any further: Shakespeare's fascination with the limitations of body-political language and thought has long been noted; but the play that usually attracts this kind of analysis is his Roman history play, *Coriolanus*. Since the 1970s literary scholars have argued convincingly that by the early 1600s "it was becoming increasingly difficult for the Jacobean state to appropriate the human body in order to legitimate the organic inviolability of the existing order" (Riss 53), and, moreover, that this is reflected in *Coriolanus*.⁶ There are differ-

⁵ On the centrality of the *Henry IV* plays to the subversion/containment debate see Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets."

⁶ See also Barkan; Gurr; Hale (1971a; 1971b).

ent ways of understanding how this is worked out, with Arthur Riss arguing this late play explores the tension between literal and ideological “bodies”: Coriolanus fails because he “asserts himself as a private, absolutely enclosed, literal ‘body’ in a society that mandates he embrace an ideology of the body politic” (Riss 54). What my argument suggests, however, is not only that Shakespeare was already thinking through the tension between literal and metaphorical bodies in the late 1590s, when *Henry IV, Part Two* was composed (circa 1596), and reflecting on the redundancy of the metaphor of the “body politic,” but that he understood this kind of critical enquiry had resonance for English historical drama too. He understood that the language of the body politic could be used responsibly to express commonwealth values, not just protect the social order.

Diagnosis and the Body Politic

To begin I will say a little about the metaphor of the body politic. The basic idea is a familiar one: that the state is akin to a human body, with its different parts – head, heart, limbs, hands and feet. Like the healthy human body in which all the parts work well together in harmony, so in the healthy body politic the different social ranks work together without contention. The state might be ruled by the head or heart, depending on which kind of constitution is favoured. A rebellious state, in contrast, is ruled by the belly. This is the gist of the Archbishop of York’s diagnosis of the state of England, with his emphasis on greediness and surfeiting. He joined the warlike rebels, he explains awkwardly to the Earl of Westmoreland, “To diet rank minds sick of happiness” and to “purge th’obstructions which begin to stop / Our very veins of life” (4.1. 64-6).

It is a persuasive and effective metaphor because it helps us to visualize the state as a vital, living entity with different parts that interrelate. But it is also effective because it allows us to imagine that political ills can be “diagnosed,” and also set right or cured. “Medical language,” Margaret Healy writes, “is a powerfully meaningful, persuasive and emotive idiom in which to couch political discourse.” It is powerful because the “prescriptions” of those diagnosing the problems in the body politic “tend to be experienced as ‘natural’ and even indisputable” (Healy, “Curing the ‘frenzy’” 334). We can see what she means with reference to the analogies drawn by a representative theorist of the body politic, the Tudor humanist Thomas Starkey, whose manuscript *Dialogue Between Pole and Lupset* details a conciliar remedy for the various ills that cause a distempered polity. I would like to look more closely at this text and at the work of the doctor and author William Bullein and also the human-

ist Thomas Elyot to broaden our understanding of the period's conception of political diagnosis and cure before making my way back to Shakespeare's play.

Starkey, who was briefly in the service of Thomas Cromwell, composed an imaginary dialogue between two contemporaries, Cardinal Pole and Thomas Lupset, sometime between 1529 and 1532. Pole and Lupset, T. F. Mayer explains, had recently returned to England having secured support from the theologians of the University of Paris in favour of Henry's divorce in 1529-30, and Starkey wanted "Pole to capitalize on that triumph and to lead a reformed nobility back to the head of the commonwealth" (Mayer, introduction to Starkey viii). To make this argument, he has Pole instruct Lupset on the diagnosis and cure of the polity. Starkey knew that Pole and Lupset had "worked on the Aldine edition of the text of Galen in the 1520s" in Pole's household in Padua, and this makes the analogies that he has them draw between the diseased body and the state "particularly appropriate" (Healy, *Fictions* 66). Indeed, as we see below, Pole spells out the value of this analogy:

lyke <as> to physicyons lytyl hyt awaylyth to know the body, complexion therof & most perfayt state, except they also *can* dyscerne & jüge al kynd of syknes & disseassys wych *commynly* destroy the same, so to us now, thys universal & phylosophycal *consyderatyon* of a veray & true *commyn* wele, lytyl schal profyte, & lytyl sschal avayle, except we also truly serch out al *commyn* fautys and general mysordurys, wych as <sykenes &> dyseasys be manifest *impedymētys*. (Starkey, 47)

If you want to reform the commonwealth, Pole is arguing, you need to know first what is wrong with it, just like the physician looking after a sick body. Pole is the physician-cum-counsellor this dialogue sets us up to trust and he identifies various ills of the English commonwealth: under-population, idleness, an attachment to the pursuit of luxury etc. These conditions are likened to specific diseases: dropsy, palsy, frenzy, gout, plague. Thus, Pole compares the neglect of duty and the propensity for gluttony among the so-called lower sort, artisans and ploughmen, the feet and hands of the commonwealth, to gout (58-9). Later he will propose a remedy for this: if officers punished lazy artisans and ploughmen, and if enclosure was prohibited, then "al thyngys" would be "more abundante & <the polytyke body more lyvely &> quyke" and "thys goute bothe in the fete & handys schold be much <therby> easyd" (Starkey 113-4).

It is not hard to suppose that this analogy is reassuring and effective: this is the illness, Starkey says, now let me give you the cure. And yet, even those without the advantage of reading David Wootton's *Bad Medi-*

cine were aware that Renaissance physic was far from effective, and this surely had implications for its use as an analogy within political commentary (Wootton 1-26). There is a disparity between Starkey's confidence with reference to the diagnosis and cure of the commonwealth and the hit and miss reality of medical experience in the sixteenth century – in most cases, largely miss. In her diary Lady Margaret Hoby, who suffered from a range of unidentified illnesses, notes the death of her physician, Dr Brewer, who poisoned himself by self-ministering “a medeson . . . to Cause him to sleep.” Hoby expresses regret, but not surprise. She thanks God for “Causinge” her physician “to haue great Care of ministringe vnto me, and so litle for his owne saftie,” but she continues to take the “phisecke,” the pointless potions, clisters and blood-letting, prescribed by her new physician, though it is clear from her diary that these often make her ill: “After I was awake,” she records, “Mr lister Came with phisecke whiche I tooke presently and lay after a whill, which Continewed me ill all most all the day that I omitted my ordenarie exercises of praier” (Hoby 13, 75).

Margaret Hoby's transactions with the medical profession are far from sceptical. But scepticism – or, at the very least, cautiousness – is encouraged by most vernacular medical writers, and most inventively and far-reachingly by the physician William Bullein in his last health book: *A Dialogue bothe pleasaunte and pietifull, wherein is a goodly regimete against the fever Pestilence with a consolacion and comfort against death* (1564). This is a remarkable text: a series of dialogues with a cast of characters in what appears to be a five-act drama. These characters represent various social types and professions – a citizen and his wife, a servant, a doctor, an apothecary, a lawyer, a divine – and they discuss a variety of “health” issues, especially the plague, but also how to make money, and most prominently of all, the state of the commonwealth.

Given this dialogue's preoccupation with the commonwealth and its strong religious narrative we might suppose that it represents Bullein's turning away from medicine. And in many ways this dialogue is concerned with the spiritual health of the nation and its citizens. In the dramatic conclusion to the dialogue the soul of the dying Civis is saved because he seeks help from a theologian rather than a physician. Similarly, in a letter appended to this book, the author Bullein refuses to treat a friend, Francis Barlow, who is stricken with the plague: “If the time had not been somoche spent, and the venime so daungerous, and the parties so weake and feble, I woulde have caused you to have been letten blood and geven you pilles *contra pestem* [against the plague].” Instead he gives him a different cordial, a prayer: “Thus God give you the croune of life, which Jesus Christ without our deservings, hath pur-

chased for us in his precious blood. His name bee praised. Amen" (Bullein N3^{r-v}).

Nonetheless, despite Bullein's repeated attack on the worldliness of characters who neglect the health of their souls, he has still written a medical book.⁷ Bullein is arguing that there is a time for medicine and the art of the physician, which are "not againste Gods worde" (A4^r); however, he also recognizes that the citizen needs a dose of medical scepticism to stay healthy in body and soul.

Thus, although the end of *A Dialogue . . . against the fever Pestilence* is to provide spiritual counsel, at its heart is a dialogue between a patient, Antonius, and his physician, Medicus, in which good advice is given even as we are encouraged to read what is said with some suspicion. Antonius is consulting Medicus about his symptoms and treatment; the dialogue – or table talk – is part of that treatment because it involves keeping Antonius awake (D2^v). Medicus answers questions posed to him by Antonius. These questions are both philosophical – e.g. "is there a soule in manne?" – and medical. Medicus explains the causes of pestilence according to Hippocrates and Galen (D7^{r-v}), and advises on its remedies (E2^r). Antonius should avoid wine, potage, milk, unripe fruits, hot spices, honey, anger and perturbations of the mind (E2^r). All of his advice is unremarkable. Similarly Medicus's moral advice is conventional enough. "Extreames are ever hurtfull," he declares at one point. In fact, it is recognized that this is a good theme for him to hit on since it is suspected that Antonius's "greate surfeites in banquetynge" (C4^r) have made him susceptible to the plague. When Antonius asks how one should remedy this, Medicus's advice is familiar: "Nothyng is better then a meane, called temperaunce, which is governed by prudence" (D6^r).

Medicus is giving conventional advice. Regimens reiterate the importance of measure and moderation to good health, and Bullein's doctor is no different. However, it becomes clear that something else is needed, that it is not enough simply to reiterate this (or any other) prescription. Medicus may recommend the virtue of temperance, but he is no representative of it. Rather, he is a corrupt physician who is out for gain. Antonius, his patient, is plague-stricken and dying. At this point Medicus should be encouraging him to save his soul, but instead he uses the promise of physic to give him false hope. So corrupted is he that when Antonius recounts a nightmare which anticipates the horrors of hell that await him (C7^v-8^r) – a sign, the print marginalium tells us, that he has a "troubled conscience" (C8^r) – he discourages further reflection because he knows that this would lose him money. He discourages this by wrongly diagnosing Antonius. Medicus advises that Antonius's night-

⁷ On the dual function of this work see especially Maslen.

mare is caused by an "aboundaunce of choler," and he appoints a time to apply a clister and arranges for a surgeon to let his blood (C8^v-D1^r). This diagnosis and cure advantages one interlocutor only, Medicus.

All of Bullein's earlier print-publications were rather more straightforward medical advice books, including *The Government of Health* (1558), a simple question and answer dialogue between a student/patient, John, and his teacher, a physician called Humphrey. *A Dialogue . . . against the fever Pestilence* mimics this form, but it does much more: it does not just give advice; it also makes the difficulty of interpreting it part of the experience of reading. In fact, Bullein foregrounds the problem of interpretation in different ways throughout the dialogue. He may present us with fables or emblems that need interpreting, and share with us the characters' conflicting attempts to do this, for example, when Medicus and the apothecary Crispine "read" the emblematic monuments in Antonius's garden. The first of these represents a tiger, with a child in his arms whom he threatens to kill; the child has a gold crown on his head and a globe in his left hand, "figuring the whole worlde." Medicus offers one interpretation, revealing his bias: "This gentleman came of a greate house, this is the crest of his armes, for he descended of the most auncient Romaines I warrant you, he is no upstart, assure your self." In contrast, Crispine reads it more convincingly thus: "I had thought it had rather signified the condicions of a cruell tirant, or some bloodie conquerour" (B5^r). At other times, Bullein shows us the characters understanding but failing to apply moral *sententiae* to their own situation. "For *Tempura labuntur*, is to saie: by little and little, time dooe slipe awaie," Medicus helpfully offers, translating the Latin tag; however, he takes no heed of its meaning, rushing on: "I will heare the reste of the matter at leasure. What is it a clocke?" (C1^v). Finally, Bullein shows us characters being taken in by mendacious speakers, like Mendax, who tells absurdly fabulous tales of "Terra Florida." The scepticism Bullein wants the reader to experience is prompted also by ironic print marginalia like "No lye, no lye" (Withington 469; Bullein K1^r).

None of this is to make us flatly sceptical of the benefits of medicine; but it does reveal the limitations of the art and its practice. *A Dialogue . . . against the fever Pestilence*, I noted above, is concerned in the end with the spiritual health of the body politic and its citizens, like Civis. It presents a far-reaching attack on the worldliness of characters like Antonius whose short-sightedness is represented by his belief that he can pay Medicus to make him better. But Bullein, a practising physician, does not neglect the body, and he is not, in the end, dismissive of the desire to heal. The last word on this might be given, surprisingly, to Medicus when he finally admits that Antonius is past cure. When Crispine concludes "Then I perceiue your talke was unprofitable," he

quickly responds, echoing Bullein in the letter to Francis Barlow appended to the dialogue, "Not unprofitable, if the Phisicion come in the beginning or augmenting of the sicknesse" (F5^v).

In this culture, when there was still no body of accepted medical lore and certainly no "medical science," what kind of counsel might one hope for from a physician? There is a long tradition of sceptical engagement with medical knowledge, represented in health books like Bullein's. But the purpose of this essay is not to develop this detail, but rather to observe it and to think through what such scepticism meant for the medical metaphors that political commentators, among them Shakespeare, drew on.

To put this another way: given this distrust of the physician and his art, how useful was the medical analogy for political thinking? Bullein's distrust prompts us to think about the analogy of the body politic differently to Starkey. In Starkey, the physician provides a rhetorically compelling match for the counsellor who understands and promises to cure the ills of the commonwealth. His prescriptions seem "indisputable." In Bullein's dialogue, in contrast, the diagnoses and cures offered *are* disputable. The patient would do best to think hard about the advice he is given. Antonius never manages this, but in the main plot the citizen Civis does. To be sure, he makes interpretative mistakes as he journeys away from the plague with his wife and servant. But for much of the dialogue we see him engaged in reflective conversation; in the end he makes the right decisions.

A source for this different model of the healthy body politic "in-dialogue" is provided by another of Thomas Cromwell's commonwealth-men, Thomas Elyot. Like the physician Bullein twenty years later, but unlike his contemporary Starkey, Elyot is preoccupied with the *physical* body, and this informs his political thinking in interesting ways. Elyot admits in his letters to suffering several bouts of ill-health in the 1530s (Wilson 16, n. 10.); he also explains in the preface to his popular vernacular regimen, *Castel of Helth* (1539), that he compiled this work on hearing that his friend and patron, Sir Thomas Cromwell, was ill. This preoccupation carries over to his political writing too. Elyot's *The Image of Governance* (1541) presents the acts and sentences of the governor, Aurelius Alexander, "sometyme Emperour of Rome" (Elyot, *Image* A1^r), titled Severus because he is a harsh punisher of men's offences. He is compared to a sharp physician who purges the state of its corrupt officers on his accession. However, he is also a physician in other ways. Severus "is well read in Galenic medicine," and he uses this knowledge to the advantage of his citizens, providing "open spaces for health-giving exercise" and building "free hospitals" (Elyot, *Image* K3^v-M1^r).

Crucially, Severus's understanding of the source of well-being is not just corporeal. He also understands that the body "requires intellectual as well as physical sustenance" (Shrank 164-5). He builds libraries as well as gymnasia so that his counsellors and citizens have the opportunity to exercise their minds, and he creates public places "where civile controversies" can be "herde and judged" (Elyot, *Image* K4^r). It is not hard to see how this informs Elyot's conception of the body politic. In the commonwealth Elyot depicts, Severus makes sure that his counsellors have time to read so that they can gather "sentences." His libraries have spaces for disputation and declamation ("consultation") (Elyot, *Image* L2^{r-v}), whereby speakers select from "some auncient story some question concernyng martiall or civile polycie," "commendyng or discommendyng it," and "declare their opinyons and sentences" (Elyot, *Image*, L2^v). This is important because it increases the "wytte and prouysion of counsaylours" (Elyot, *Image* L2^v). A healthy body politic, Elyot explains, has many officers not just a single ruler. No single man can digest all the different "meates" – the causes to be discussed – to sustain the body politic. He explains: "it fareth with hym as it dothe with a mans stomacke, for the stomacke receyueth meates, dyuers in qualities and effectes, which altogither can not be by one mans Nature duly concocte and digested" (Elyot, *Image* I1^v-I2^r). This is a different way of explaining the common *sententia*: as many heads as many wits. Simply, without counsellors the king's "wytte" and nature will be overwhelmed.

This is a conception of the functioning body politic that is grounded in a particular engagement with the material body and its care, but which also makes wit – judgement – integral to this. Elyot had no formal medical education. He tells us in the preface to the 1541 edition that before he was twenty years old, "a worshipfull physician," probably Thomas Linacre, read to him from the works of Galen, Johannicius and Hippocrates, and that he studied many other authorities including Avicenna, Celsus and Pliny (Elyot, *Castle* A4^r). This declared autodidacticism shapes his view of physicians. In the long sub-title of his regimen, *Castel of Helthe*, Elyot makes clear his distrust. His book promises information "whereby every man may knowe the state of his owne body, and preservation of healthe, and how to instruct well his physition in his sicknes, that he be not deceived." And while in the preface he defends the "science of physicke" (Elyot, *Castle* A2^v), he also alerts the reader to errors, explaining cheekily that he wrote this book for the "commodity" of physicians, so that "the uncertayne tokens of urynes and other excrementes should not deceyve them, but that by the true information of the sycke man, by me instructed, they mought be the more sure to prepare medicines convenient for the disseasis" (Elyot, *Castle* A4^r).

So to summarize, before I turn back to Shakespeare: I have been arguing in favour of a different model of the body politic, the health of which is best protected by the self-reliant, critically-engaged, even sceptical and well-informed citizen, not the diagnosing physician. In the work of Elyot and Bullein I have traced a different engagement with medical discourse, one that is rooted in a recognition of the vicissitudes of bodily experience and the uncertainty of medical knowledge. It is with this tradition in mind that I return to Shakespeare's scepticism of medico-political diagnosis in *Henry IV, Part Two*. I suggest that the sceptical turning over of advice encouraged in this medical tradition is absorbed by *Henry IV, Part Two* and becomes integral to its reflection on political experience – and, furthermore, to the habits of mind it wishes to inculcate in its auditor. In the following sections I will explore, firstly, how Shakespeare makes us sceptical of political diagnosis; and secondly, why we might prefer Falstaff's flawed attempts at corporeal diagnosis instead.

Rebellious Diagnosis

Shakespeare was well acquainted with the tribulations of the medical profession. After all, his daughter Susanna married a physician, John Hall. In Hall's casebook, his record of medical success stories, we find one treatment he prescribed for Susanna's ill digestion or colic. Hall began by trying several purgatives, but these compounds produced merely two stools and no abatement of the pain. Eventually, he "appointed to inject a Pint of Sack made hot." This seems to have done the trick. "This presently brought forth a great deal of Wind," he writes cheerily, "and freed her from all Pain" (Hall 34).

This is an example of successful diagnosis and eventual cure, after some trial and error. But whatever Shakespeare thought of his son-in-law and his professional skills he could not, as an early modern man, have escaped the vagaries of contemporary health care. Even a cursory glance through the medical casebooks of the period discloses some of the weird, wonderful and entirely pointless remedies, including this "speciall medicine for the Gout":

Take a young whelpe, in the month of May, & strip him out of skin, & dresse him cleane, then take a quantity of water froges, & choppe them small, & put them in his bellie when the guttes be out, & sew up his belly, then rost him, & take the dripping in an Iron vessell, & when it is cold, put it in a glasse, and therewithal anoint the disease, & yow shall be whole (by Godes grace). (*Anon.*, English medical recipe book, c. 1635, fol. 175r.)

Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part Two* is manifestly concerned with the abiding problem of diagnosis and remedy as a way of reflecting on political issues. However, it is equally interested in *misdiagnosis* and this is equally integral to its method. To begin with, the characters of *Henry IV, Part Two* are always analyzing each other's constitution, and usually getting it wrong. The hostess mis-describes Falstaff's hot and dry or choleric nature as "rheumatick as two dry toasts" (2. 4. 56). We know that Falstaff is ill, but the problem remains undiagnosed. At the start of Act I, scene 2 he asks "what says the doctor to my water?" His Page responds thus: "He said, sir, the water itself was a good healthy water; but, for the party that owed it, he might have moe diseases than he knew for" (1.2. 1-4). We never find out what is wrong, and Falstaff himself is uncertain. "A pox of this gout! or a gout of this pox!" (1.2. 244-5), he declares at the end of this scene. Moreover, he supposes his illness "incurable," like the disease he describes as "consumption of the purse" (1.2. 237, 239). Also undiagnosed and untreatable is the spurious illness of the Earl of Northumberland who "Lies crafty-sick" (Induction, l. 37).

Given how difficult it is to diagnose diseases, we might be sceptical of confident attempts to do just this, especially when an ulterior motive is suspected. In Act I, scene 2, Falstaff and the Chief Justice are discussing the King's illness. In fact, Falstaff is trying to distract Justice from his misdemeanours:

Fal. And I hear, moreover, his Highness is fallen into this same whoreson apoplexy.

Ch. Just. Well, God mend him! I pray you let me speak with you.

Fal. This apoplexy, as I take it, is a kind of lethargy, and't please your lordship, a kind of sleeping in the blood, a whoreson tingling.

Ch. Just. What tell you me of it? Be it as it is.

Fal. It hath its original from much grief, from study, and perturbation of the brain; I have read the cause of his effects in Galen, it is a kind of deafness.

Ch. Just. I think you are fallen into the disease, for you hear not what I say to you.

Fal. Very well, my lord. Rather, and't please you, it is the disease of not listening, the malady of not marking, that I am troubled withal. (1.2. 106-21)

Sickness becomes Falstaff's excuse for not attending to the Chief Justice who wants to speak with him about the Gad's Hill robbery; it gilds his instruction to his page: "Boy, tell him I am deaf" (l. 66). The Chief Justice puts it more plainly and accurately. When the page advises "You must speak louder, my master is deaf," he responds bluntly: "I am sure he is, to the hearing of anything good" (ll. 67-8).

Of course, scenes like this one provide a parallel to and commentary upon the conduct of the rebel nobility in the play. As all the characters

acknowledge, the body politic is also sick. However, diagnosing the causes of this with any degree of exactitude is extremely difficult. For instance, the rebels are quick to medicalize the commonwealth, though this is rarely helpful. They debate whether all is lost, and whether another uprising against the king has any chance of success. “[I]t never yet did hurt,” says Lord Hastings, “To lay down likelihoods and forms of hope” (1.3.34-5), to which Lord Bardolph notes that hope is not enough; without a careful plan, hope becomes despair:

. . . When we mean to build,
We first survey the plot, then draw the model,
And when we see the figure of the house,
Then must we rate the cost of the erection,
Which if we find outweighs ability,
What do we then but draw anew the model
In fewer offices, or at the least desist
To build at all? Much more, in this great work –
Which is almost to pluck a kingdom down
And set another up – should we survey
The plot of situation and the model,
Consent upon a sure foundation,
Question surveyors, know our own estate. . . . (1.3. 41-53)

This is good advice, but it is not taken. Hastings immediately replaces the building metaphor, reverting to the more emotive language resonant of the body-politic:

Hast. Grant that our hopes, yet likely of fair birth,
Should be still-born, and that we now possess’d
The utmost man of expectation,
I think we are a body strong enough,
Even as we are, to equal with the King. (1.3. 63-7)

The argument that “we are a body strong enough” does not sound much like planning! This theme is then picked up by the Archbishop, who mixes the metaphors, when he tries to explain why the commonwealth of Henry IV is failing:

The commonwealth is sick of their own choice;
Their over-greedy love hath surfeited.
An habitation giddy and unsure
Hath he that buildeth on the vulgar heart. (1.3. 87-90)

Bardolph's suggestion that the rebels need a plan is undeveloped; instead, attention shifts to the weakness of the commonwealth, built "on the vulgar heart." I note that Lord Bardolph plays no further part in the scene, apart from asking one practical question about the enemy forces: "Who is it like should lead his forces hither?" (1.3.81). After this he is silent. In fact, we don't hear from or about him again until Act IV, scene 4: "The Earl of Northumberland, and the Lord Bardolph, /With a great power of English and of Scots, /Are by the shrieve of Yorkshire overthrown" (4. 4.97-99).

Healy argues that the "prescriptions" of those diagnosing the problems in the body politic "tend to be experienced as 'natural' even indisputable." This is an apt description of what is happening in this scene. We move from Bardolph's invitation to the rebels to design the foundations of a new commonwealth to the easy diagnosis of the commonwealth as sick, with no further thought. So reassuring is the metaphor that the Archbishop of York returns to it in Act IV, scenes 1 and 2, before the rebels are betrayed and sent for execution by Hal's brother, the Duke of Lancaster; and again the same problems surface. "[W]e are all diseas'd," he declares, "And with our surfeiting, and wanton hours, /Have brought ourselves into a burning fever, /And we must bleed for it." Yet York seems uncertain of his own role in the curative process of rebellion. "I take not on me here as a physician," he says, "Nor do I as an enemy to peace," but "To diet rank minds sick of happiness, /And purge th'obstructions which begin to stop /Our very veins of life" (4.1.54-66). Is he a physician, or not? Is rebellion medicinal, or not? It is also unclear what is the cause of the political illness; really, what does "surfeiting" in this particular diagnosis actually represent? Does it represent the moral laxity of princely government, represented by Hal and most egregiously, Falstaff? It seems not. When pressed, the Archbishop explains the source of the rebels' discontent thus: that the ringleaders have been denied access to the king. Yet there is no evidence to warrant this either.

In short, the rebels' attempts at diagnosis are confusing. It is obvious that something is seriously wrong: sickness is embodied on stage in the figures of Falstaff, the King and other characters, and this is represented too in the play's social divisions. But we never get to the root of the problem. The rebels certainly struggle to diagnose their world and indeed, from a different perspective – Henry IV's – they are the disease itself.

In the light of this, the simplicity of the play's end may come as a relief. I don't mean just the execution of the rebels, although that is a resolution of sorts, but the banishment of Falstaff, who is both with and outwith the King's party. The sickness of the Lancastrians is invested in

this body and with his purgation we may assume this has been cured. Indeed, his cure – his bringing to order – has been anticipated from the start when the Chief Justice tells him: “I care not if I do become your physician” (1.2.123-4). Only it is Hal, of course, who finally and brutally diagnoses Falstaff: “I have long dreamt of such a kind of man,” he says to his erstwhile companion, “So surfeit-swell’d, so old, and so profane. . . . / Leave gormandizing; know the grave doth gape / For thee thrice wider than for other men” (5.5. 49-54). Yet, notoriously, the adequacy, let alone the equity of this curative measure is equally symptomatic of the play’s complex and equivocal approach to the issue of political diagnosis and remedy. Quite simply, it is not satisfactory in a play that encourages us to think sceptically about medico-political diagnosis.

There are many problems with the analogy of the body politic in *Henry IV, Part Two*. For instance, it does not help the rebel aristocrats to understand what is wrong with the commonwealth and so “cure” it. In fact, we might say that the analogy exacerbates the problem. It makes them overly confident of their analysis and proposed prescriptions, while also serving to conceal from them their self-interest. Our conclusion might be simply that we need to find a different analogy to study the condition of the polis, perhaps the architectural metaphor invoked by Lord Bardolph. And yet a different use of the body politic analogy is suggested by the very flawed Falstaff; I suggest we might want to take note. Without Falstaff and his misuse of Galen early in the play (1.2), we would not have our prompt to think about the way in which characters misdiagnose social ills and we would have no alternative way of seeing and thinking about what we hear. More to the point, we would also miss what *should* be central to political thinking: as Thomas Elyot suggested, the care of the bodies of the citizens who make up the commonwealth.

Falstaff's diagnosis

“Shakespeare’s history plays,” writes Dermot Cavanagh, “have long been understood as dramas which create an influential form of national myth.” One aspect of this, undoubtedly, is the commemoration of the “lives (and deaths) of great men” (Cavanagh 38-9). However, there is another aspect to the Shakespearean history play that counters such memorialization, and this too needs to be noted: an awareness of the costs of political unrest and of war especially. In *Henry V*, for example, the celebration of the English/British nation and its king is painfully countered at moments that recognize the suffering of the fallen in battle: “All those Legges, and Armes, and Heads, chopt off” (Cavanagh, 41; 44, citing Hinman’s *The Life of Henry the Fifth*, l. 198).

There are moments, too, in *Henry IV, Part Two*, when attention is drawn to the impact of war on the lives of ordinary men and women. It is not clear what is more unsettling about Act III, scene 2: the evidence of the corruption of Bardolph and Falstaff, who will free from the press-gang those who have the means to bribe them, or Falstaff's callous wit.

Fal. Is thy name Mouldy?

Moul. Yea, and't please you.

Fal. 'Tis the more time thou wert used.

Shal. Ha, ha, ha! most excellent, i' faith, things that are mouldy lack use: very singular good, in faith, well said, Sir John, very well said.

Fal. Prick him.

Moul. I was pricked well enough before, and you could have let me alone. My old dame will be undone now for one to do her husbandry and her drudgery. You need not to have pricked me, there are other men fitter to go out than I.

Fal. Go to; peace, Mouldy; you shall go, Mouldy; it is time you were spent.

Moul. Spent?

Shal. Peace, fellow, peace; stand aside. (3.2. 104-119)

Mouldy's questioning of Falstaff's throwaway remark is left unanswered.

This is not one of Falstaff's finer moments and it provides another reason why he needs to be purged at the end of the play. Yet, there is also reason to think again about the significance of this scene. To be sure, this scene represents Falstaff's culpability. His moral bankruptcy is contrasted sharply with Feeble's resigned sense of duty to King and country. But, at the same time, this scene comments on the war-mongering aristocracy on both sides and their lack of care for the bodies of the commonwealth: a strange fact given *their* medicalization of the play's political discourse.

There is a connection between the sick bodies on stage and the health of the body politic. Sometimes the connection is made explicitly. On occasion, for example, illness makes the king unable to rule properly. Henry IV's counsellor-cum-physician, the Earl of Warwick, packs him off to bed at the end of Act II, scene 2 with the advice: "Please it your Grace /To go to bed: upon my soul, my lord, /The powers that you already have sent forth /Shall bring this prize in very easily" (3.1. 98-101). At other times, his health is directly affected by the state of the polity. We are told repeatedly that the King is "Exceeding ill" (4. 5. 11), and it becomes clear that his condition is exacerbated by bad political

news. For example, his health deteriorates further when he hears that Hal is still consorting with his companions: "This part of his conjoins with my disease," he complains, "And helps to end me" (4.5. 64-5).

Yet, more often than not, the characters have to be reminded that bodies are mortal. For example, at the very start of the play, Morton needs to remind the battle-shy Northumberland, who is grieving the loss of his son Hotspur in battle, that he should have known that he was not invincible: "You were advis'd his flesh was capable /Of wounds and scars" (1.1. 172-3). Or they need to be reminded of the severity of the prescriptions proposed. When York prescribes bleeding to cure the polity's sickness, he is speaking in the abstract terms of Starkey's Cardinal Pole, but we know he means that blood must really be spilt. Similarly, Warwick may reassure the King that the commonwealth:

... is but as a body yet distemper'd,
Which to his former strength may be restor'd
With good advice and little medicine.
My Lord Northumberland will soon be cool'd. (3.1. 41-4)

However, we know very well that the "little medicine" that will cool Northumberland and the other rebels will be their execution. We might be tempted momentarily to think that Warwick's "little medicine" means something else: the promise that the rebels' terms will be met, thereby avoiding bloodshed. In Act IV, scene 2, the cure seems to be going in this direction at the point at which Lancaster promises redress: the rebels disband their army and the two sides drink to each other's health. But this moment of resolution is short-lived. The play teeters between the possibility of an irenic cure, on the one hand, and on the other, the application of the solution that is actually intended, the execution of the rebels on the charge of high treason. It is the rebel Mowbray who has a premonition of this and York who, cup in hand, foolishly reassures him:

Mowb. You wish me health in very happy season,
For I am on the sudden something ill.
Arch. Against ill chances men are ever merry,
But heaviness foreruns the good event. (4.2.79-82)

All of this death and destruction does not pass without comment. However, it is Galen-reading Falstaff that we have to thank for this. I would like to end with a last example that represents one of the few astute, albeit flawed moments of medico-political diagnosis in the play: Fal-

staff's witty diagnosis, in Act IV, scene 3, of the Duke of Lancaster's coldness, which he attributes to greensickness or anaemia.

This short scene includes Falstaff's encounter first with the rebel knight Sir John Coleville, and then with the Duke of Lancaster. Coleville, who is fleeing the battle scene, yields quickly to Falstaff, recognizing his captor, Falstaff tells us, from the size of his belly: "I have a whole school of tongues in this belly of mine, and not a tongue of them speaks any other word but my name" (4.3. 18-19). In the second encounter, Coleville is handed over to Lancaster, and this concludes his brief appearance on stage. Before he is sent for "present execution" (l. 72), however, Coleville offers this sharp reflection on the previous scene when the rebel noblemen are deceived into giving themselves up, and a last stand of defiance: "I am, my lord, but as my betters are / That led me hither. Had they been rul'd by me, / You should have won them dearer than you have" (4.3. 63-5). This scene is memorable because it offers different kinds of political commentary on what we have already heard. Coleville is one kind of commentator, Lancaster another. The latter clearly sees through Falstaff's "tardy tricks" (l. 28) and grandiose waffle, and points us towards the play's conclusion: the chastening of this corruptor of the prince. But the last word is given, crucially, to Falstaff who articulates and analyzes the discomfort that Lancaster's cold, calculating manner surely invokes in the audience. That is, Lancaster is diagnosed by Falstaff. His diagnosis is both corporeal and political: Falstaff's commentary suggests that the body politic will not be well served by this unhealthy governor. The cause of this duke's illness is not surfeit, but abstinence, and its cure, more "sack."

The diagnosis and cure are typically irreverent, self-interested, in other words "Falstaffian," but in this one example we see the value and force of medico-political analysis: what it *can* tell us about what is lacking from this body politic: "excellent wit" and a warmth that leads all "the vital commoners" of the body/politic to "muster" behind him (100; 108-109). It is through Falstaff's alternative perspective that the concerns so pervasive in the tradition of medico-political thinking that I have been tracing – an awareness of the problem of diagnosis *and* of the bodies of the commonwealth – are made an integral part of our experience of this play.

References

Primary Sources

Anon. English medical recipe book, c. 1635. Wellcome Institute Western MS 809.

Bullein, William. *A Dialogue bothe pleasaunte and pietifull, wherein is a goodly regimemente against the fever Pestilence with a consolation and comfort against death*. London, 1564.

Elyot, Thomas. *The Castel of Helthe*. London, 1541.

———. *The Image of Governance Compiled of the Actes and Sentences notable, of the moste noble Emperour Alexander Seuerus*. London, 1541.

———. *The Letters of Thomas Elyot, Studies in Philology*. Ed. K. J. Wilson. 73.5, 1976.

Hall, John. *John Hall and his Patients: The Medical Practice of Shakespeare's Son-in-Law*. Ed. Joan Lane; medical commentary by Melvin Earles. Stratford: The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 1996, rpt. 2001.

Hoby, Lady Margaret. *The Private Life of an Elizabethan Lady: The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby 1599-1605*. Ed. Joanna Moody. Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998.

Shakespeare, William. *The Second Part of King Henry IV*. Ed. A. R. Humphreys. London: Methuen, 1981.

———. *The Life of Henry the Fift*, facsimile edition of *The First Folio of Shakespeare*. Ed. Charlton Hinman. New York: Norton, 1968; reissued 1999.

Starkey, Thomas. *A Dialogue between Pole and Lupset*. Ed. T. F. Mayer. London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1989.

Secondary Sources

Barkan, Leonard. *Nature's Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the World*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975.

Bradley, A. C. "The Rejection of Falstaff." *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*. London: Macmillan and Co.: 1934. 247-73

Cavanagh, Dermot. "History, Mourning and Memory in *Henry V*." *Shakespeare's Histories and Counter-Histories*. Ed. Dermot Cavanagh, Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Stephen Longstaff. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006. 32-48.

Greenblatt, Stephen. "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion." *Glyph 8: Johns Hopkins Textual Studies*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981, 40-61.

Gurr, Andrew. "Coriolanus and the Body Politic." *Shakespeare Survey*, 28 (1975): 63-9.

- Hale, David George. *The Body Politic: A Political Metaphor in English Renaissance Literature*. The Hague: Mouton, 1971a.
- . "Coriolanus: The Death of a Political Metaphor." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 23 (1971b): 197-202.
- Harris, Jonathan Gil. *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Healy, Margaret. *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England: Bodies, Plague and Politics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001.
- . "Curing the 'Frenzy': Humanism, Medical Idiom and "Crises" of Counsel in Sixteenth-Century England." *Textual Practice*. 18.3 (2004), 333-50.
- Hutson, Lorna. "Not the King's Two Bodies: Reading the Body Politic in Shakespeare's 1 and 2 *Henry IV* plays." *Rhetoric and Law in Early Modern Europe*. Ed. Victoria Kahn and Lorna Hutson. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001, 166-98.
- Maslen, R. W. "The Healing Dialogues of Doctor Bullein." *The Yearbook of English Studies*. 38.1/2 (2008), 119-135.
- Mayer, Thomas F. *Thomas Starkey and The Commonweal: Humanist Politics and Religion in the Reign of Henry VIII*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Poole, Kristen. "Saints alive! Falstaff, Martin Marprelate, and the staging of Puritanism." *Shakespeare Quarterly*. 46 (1995), 47-75.
- Riss, Arthur. "The Belly Politic: *Coriolanus* and the Revolt of Language." *English Literary History*. 59 (1992), 53-75.
- Shrank, Cathy. "Sir Thomas Elyot and the Bonds of Community." *The Oxford Handbook to Tudor Literature*. Ed. Mike Mincombe and Cathy Shrank. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 154-69.
- Withington, Phil. "'For this is true or els I do lye': Thomas Smith, William Bullein, and Mid-Tudor Dialogue." *The Oxford Handbook to Tudor Literature*. Ed. Mike Mincombe and Cathy Shrank. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 455-71.
- Wootton, David. *Bad Medicine: Doctors Doing Harm Since Hippocrates*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

