Gender and the King’s Two Bodies: Interpreting Female Characters in Select Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama

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GENDER AND THE KING’S TWO BODIES:
INTERPRETING FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SELECT ELIZABETHAN AND
JACOBEAN DRAMA

By

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Gender and the King's Two Bodies: Interpreting Female Characters in Select Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama
written by Hadley Kamminga-Peck
has been approved for the Department of Theatre & Dance

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the forms meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
Kamminga-Peck, Hadley (Ph.D., Theatre & Dance)

Gender and the King’s Two Bodies:
Interpreting Female Characters in Select Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Oliver Gerland

The theory of the king’s two bodies was a mid-16th century political theory articulated in the Inns of Court to help understand and define the role of the monarch in England. The theory divides the reigning monarch into two entities: a body natural (corporeal, fallible, mortal, and imperfect) and a body politic (spiritual, infallible, immortal, and perfect). The body politic, which is the same body politic for every monarch, renders the body natural perfect, so that any defect created by a king’s age or a queen’s gender did not affect his or her reign. While the theory has been applied to Elizabethan history plays like Richard II, this dissertation identifies further implications of the theory, given its formulation under Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth. In looking at gender roles in Elizabethan England and their interpretation on the public stage, this theory permitted portrayals of women beyond the ideal, mythical Elizabethan woman. The theory highlights a particular gender fluidity and identity established in Elizabethan England that has been somewhat ignored in analysis of drama. This dissertation aims to investigate the ramifications of the theory beyond the limits of the monarchy. By identifying traditional roles of women – queens, ladies, wives, mothers, daughters, widows, servants – and then investigating their portrayal in histories and tragedies including Shakespeare’s Henry VI tetralogy, Webster’s Duchess of Malfi, the anonymously written Arden of Faversham, and Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, it becomes clear how Elizabeth’s use of this theory opened the pathway to a more diverse portrayal of women and gender on the stage.
To my parents,

whose love and support knows no bounds
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INTRODUCTION

“The king is dead. Long live the King!”

The statement above has been used for centuries to symbolize the transfer of power between monarchs. The words informally recognize as crowned the next king even as the previous king dies, preventing any gap between reigns and ensuring the continuity of rule. One reign ends as the next begins. The phrase is found in multiple languages and cultures, and has made its way into popular culture through song lyrics, movies, television, and the news. It was altered to “The king is dead, long live the queen!” in headlines and articles when Queen Elizabeth II ascended to the British throne (The Daily Mail).

The punctuation and capitalization used in the above quotation highlights an element of kingship laid forth in the King’s Two Bodies theory. “The king is dead” refers to the king’s body natural: the mortal, corporeal body that has passed away. “Long live the King” can be seen to refer to the body politic: the metaphysical, permanent body that transfers between monarchs and never will die. This view of kingship burgeons in the Elizabethan period, even finding its way into the popular drama. In the famous deposition scene in William Shakespeare’s King Richard II, the eponymous protagonist proclaims “‘God save King Henry’, unkinged Richard says, /‘And send him many years of sunshine days!’” (IV.i.220-221). Author of the influential The King’s Two Bodies Ernst Kantorowicz believes that “The Tragedy of King Richard II is the tragedy of the King’s Two Bodies” (26). As I argue in the pages that follow, this play is not the only one from the period to engage the theory of the King’s Two Bodies.
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The theory of the king's two bodies was first articulated in English courts of law in the 1560s, when judges were called upon to settle two land ownership disputes involving Queen Elizabeth. This political theory states the monarch has two bodies, a body natural and a body politic. The body natural is temporary, fallible, and frail while the body politic is eternal, infallible, and enduring. The theory of the king's two bodies flourished through James' reign and into the 1640s when it was used to separate King Charles I's political power from his corporeal body, thus marking its end as a meaningful political doctrine. In the 1950s, Ernst Kantorowicz redefined the theory as a political theology and demonstrated its literary usefulness by analyzing Shakespeare's Richard II in its terms. The theory has been used and examined in political and historical contexts, and has been applied to scattered Elizabethan plays, mostly Shakespeare's history plays.

This dissertation will elaborate on the work done so far in two new ways: first, by applying the theory of the king's two bodies to late 16th and early 17th century English dramas that have not yet been examined in its terms; second, responding to the historical fact that the theory of the king's two bodies was developed while a female monarch was on the throne, the focus of the analysis will be on female dramatic characters. By looking at the ideals monarchs were expected to embody in context with notions of female identity in the early modern period, I hope to clarify the motivations, rights, and responsibilities of the female characters examined here.

The main questions pursued in this study are: What does the theory of the king's two bodies offer or reveal about female characters in plays contemporary with it? How can this theory be utilized as a framework to better understand Elizabethan and Jacobean drama?
What is its relationship to the familiar dichotomy of desire v. duty? How does this theory’s use change the perception of the “mythical” and “real” Elizabethan woman?

This study will examine tragedies and history plays from the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods using the king’s two bodies theory as a lens. This theory has clear applications to English history plays featuring strong female queens such as *Henry VI parts 1, 2, and 3* and Marlowe’s *Edward II*. Working down through tiers of power structures and women’s socio-economic roles, Lady Macbeth from *Macbeth* and the Duchess of Malfi from Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* provide examples of women in power (but not queens) who bear a body politic. The analysis will then delve into characters defined by their marriage unions, Desdemona from *Othello* and Alice from *Arden of Faversham*. Finally the domestic sphere will be examined, focusing on two servant characters: the Nurse from *Romeo and Juliet* and Putana from ‘*Tis Pity She’s a Whore*. By methodically working through Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean plays that depict female characters in varying socio-economic roles, this study will investigate deeply the theory’s potential ramifications for the drama of the day, and demonstrate the prevalence and usability of this concept in analyzing female characters.

**Need for Study**

The king’s two bodies theory has been explored extensively in the fields of history and political science; it also has received scattered attention in the field of drama, mostly with applications to Shakespeare’s history plays. However, it has applications beyond examining Shakespearean plays about kings. This theory arose during Elizabeth’s reign and, therefore, is related to her identity as monarch and her people’s understanding of political
power and female identity. The theory engages issues of desire, responsibility, and gender that are important themes prevalent in the Elizabethan era. These themes are certainly evident throughout the dramatic literature of the day. By contextualizing the theory in terms of Elizabeth’s reign and with early modern writings about gender, I offer an expanded view of female characters, showing how they develop beyond the expected roles of maid, widow, or wife without becoming shrew, witch, or nun.

The theory of the king’s two bodies as outlined by Edmund Plowden in his Reports, Edward Forset in his Discourses, and eventually Ernst Kantorowicz in his book The King’s Two Bodies presents a picture of the expected behavior of England’s kings. But of course there is no drama in a king doing what is expected. Dramatists like Marlowe and Shakespeare explored what happens when the two bodies fight against each other or their proper order is inverted and the body natural supersedes the body politic. The conflict between the body natural and the body politic creates tension and can offer insight as to why, in a play, a monarch succeeds or fails. But this theory has more to offer scholars and practitioners than simply serving as a lens to look at dramatized kings. The king’s two bodies symbolize the conflict of interest between one’s duty to the people (or the land or one’s family) and the physical, bodied desires and affections of the self. Broadly conceived, then, the theory resembles the familiar tension between desire and duty. Seen in this light, it provides the starting point for an interpretive framework that establishes similarities in motive for a wide variety of dramatic female characters, from Marlowe’s passionate queen in Edward II to Shakespeare’s bawdy Nurse in Romeo and Juliet. Each chapter will feature one Shakespearean and one non-Shakespearean play, so as to investigate this theory thoroughly and contextualize it with drama contemporary with it.
**Literature Review**

After its initial inception in the Elizabethan period, few scholars addressed the theory of the king’s two bodies with any regularity or seriousness for a few centuries. The theory then experienced a resurgence of interest in the late 1950s after Ernst Kantorowicz published his Princeton University Press book *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*. This volume extensively analyzes the theory’s effects on Elizabethan court life, and discusses how its articulation changed Elizabethans’ perspectives on their monarch. Kantorowicz uses Shakespeare’s *Richard II* as an example of the separation of body natural and body politic. He also sets this theory against the religious language of the day, hence his subtitle “medieval political theology.” Though many scholars have taken issue with Kantorowicz’s argument, the continued popularity of his volume indicates a continued fascination with the theory.

Since then, there have been published a number of scholarly investigations using Kantorowicz’s ideas to analyze certain Shakespearean plays, usually the Histories. In 1977, Marie Axton wrote *The Queen’s Two Bodies: Drama and Elizabethan Succession*, a book that explores the historical ramifications of the theory with a queen on the throne and examines a few plays identified as “king as common man” plays. A dissertation written in 1979 at Boston University discusses the theory in relation specifically to the two major tetralogies of the history plays, the Henriad and the Wars of the Roses. Stephen Greenblatt dedicated the 2009 issue of the journal *Representations* to analysis of this theory and its expressions, including articles analyzing and debunking Kantorowicz’s “political theology.” Albert Rolls’ 2000 book *The Theory of the King’s Two Bodies in the Age of Shakespeare* begins to fill in some of the holes that Kantorowicz left, especially in looking at the theory’s effects on 16th
century England and attempting to articulate Shakespeare’s opinions on and depictions of the body natural and the body politic. No one yet has undertaken a comprehensive study of this theory’s relevance to the works from the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods written by playwrights other than Shakespeare. Nor have other scholars focused on female characters, or applied the theory to non-royal characters.

The king’s two bodies theory is no longer just a political theory or Kantorowicz’s political theology; it has clear literary and dramatic applications. Though it certainly applies (and has been applied) to plays about kings like Richard II, its implications reach further. Shades of the theory can be seen when any relationship is looked at as a union that fundamentally alters a person’s identity, as happens when a monarch ascends to the throne. Characters struggle to choose between what they must or should do for another character (the responsibilities of the body politic), and what they want to do for themselves (the desires of the body natural). When the struggles between husbands and wives or masters and servants are examined, the theory becomes desire vs. duty. Other dramatic literature scholars have not used this theory to analyze so many different kinds of relationships across such a broad spectrum of plays and playwrights, nor have they explored as deeply as I the theory’s gender implications.

I will refer to contemporary scholarship on early modern English drama when I present my interpretations of the female characters in this study. My sources will include critical writings on gender, sexuality, duality, politics, performance history, queerness, and gender roles. Scholars including Catherine Belsey, Dympna Callaghan, Lisa Hopkins, Marjorie Garber, Emily C. Bartels, Stephen Greenblatt, and Russel West-Pavlov have written extensively on gender and the early modern English theater. Their insights are
important in order to understand how the king's two bodies theory can highlight aspects of
gender identity; often, the king's two bodies theory elegantly overlaps with early modern
and contemporary ideas on gender and duality. Additionally, where possible, I will turn to
accounts from actors who have portrayed these roles; they bear an embodied perspective of
the character and, as such, provide valuable insight into the character. It is important to
note, however, that current scholarship on the theory itself will have no bearing on the
theory's application to the dramatic texts. This study's goal is to investigate the intersection
of the theory with Elizabethan culture and society as depicted on the early modern stage.

The plays chosen for this study represent a range of histories and tragedies from the
late Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, focusing on Shakespeare and his contemporaries.
The plays were selected based on the female characters therein: the goal is to discuss
prominent female characters who are part of the main story and have a driving hand in the
action. Additionally, it was crucial to investigate women from specific social strata –
royalty, noblewomen, the middle class, and the lower class. Though there are many
examples of women fulfilling these requirements in comedies, female characters in comedy
are able to alter their identities and social roles with much more ease and frequency than is
the case in tragedies or histories. The meaning of their altered identities is also more difficult
to define: for example, does Viola dress as a man in Twelfth Night to protect her womanly
body natural or to serve her filial body politic? While comedy would no doubt provide
interesting interpretations with the theory, the genre merits its own study.

Furthermore, this study focuses on plays known to have been performed on the
public stage. Closet dramas, some of them plays written and performed by women in the
Elizabethan/Jacobean period, would clearly offer intriguing prospects for the theory.
However, these dramas are likely less accurate guides to and reflections of prevailing social norms than plays that were regularly performed for the general public. The plays selected have records of performance that indicate their popularity, so it is possible to locate them at the intersection of public desire and government sanction.

**Methodology**

Plowden’s *Reports* (1571) and Forset’s *Discourses* (1606) will be the primary sources for information about the king’s two bodies theory. These works will serve to define the terms “body natural” and “body politic,” which also can be identified as the corporeal body and the spiritual body, the individual body and the communal body, and even the masculine and feminine bodies. On the basis of these definitions, a close textual analysis will be conducted of female characters from select plays by the likes of Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster, and Ford. In each chapter, two plays will be analyzed: one by Shakespeare and one non-Shakespearean. This will serve to demonstrate just how widely applicable this theory can be while still allowing readers easy access to the theory through familiar plays. Kantorowicz and later scholarship on the theory of the king’s two bodies will be engaged as necessary; however, my goal is not to prove which scholar was right but, rather, to demonstrate the utility of this theory when analyzing Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatic literature, even 400 years later. Returning to the texts in which the theory originated will facilitate drawing connections to the dramatic literature of the period.


Chapter Organization

The first chapter will detail the historical records of the theory of the king’s two bodies. Works by Plowden and Forset will be examined and from them I will extrapolate the language necessary to build the theoretical framework. This chapter also will highlight specific and direct usage of the theory by Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, and King James, focusing on how each monarch used the king’s two bodies during their reigns. Mary’s complicated marriage to Philip, and Elizabeth’s case against her marriage, in which she used the language of the king’s two bodies to her advantage, provide excellent examples of the theory’s uses and limitations. As will be shown, marriage emerges as a metaphor for the union of body natural and body politic. This historical evidence will provide the context for the king’s two bodies theory to be applied to drama contemporary with it.

The second chapter will provide an historical context for the theory, particularly focusing on the identity and expectations of an Elizabethan woman. In order to understand how Mary and Elizabeth used the king’s two bodies theory to their advantage, it first must be clear what was expected of them and how they broke the mold. Court records, conduct manuals, and personal writings will serve to demonstrate the identities or roles a woman could be expected to have in her lifetime, as well as an early modern understanding of gender. An examination of Mary’s and Elizabeth’s reigns, focusing on the marriage question, highlights the challenges they faced as female monarchs. Mary and Elizabeth, as queens, had to operate as more than just women – they had to embrace both masculine and feminine identities in order to be effective rulers, an embodiment that reflects the king’s two bodies theory.
The following four chapters will each focus on two characters of equal social ranking, one from a Shakespearean and one from a non-Shakespearean play. Each chapter will begin with a brief introduction to the plays including pertinent historical information. Then the chapter will systematically analyze the plays through the plots, dividing the characters and their relationships into “Body Natural,” “Body Politic,” and “Demise.” In highlighting when the character is motivated by the body natural and identifying when they gain the body politic, the causes of their demise (which can often be read as their tragedy) become clear.

Chapter 3 will focus on the most literal application of the theory of the king’s two bodies: queens. Queen Margaret, from Shakespeare’s Wars of the Roses tetralogy, and Queen Isabella, from Christopher Marlowe’s *Edward II*, offer a clear starting-point in developing this theory’s literary applications. Their inheritance of the body politic is distinct in each play; so too is the conflict with their bodies natural. Though both women manage to rule their countries better than their husbands, ultimately the strength of their feelings for their lovers proves their undoing. Their demises are accompanied by the loss of their kingdoms and the clear transfer of their bodies politic to the next kings.

Chapter 4 will discuss Lady Macbeth from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, and the Duchess of Malfi from John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*. Lady Macbeth and the Duchess are both in positions of power, though not queens, and both also operate within the bounds of matrimony. Their unions with their husbands must be balanced with the body politic in order for them to succeed. Here the union of the body politic and body natural (often embodied in the language of the body and soul) is paralleled in the marriage union, such that the union of husband and wife creates a strong body natural for the body politic to
inhabit. The body politic’s demise arises when the bodies natural of husband and wife are divided, and ends in death.

Chapter 5 will leave the political sphere and focus on female characters defined by their identities as wives. Desdemona, from Shakespeare’s *Othello*, and Alice, from the anonymously written *Arden of Faversham*, demonstrate the theory’s applications in the marital union, a microcosm of the kingdom. Here the theory begins to morph, and the wifely body politic emerges. As the husband was considered the “king” of the household, the wife’s association with the husband and role within the household creates duties and responsibilities. When she ignores those duties, she abuses the wifely body politic, setting the body natural above it and inverting the natural order of the two bodies. The only way to rectify this inversion is through the body politic’s demise in death.

Finally, Chapter 6 will offer an analysis of servant characters, featuring the Nurse from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* and Putana from John Ford’s ‘*Tis Pity She’s a Whore*. Though no longer a political force, the body politic will be seen to exist and have an effect on the actions of these characters as much as on those of the queens. The servile body politic develops from the duties owed by the servant to the master. However, in both the Nurse and Putana, the body natural is shown to be a powerful force, strong enough to overthrow the body politic. The servile body politic demonstrates most clearly how the body natural is ruled by desire, while the body politic is ruled by duty. Here, the servants’ demise is connected to deaths of the mistresses, Juliet and Annabella, who develop wifely bodies politic over the course of the play. Ultimately, in this situation, the body politic is connected to many others; its decisions affect many other people while its power is diluted.
Close textual analysis of these diverse plays, female characters, and relationships will demonstrate the wide applicability of the theory of the king’s two bodies. I purpose to show that this theory allows for previously irreconcilable characters, whose motivations might seem disparate and confusing, to be perceived as fully embodied characters who grow and adapt to the circumstances. In the domestic sphere, the struggles between body natural and servile body politic have broadened out to become conflicts between desire and duty. Part of my project is to root the familiar desire/duty dichotomy in the dual bodies of the monarch. Tracking the structure given by Plowden and Forset closely through a variety of power and love relationships provides a framework for analyzing and understanding the motivations and successes (or failures) of a variety of dramatic female characters in select Elizabethan and Jacobean dramas.
CHAPTER ONE

THE THEORY

Queen Mary I and Queen Elizabeth I largely drove the delineation of the king’s two bodies theory. In a country where the monarchy had passed peacefully from father to son many times, and every time someone else had inherited had resulted in civil war, the crown’s passage to Henry VIII’s daughters (and the creation of a new national religion, breaking away from Catholicism and the Pope) created tumultuous times with new uncertainties. Queen Elizabeth saw England through a turning point in its history. The establishment of the Protestant religion had begun under her father King Henry VIII, but Elizabeth had to formalize many of the practices and answer many of the lingering questions from her people regarding earlier and current elements of religious doctrine, such as the status of their souls. England’s relationship with the countries in Europe was tense as a result of the Catholic/Protestant divide. Within England, movement between the hierarchical classes had become more possible as the merchant class expanded and grew wealthier, but gender roles had become more articulated and rigid as a result of a growing economy. English theater had undergone a massive shift away from roaming pageant wagons on which plays based on religious doctrine were performed, and into secular material performed in a permanent theater building. Elizabeth also had to negotiate the morass of the monarchy as a single woman, something that Mary had begun but which Elizabeth had to deal with for nearly 50 years. The following century would see a distinct shift in the power of government due to the policies begun in the 16th century.
It was in the midst of this turbulence that lawyers sought to understand the rules and capacities of the monarch, and these two remarkable queens helped to redefine their own roles and identities, expanding what it meant to be a woman.

**The King’s Two Bodies – Plowden**

The King’s Two Bodies theory originated in judicial decisions from the 1560s, which were recorded by a legal apprentice named Edmund K. Plowden (who went on to become a well-regarded lawyer) in the *Reports*. Plowden’s *Reports* relate two legal cases argued at Serjeant’s Inn, both land disputes begun by Queen Mary and continued by Queen Elizabeth. In both cases, the issue was whether the land belonged to its current tenants or should revert back to become the property of the crown.

The first case, titled *Duchy of Lancaster*, regarded a lease made by King Edward VI of the duchy of Lancaster during his reign. The parties involved were the Crown (the case was begun by Queen Mary and pursued further by Queen Elizabeth) and the Duchy (its current tenants, who had the lease from Edward VI). Both Mary and Elizabeth wanted the lands returned to them in order to secure political alliances and revenue for the crown. Edward never reached the age of majority during his reign. Each of the queens argued that, since he was underage when he leased the lands, the acts were not done as king and as such were not permanently binding; the lands should have reverted to Mary’s control upon Edward’s death. However, this line of reasoning could become problematic; the king must always be the king, otherwise anyone could undermine his decisions. Therefore, the justices determined that the monarch had two bodies, a body natural and a body politic:

> by the Common Law no Act which the King does as King, shall be defeated by his nonage. For the King has in him two Bodies, *viz.* a Body natural, and a
Body politic. His Body natural (if it be considered in itself) is a Body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, to the Imbecility of Infancy or old Age, and to the like Defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other People. But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Directions of the People, and the Management of the public-weal, and this Body is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to, and for this Cause, what the King does in his Body politic, cannot be invalidated or frustrated by any Disability in his natural Body (Dutchy).

In other words, though Edward VI was under the age of majority, which would have incapacitated him in most situations, the fact that he was king overruled his minority and gave him the power and authority of a person of age, such that he acted as king as well. “So that he cannot do it without doing it as King, and it would be inconvenient and beneath the Dignity royal…” (Dutchy) for the king to do something without doing it as King. Mary and Elizabeth could not simply overrule Edward’s actions because of his age.

The question of ownership over this particular duchy was especially tricky because of its relationship to the Lancastrian kings and both their bodies natural and politic; Henry IV had been Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Lancaster before he became king, and had made a provision once he became king that separated the duchy from the crown’s properties. He wanted to ensure that his heirs, should they lose the throne, would retain the dukedom. While the jurors all agreed that “the King could not be Duke in his own Realm, though he might be out of it” (Dutchy), for the title of king usurps that of duke, Henry IV’s body natural was not completely overthrown by his body politic and therefore retained possession of the lands, maintaining the right to entail them as it would if he did not possess a body politic. The presence of the body politic does not negate the body natural, though the first alters the second. To this day, the duchy of Lancaster has special rights attached to it due to Henry IV’s actions.
This is important to note because, if Edward VI held the lands solely in his body natural, he would not have been able to make legal decisions regarding the property as he was underage. However, upon becoming King, he gained a body politic as well:

And Infancy, which is a great Disability, is repugnant to the Estate of a King, and although the natural Body of the King is subject to Infancy, yet when the Body politic is conjoined with it, and one Body is made of them both, the whole Body shall have all the Properties, Qualities, and Degrees of the Body politic which is the greater and more worthy, and in which there is not nor can be any Infancy (Dutchy).

Because of the presence of the body politic, the rules change. The body politic has an effect on the body natural, making it greater than it was before, altering it into a higher state of being: “for his Body politic, which is annexed to his Body natural, takes away the Imbecility of his Body natural, and draws the Body natural, which is the lesser, and all the Effects thereof to itself, which is the greater” (Dutchy). The body natural can no longer be considered as a singular capacity, but the effects the body politic has had upon it must be acknowledged.

A point of fascination is that in order to explain what had been happening with the body politic between Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, the justices had to return to another time when the crown had been uncertain; they began by examining Henry IV’s reign, a necessity given the dispute over the duchy of Lancaster, and the origin of the need to articulate the distinction between the body natural and body politic because Henry had been Duke of Lancaster before he became King. This was perhaps the first time since England’s establishment of a continuous monarchy when the crown had not passed in direct succession from father to son, from king to heir. Henry had taken action to have Richard II deposed, and though Richard didn’t have a direct heir and Henry had arguably the strongest (or second strongest) claim to the throne as Richard’s cousin, it had still been a contentious
transition. The justices also discussed Edward IV, Richard III (albeit briefly, calling him “late in Deed and not in Right King of England”) (Dutchy), and Henry VII. In justifying how the lands of Lancaster had been managed through each of these Lancastrian and Yorkist kings, each of which was problematic in his own way, they were able to determine what exactly the rights, responsibilities, and powers of the body politic were.

The second case recorded by Plowden, Willion v. Berkeley, regarded land belonging to a Marquess, the Manor of Weston. Upon the Marquess’ death, the lands had gone to Henry VII and had been entailed to the male heirs of Henry’s body ensuing. Henry VIII leased the lands to his last wife, Catherine Parr, shortly before his death, and upon her death the lands reverted to the crown, specifically, to Henry VIII’s male heir, Edward VI. Edward later gave the manor to Sir William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, who leased it as a feoffment (a deed gifting land) to Willion. When Edward VI died without any male heirs, Henry Lord Berkley and Richard Knight, descended from the original Marquess, attempted to forcibly eject Willion, at which point the case was brought to trial.

Again, the question was raised of whether the lands had belonged to Henry VII’s body natural or body politic, “that first the Capacities of the King are to be considered, and how many Capacities he has; and if he has several Capacities, then in what Capacity King Henry 7 took the Remainder” (Willion). Dyer Chief Justice concluded that “he that gives to the King may give to him in one Body or in the other . . . but here the Gift itself distinguishes in what Capacity the King shall take it, for the Remainder is to him and to his Heirs Males of his Body begotten, and such Heirs must come from the natural Body, for the Body politic cannot beget issue” (Willion). Because the land’s gift had been tied specifically to male descendants, it had to be vested in the body natural. The body politic has only one
successor and, as Mary and Elizabeth will demonstrate, that successor is not bound by gender. Lord Berkeley won the case and was allowed to retain possession.

Much of the language used in this second case reiterates that found in the Duchy of Lancaster decision. The idea is again presented “that the King has two Capacities, for he has two Bodies, the one whereof is a Body natural, consisting of natural members as every other Man has, and in this he is subject to Passions and to Death as other Men are” (Willion). The body natural is the weaker of the two, but it does not vanish when the man becomes King,

[T]he Capacity which the King has in his Body natural remains after he is King, for else the Warranty and Assets could not have descended upon [Edward III] as Heir to the Earl his Ancestor; so that by this Warranty and Assets, which descended upon the Body natural of the King, he was barred of the Reversion which he demanded in his Body politic, for it was Parcel of the Possessions of the Crown, for any Thing that appears to the contrary (Willion).

A king has the same capacity, the same rights and abilities, as any man by virtue of his body natural; it does not vanish when he becomes king. However, “although the Body natural of the King is distinct in Capacity from the Body politic, yet it does not remain distinct from it to all other Purposes” (Willion). The body politic effects change on the body natural, making it more than what it was previously, which is marked by the union of name and title, so that he is not simply the king, or Henry, but King (body politic) Henry (body natural):

[T]he Majesty and Name of the King, when they are conjoined with the natural Person, alter the Quality and Degree of the natural Person, in the Eye of the Law, so that if he was within Age before, he shall then be adjudged of full Age to all Purposes; and if his Body natural was attainted before (as Henry 7 was) [sic] eo instante that the Dignity Royal comes to it, the Disability is gone, for the greater removes the Imperfection of the lesser, and the Body politic has the Pre-eminence over the Body natural. (Willion)
The presence of the body politic does not negate the body natural; the body natural gains the capacities and abilities of the body politic. The two remain distinct, but the body politic affects the body natural. Furthermore, the body politic requires the presence of the body natural, since the body politic requires a vessel. This was highlighted when the justices noted that “the Body politic cannot beget Issues” (Willion). The body natural produces multiple heirs, while the body politic takes only one of those heirs to become its successor.

In both of these cases, the justices decided against the crown, upholding Edward’s lease of the duchy, and allowing Berkeley to take possession of the Manor. Ultimately, the decisions made by previous Kings (ex. Edward VI) could not be undone on account of any reason pertaining to the king’s body natural. Doing so would lay the groundwork for each successive monarch to undermine and undo the work done by the previous one, which could result in chaos. The justices’ decisions codified exactly why the decisions of a monarch were infallible and irreversible.

To summarize, the body natural is defined within the documents as “mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, to the Imbecility of Infancy or old Age, and to the like Defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other People” (Dutchy). That is, the body natural is the same corporeal body every person has. It can get sick, it can grow old, and most importantly, it can make mistakes. By contrast, the body politic is the greater of the two bodies. It “wipes away every Imperfection of the other with which it is consolidated, and makes it to be in another Degree than it should be if it were alone by itself” (Willion). The body politic is eternal and infallible; it transfers between monarchs and can be symbolized by the crown and scepter. It was also noted that

[A]s to this Body the King never dies, and his natural Death is not called in our Law (as Harper said) [sic] the Death of the King, but the Demise of the
King, not signifying by the word (Demise) [sic] that the Body politic of the King is dead, but that there is a Separation of the two Bodies, and that the Body politic is transferred and conveyed over from the Body natural now dead, or now removed from the Dignity royal, to another Body natural. (Willion)

Therefore the body politic is the same for every monarch; it does not die but undergoes a demise until the next monarch is crowned. The body politic, always the same, influences each new body natural, though the two remain distinct capacities encapsulated in one person.

**FORSET**

In 1606, a political writer and playwright named Edward Forset wrote *A Comparative Discourse on the Bodies Natural and Politique*. Forset had been part of the political scene, supposedly taking part in the Gunpowder Plot trial. Forset’s work was mostly eclipsed by more prolific playwrights (his most famous play was *Pedantius*, performed at Trinity College) and philosophers like Francis Bacon, but his writings demonstrate an engagement with and reflection of the era in which he lived, and particularly a contemplation of the role of sovereignty. While Plowden reported legal cases, investigating issues of heredity and land ownership, Forset interpreted the language of the body natural and body politic through other metaphors: of body and soul, of head and corporation, and of the head and the body. Working primarily with classical references, Forset indicated that though the physical body is nothing without the soul, “the puritie and dignitie therof is much extolled above that lump of mowlded earth his body” (Forset n.pag.), the soul requires a body.

Here is the same idea that the body natural is somehow less than the body politic, in this case the soul, which is pure and dignified. However, Forset investigates the point of
union between the two bodies, “so to compare or make parity betwenee the bodies Naturall and Politique, that each part may be brought in rather easily entreated, than streiningly intruded; and rather agreeing naturally, than forced violently” (Forset n.pag., original italics). This union is “a passive subjection to an active superioritie” (Forset n.pag.). The addition of the body politic to the body natural creates

admirable effects, as to transom savagenesse into civilitie, repugnances into concords, vices into vertues, procuring love, yet implying feare; compelling obedience, yet with yield of highest honour; holding towards all, the proportion of justice, yet extending withal the remorse of mercie, doeth in like sort (by such the conversion of the body naturall, into a body politickal) beget thereunto a more admir'd glory, and a more deere esteeme. (Forset n.pag.)

Forset begins to articulate not just the capacities of the king through the dual nature, but the advantages that result from the union. The body natural is made better by the presence of the body politic, but the power of the body politic is also tempered by the innate understanding of the body natural. The king is human, and God-ordained, and as such becomes a brighter figurehead for the kingdom.

Forset suggests that one body cannot function without the other but it is easy to consider them separately for the purposes of theory. The two bodies must be in accord in order to be effective.

If any parts disdaining the rule of their soule, and disliking their subjectd condition, shall not onely neglect their dutious performances, but also conspiringly complot against the head, hart, and other the noblest viols of life, to the utter destruction of the whole bodie, by such their horrible commotions and violent convulsions: which if it were never yet attempted, or once intended by any naturall members ruled by the law of their creation, how commeth it to passe, that any parts of the political bodie should so outrageously and sediciously betake themselves to an Anarchie, most unnaturall and rebellious? (Forset n.pag.)

The analogy between the king and his kingdom, and the head and its body, becomes clear in this passage. The king is the head of the body, and is the body politic, in which is embodied
the entire kingdom, which is the body natural. For the body to rebel against the head would be “unnaturall” (Forset n.pag.).

Forset also delineated how the decisions made by the soul are similar to those made by the king. Ultimately, the body alone is “a confused lump, unformed, senseless, witless, and destitute of all helping means to mayntaine it selfe from perishing and utter dissolving” (Forset n.pag.) which is why it needs the soul to “quicken it, move it, care for it, provide for it, cherish it with his love, [etc.]” (ibid). Writing at the start of James I’s reign, he notes that “The favorites of a Prince may be resembled to the fantasies of the Soule, wherewith he sporteth and delighteth himself; which to doe (so the integritie of judgement, and Majestie of State be reteyned) is in neither of both reproveable” (Forset n.pag.). However, this does not give the monarch carte blanche to do whatsoever s/he will. “The will of the Soveraigne in the decreeing or enacting of Lawes, holdeth the right as the will of the soule doth in the perfourming the resolves of reason” (Forset n.pag.). The soul, the body politic, is responsible for enacting law reasonably on behalf of the body natural.

Forset then moves on to examine the metaphor of “the head in his unresistable right of ruling over the bodie” (Forset n.pag.), discussing the sovereign as corporation, which never fails or dies as the human body does. Forset identifies four elements that make up the body politic: the generous, the learned, the yeomen, and the trafiquers, which translate to the nobility, the scholars and clergy, the merchant class, and the laborers. These elements must be in harmony for the state to exist peacefully, similarly to the humors, or the natural elements. He concludes with the hope that “The [Prince’s] contentment must be the happinesse of the Subject, & the subjects welfare the securitie of the Prince: And so shall the Commonwealth be compleatly blessed, by the firmnesse of that concurring union . . . the
tranquilitie of the mind, with indolence of the bodie” (Forset n.pag.). Without going so far as to regulate the body politic, Forset eloquently articulates the appropriate concerns of the body politic for the state to maintain peace and prosperity, deterring, and by implication condemning, a self-centered tyrant.

From Plowden and Forset come the language of the body natural and the body politic, which can also be identified as the corporeal body and the spiritual body, the individual body and the communal body, and the body and the head. Often times the two bodies are differentiated through the use of “king” (body natural) and “King” (body politic). Plowden Reports identify the basic definition of the bodies natural and politic, and demonstrates how the latter supersedes the former, and must do so for the country to function. Forset’s language allows for the metaphor of the body natural and body politic to extend further to include the body and soul, and the body and head, which in turn allows this theory to be metaphorized further and applied to more than just the monarchy.

In both records, the theory of the king’s two bodies invites a ranking of the body natural and body politic, stating that the body politic is greater than the body natural and thus implying that it is also better. However, as shall be seen, Elizabethan and Jacobean dramas rarely portray one body over another. Instead, the two bodies are seen to be on equal footing, creating dramatic tension by striving against each other. While the original iterations of the theory may have indicated the body politic to be privileged above the body natural, the plays contradict this reading.

Each of these documents also mentions that “other Persons” had a similar dual capacity. Mostly the references are to the church, and concern how a priest can be both of God and mortal, how Christ is both the Son of God and a man. These elaborations serve to
point out that the dual capacity is not limited to the monarchy, that perhaps there are other instances where a person may hold two natures within themselves, and that this dual capacity can help to create identity. While these documents can, at times, become tedious with their exhaustive repetition of the differences between body natural and body politic, it should be noted that this was the beginning of the formalization of this idea. The next hundred years would continue the use of and experimentation with this terminology until it was superseded by a new political regime.

**Contemporary Iterations**

The theory of the king’s two bodies pervaded England from Plowden’s publication in the mid-16th century through the end of Charles I’s reign. In 1642, the Commonwealth effectively served to alter the rights and responsibilities of the monarch, and when Charles II took the throne in 1660, the theory of the king’s two bodies was defunct. The body politic had been removed to Parliament; Charles only returned to England because Parliament had invited him back. Therefore the bulk of the political power rested within Parliament; the king was no longer purely God-ordained, but appointed by government as well. Since the Restoration, the theory has served as a political relic from an earlier time, not so much informing current political doctrine, but serving as an example of one aspect of life under Elizabeth. Ensuing scholarship on the theory has mostly served to debunk it as a political doctrine, identifying how those formalizing the theory in the mid-16th century had been wrong in their understanding of the king’s capacities, or incomplete in their reasoning.

F. W. Maitland, writing at the end of the 19th century, calls Plowden “metaphysical – or we might say metaphysiological – nonsense” (109). He investigates the problems inherent
to two bodies inhabiting one person, and questions whether or not the jurists had really thought the theory through, pointing out that the theory did not immediately change laws, but created extra regulation that had to be negotiated. This is the first major investigation of the theory since it ceased to be useful, though Maitland has his own agenda in deconstructing it, questioning the purpose of uniting person and office in one body and deriding the benefits of personifying the state.

In the 1950s, Ernst Kantorowicz wrote his treatise on the king’s two bodies as political theology, connecting the theory back to medieval religious iconography as a way to explain the origins of the dual nature in one person, and analyzing Shakespeare’s Richard II through its lens. Subsequent scholars have mostly dealt with Kantorowicz’s explanation of the theory; Greenblatt calls him “selectivist” (“50 years” 63) suggesting that his political arguments lack support and his analysis of Richard II is partial at best. Bernhard Jussen accuses Kantorowicz of over-application of the theory, stating that, “Not everything that has two sides or aspects or . . . two functions or positions, fits into a conceptual history of the doubled body, twin figure, or persona mixta” (12). He argues that the theory demonstrates not that there was “a slowly emerging political theory of abstract institutionality” (9) as Kantorowicz indicates, but that the abstract institutionality had already existed in the church and was simply being transferred to the state. Natalie Zemon Davis connects Kantorowicz’s ideas to similar contemporary positions such as the papacy and the presidency (“History’s Two Bodies”); other scholars have continued Kantorowicz’s analysis of kings depicted in Elizabethan history plays, as well as furthering or refuting his political study (see Albert Rolls, Lorna Hutson). Marie Axton, by contrast, has used
Kantorowicz and returned to the original *Reports* in order to investigate the theory’s effects on the Elizabethan succession (*The Queen’s Two Bodies*, 1977).

This scholarly conversation demonstrates how the theory of the king’s two bodies, while problematic, has not faded from contemporary scholarship. While it has served as a lens for much literary and political analysis, analysis of the theory within its own context and as it applies to Elizabethan characters other than kings, remains scant. Most of the contemporary scholarship on the theory focuses on Kantorowicz’s interpretation and derivation, or creates a new derivation which is then applied to a contemporary knowledge framework. However, the implications of the theory of the king’s two bodies as it pertains to early modern English drama have yet to be fully explored, particularly in the context of Elizabeth’s reign.

The theory of the king’s two bodies was not a universally accepted truth; it is not likely that it was announced in pulpits and therefore every citizen of England knew and understood it. But it was argued at the inns of court, and there is a fair likelihood that many playwrights, Shakespeare especially, were familiar with the legal arguments that came out of the inns, as they often used the legal cases and decisions for material and inspiration. Ernst Kantorowicz points out that,

> it would have been very strange if Shakespeare, who mastered the lingo of almost every human trade, had been ignorant of the constitutional and judicial talk which went on around him and which the jurists of his days applied so lavishly in court. Shakespeare’s familiarity with legal cases of general interest cannot be doubted, and we have other evidence of his association with the students at the Inns and his knowledge of court procedure. (Kantorowicz 25)

Other scholars have investigated Shakespeare’s knowledge of law and legal theory, and, given Forset’s elaboration of the theory in the 1600s, it was clearly still around through
Shakespeare’s lifetime. Plowden was also fairly well-known, even outside the courts. “The case is altered” is quoted from Plowden, and became a commonly used phrase in the 16th and 17th centuries (Kantorowicz 25).

Furthermore, while the theory may not have been universally known, Elizabeth was. Her actions and speeches were reported throughout the country. During her reign, Elizabeth used the theory of the king’s two bodies to reconcile herself as female and ruler of her country. In 1558, in her first speech as queen, she said “as I am but one bodye naturallye considered though by his [God’s] permission a bodye politique to governe” (qtd. in Axton 38). In fact, Elizabeth utilized the language of the king’s two bodies repeatedly in her speeches to her people, council, and Parliament. In 1588, before the defeat of the Spanish Armada,¹ she gave a famous speech at Tilbury in which she said, “I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king and of a king of England too” (qtd. in Bucholz and Key, Sources and Debates 90). Elizabeth cast herself in a distinctly masculine role, as Mary had before her, accompanying her troops to the battle on horseback with a truncheon at her side. In her Golden Speech, delivered Nov. 30, 1601, at her final Parliament, Elizabeth stated,

To be a king and wear a crown is a thing more glorious to them that see it than it is pleasant to them that bear it. For myself, I never was so much enticed with the glorious name of a king or royal authority of a queen as delighted that God hath made me His instrument to maintain His truth and glory, and to defend this kingdom from dishonor, damage, tyranny, and oppression. But should I ascribe any of this to myself, or my sexly weakness, were not worthy to live, and of all, most unworthy of the mercies I have had from God. (qtd. in Bucholz and Key, Sources and Debates 102)

¹ Meyer places this speech a week after the Armada had gone into retreat. Orgel notes that the popular image of Elizabeth at Tilbury was painted in 1630.
Throughout her reign, Elizabeth had to engage with the fact of her gender in most of her dealings. At no point was she allowed to forget that she was a woman, or fulfill her position as Queen without making recognition of her weaker sex. The theory of the king’s two bodies, however, allowed her to become more than merely a woman, as her queenship demanded. She could have the corporeal body of a woman and still rule the country as a man, as a result becoming more than a woman could have been before. It is interesting in the speech quoted above that she equates “king” with a mere title, and the power of a monarch with the term “queen.” The gendered implications of the theory become visible through Elizabeth’s conscious use of terminology relating to both the theory and her sex. She was mother to her people and wife to her country, virgin bride and battle queen, androgynous and sexually alluring, intelligent and vain, all at the same time, and without a husband beside her. Though her lack of husband created an ongoing question of the succession, she proved that a woman could effectively rule alone as well as any man (and better than a fair few).

**Monarchs and Marriage**

While the theory of the king’s two bodies initially served to decide the court cases recorded by Plowden against the monarchy, ultimately, the crown turned the theory to its advantage. The terminology of the king’s two bodies theory – the bodies natural and politic, the dual capacity, the idea of being the head or the soul of the body – was used repeatedly by Queen Mary I, Queen Elizabeth I, and King James I throughout their reigns. Particularly in relation to their marriages, these monarchs utilized their dual capacity in order to pursue their objectives for their country and for themselves. The monarch’s marriage has always
been a crucial and tenuous affair; there are high hopes for the union, not the least of which is additional power, political support, and heirs. Curiously, the coronation ceremony often mimics aspects of the marriage ceremony, including wedding the monarch to the state, and even placing a ring on the monarch’s finger as a symbol of this union. This ceremony can be seen as a wedding or union of the bodies natural and politic, thereby exemplifying a theoretical concept through public ritual. It stands to reason that the wedding of the two bodies would bear an effect on the wedding of the monarch’s body natural as well.

Mary utilized the dual nature of herself as queen in order to negotiate a better marriage for herself with Philip II of Spain, ultimately preventing him from entering the line of succession. Normally the marriage of a noblewoman would have been negotiated by her father, her brothers, or her guardian. In Mary’s case, with no man above her to look out for her interests, she had to play both father and daughter, head and body, negotiating the terms of her prenuptial agreement and their courtship. At times she would flirt with Philip and act coy, sending him gifts and claiming that it was not a woman's place to argue over such unromantic details as political alliances. Then she would switch on a dime and defend herself and her desires by saying that a Queen had to look out for her kingdom, sending messages through her advisors, and forcing Philip to court her. It was a masterful dance that allowed her to fulfill her desires for a husband, appease Philip’s ego, and not compromise her kingdom.

Elizabeth also had to fight against those who believed her gender defined her as the “weaker vessel.” As Mary had done, Elizabeth manipulated the duality between herself as woman (her body natural) and herself as Queen (her body politic) to her advantage, particularly when it came to marriage. Of course, for Elizabeth, this meant not marrying,
which she excused by using her queenship, demonstrated in the following quotation related in William Camden’s *Annales* (1625):

> To conclude, I am already bound unto an Husband, which is the Kingdome of England, and that may suffice you: and this (quoth shee) [sic] makes mee wonder, that you forget yourselves, the pledge of this alliance which I haue made with my Kingdome. (And therewithall, stretching out her hand, shee shewed them the Ring with which shee was giuen in marriage, and inaugurred to her Kingdome, in expresse and solemne terms.) And reproch mee no more, (quoth shee) [sic] that I haue no children: for euery one of you, and as many as are English, are my Children, and Kinsfolkes. (qtd. in Axton 39)

Mary had used almost identical language earlier, “I am already married to this Common Weal and the faithful members of the same” (qtd. in Duncan 55). But where Elizabeth took this marriage to be absolute, Mary took it to be the marriage of her body politic, which did not preclude a second marriage for her body natural. Elizabeth had no such desire for a second marriage (some historians attribute this to having watched her mother die at her father’s hand and all his subsequent romances, which went equally poorly; others argue it was due to her inability to marry Robert Dudley, or simply the lack of a genuinely strong candidate), and therefore excused herself from its necessity through the theory of the king’s two bodies.

King James I also made a similar statement, “I am the Husband, and all the whole Isle is my lawfull Wife” (qtd. in Duncan 92), but James did have a natural wife as well, and children besides. James ultimately used the theory to justify some of his lavish lifestyle at court, under the belief that the wants of his body natural were justified by his perfect body politic. His son, King Charles I, continued in this belief until he proved untenable as a king, as he was no longer placing the concerns of the state above his own desires. Thus the theory of the king’s two bodies flourished into the 1640s, when it was ultimately used to separate
the king’s power from his corporeal body, a division marked literally by Charles’ beheading. The dissolution of the monarchy removed the body politic to Parliament and established the Commonwealth, thus marking the theory’s end as a meaningful political doctrine. In terms of marriage, the union of body natural and body politic, which was mimicked so clearly in the coronation ceremony, now became a metaphor for divorce. Where the monarch had previously been wedded to the state, with two bodies embodied in one, Parliament held the body politic and the king remained merely a body natural, physically separated from his ruling other half.

The manner in which these monarchs, particularly Mary and Elizabeth, utilized the theory within their own marriages and reigns invites the consideration of the theory through a gendered lens. Mary took on a distinctly masculine role in her marriage to Philip, which led to unhappiness on his part, though it certainly helped Mary consolidate her roles as woman and Queen. Elizabeth similarly straddled the divide between masculine and feminine, consciously manipulating her androgynous image to her advantage. When looked at within the context of Mary and Elizabeth’s reigns, and the language laid out in Plowden’s and Forset’s publications, the two bodies take on distinct, gendered natures. The body natural is the feminine body, which is weak, fallible, mortal, corporeal, and often closeted away in the private sphere. The body politic is the masculine body, which is strong, infallible, immortal, spiritual, and exists in the public mindset. The two exist together, and the body politic cannot exist without the body natural, just as the soul cannot exist without the body, and one gender cannot exist without the other.

The following chapter will begin to investigate the gendered roles found in Elizabethan England. The perception of women reflects the definition of the body natural
established thus far. In understanding what was expected of the ideal 16th century English woman, it will become clear how Elizabeth expanded the definition of what it meant to be a woman through the use of this theory, and thus how the theory may illuminate female characters from Elizabethan and Jacobean drama.
CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORY

Plowden’s *Reports* recorded the arguments of cases disputed over 30 years in the mid-16\(^{th}\) century; the effects of the king’s two bodies theory continued to be felt throughout the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. In order to understand the ramifications of the theory, the reason it came about, and what it meant for female characters on the stage, it is necessary to look more deeply at gender roles and gender fluidity in 16\(^{th}\) century England. The following depictions and definitions will help to show how the bodies natural and politic can be thematized as feminine and masculine respectively, which is particularly demonstrated through marriage. Bolstered by the theory of the king’s two bodies, Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth were able to destabilize gender roles, a subversion reflected on the public stage.

THE MYTHICAL IDEAL

The ideal Elizabethan woman was most often described as “chaste, silent, and obedient,” a phrase found in many reports, pamphlets, and plays of the day. The Great Chain of Being dictated her place in the world; it was a conceptual schema that included everything on the planet and above it, creating a specific hierarchy from God to grains of sand. Originating in the ideas of Plato and Aristotle, the Great Chain of Being was an attempt to explain why the world was the way it was, particularly if God was good. All things were ranked in order of their closeness to God, or their “other-worldliness” and “this-worldliness” as Arthur Lovejoy calls it in his study tracking social schema through history. The king, as the closest to God, had the most other-worldliness of all humans and therefore
was the most perfect. The hierarchy included the relationships between human beings and other creatures, mortals and divine beings and, of course, the household hierarchy. In this great chain, a woman’s place was beneath her father or husband, in service to her sovereign, and ultimately, to God. However, the differentiation in the hierarchy was not absolute – there were gradations. Lovejoy goes on to articulate that, “the pressure of the principle of continuity tended, even in the Middle Ages, to soften, though it did not overcome, the traditional sharp dualism of body and spirit” (Lovejoy 79-80). The Great Chain of Being recognizes the duality of body and spirit; those higher up on the chain are more of the spirit, a sensibility that coincides well with the king’s two bodies theory. E. M. W. Tillyard discusses the Great Chain of Being in his book *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1942), saying, “The chain of being is still a means of spiritual ascent: but only in an ideal interpretation. God has a ceremonial as well as a natural law, and it is possible to ascend spiritually by looking on nature ceremonially” (Tillyard 33). Again this worldview is shown to coincide with the king’s two bodies, this time in the differentiation between the spiritual and the natural. In the early modern period, the Great Chain of Being began to move out of the realm of abstract philosophy and into that of “sensible realities” (Lovejoy 98), suggesting that the hierarchy became more concrete; indeed, Tillyard investigates multiple examples of the concept’s use and portrayal in literature. Yet Lovejoy insists, “the higher value is given, not to the Unmoved Mover, the state in which the One is undivided and eternally at rest in its own self-sufficiency, but rather to the restless ‘active principle,’ which is manifested in becoming, motion, diversification” (93-94). Once more the king’s two bodies theory comes into play through the idea of movement, becoming, and seeking perfection. The union of
man and woman represents a perfect union, one through which the participants are improved and made whole.

There are few examples of perfect women in the Elizabethan period; many extant records of historical Elizabethan women come from court cases, wherein the woman was hardly average or ideal; these were women who violated normative expectations. However, there are a few examples of women upheld as the nonpareil. For example, Mistress Katherine Stubbes was lauded by her husband as being perfect. She had been married at the age of 15 to a man of whom her mother approved. She was quiet, obeyed her husband, and kept a tidy house. She never fought or scolded him, nor did she gossip or engage in revelry. She was praised for her austerity and humbleness, as being a true Christian who never swore. She even, supposedly, would not leave the house when her husband was gone. She lived for 4 ½ years after her marriage (Bucholz and Key, Sources and Debates 120). The portrayal of Mistress Katherine depicts an obedient woman who always did as her husband or parents wished; her hard work earned her a short life. However, while she seems perfect, this commendation is one of the few extant; it is, instead, much easier to define the ideal woman by those who were not.

There are numerous legal records of women taken to court for various supposed crimes. There was a madam who turned her husband’s house into a brothel and poisoned him to death (Bucholz and Key Sources and Debates 121). Many women were accused of witchcraft. Shrews refused to obey their husbands; some women committed adultery, or failed to keep their husband’s home, or even wanted a divorce (which was still illegal at the time). Other information regarding the lives of women can be found in diaries, letters between husbands and wives, sisters, or mothers and daughters, and in various publications.
(see Amussen, Bucholz and Key, Fletcher, and Fraser). Letters can be woven together into stories of happy marriages, of wives missing their husbands, and of wives plotting escape from bad marital situations. Some women published “receipt” books, which included their favorite recipes for the cure of common ailments such as headaches, coughs, and general aches and pains, giving insight into the daily trials they encountered. Even Queen Elizabeth published a receipt book; it is believed that this kind of celebrity publication was quite popular, like Gwyneth Paltrow’s latest diet book. This kind of published and unpublished source material can help paint a picture of the daily lives of these women.

Of course, many publications about women were not entirely factual. They often reflected the author’s hopes or beliefs about the sex, not necessarily the societal truth, as can be seen in Joseph Swetnam’s tirade against women, *The arraignment of lewd, idle, froward, and unconstant women*, published in 1615. This kind of literature originated from hate and fear, and therefore cannot be fully trusted. Hilda L. Smith identifies two common themes within this type of diatribe:

> [T]hey made clear that the humanist educational and social programme preparing independent men for learning and responsible positions did not apply to women, and second, that women remained more imbued with the Christian virtues associated with the medieval world than did their male counterparts. (12)

Ultimately, it can be discerned that a woman was thought to fall into one of three categories: maid, wife, or widow. These three identities are found repeatedly throughout historical documents, such as when a Suffolk magistrate asked an English Catholic nun, Sister Dorothea: “Are you a maid, or widow, or a wife?” (qtd. in Fraser 148). As shall be shown, the implication is that if a woman did not fall into one of these three defining terms,

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2 For a list of publications pertaining to women and expected behavior, see H. L. Smith’s article in *Women and Literature in Britain*, ed. by Helen Wilcox.
she was a witch. This creates a fairly limited scope of female identity, but it was also the natural progression of a woman’s life.

Young girls of the lower classes were educated in the petty or “dame” schools where they received the basics of religion and reading until approximately the age of 7, after which they began to help out around the household. Girls from wealthier families likely received further education at home; noblewomen would have been taught music, dance, embroidery, and art. Most overview scholarship indicates that women did not have a job per se, but were in charge of the household, and their education would have prepared them for those duties.

The age of consent for a girl to marry was 12 years old (for boys it was 14); in 1604, the age of consent was raised to 21 (Orgel 37, 59), however, on average women were married at 26 and men at 28. Most marriages would have been love matches with the parents’ approval; a girl from a wealthy family would most likely have had her marriage arranged for economic and political reasons. There were two legal classifications for women: *femme sole* (referring to a single woman) and *femme covert* (a married woman, protected by her husband) (Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England* 165). Once she had married, the woman fell under her husband’s demesne. Here she would have been in charge of the household, managing the servants and daily business of keeping the house clean and orderly, and feeding everyone, allowing her husband to focus on the business, or the family’s interests. Scholarly opinion differs on whether wives helped to mind the business; some scholars seem to think this would have depended on how much trust a husband had in his wife, and her education and upbringing. It appears few women owned their own businesses. Anthony Fletcher, discussing the connection between gender and social position, sums up the situation thus: “Women’s work comprised everything that was left
after men had had their say: as well as bearing the major burden inside the home, women
were endlessly inventive about finding ways of going out and bringing in more pennies”
(Fletcher 254). Logic, however, would suggest that when the husband had to go out of
town, he would trust the person who had been with him and shared his concerns.

Whatever other duties her husband might have assigned her, a woman’s first duty
was to provide children. Most women endured 6-8 pregnancies before they turned 35. Of
course, pregnancy was dangerous. Bearing babies later in life meant a higher risk of still-
borns and miscarriages, as well as a smaller chance of the mother surviving. Russell West-
Pavlov, in his study of gendered bodies and their spaces, notes that “Many families included
step-children and half-sisters and -brothers from previous marriages, a phenomenon frequent
in times of high mortality, with a third of all marriages being re-marriages” (West-Pavlov
28). The necessity of combining families due to such high mortality rates often produced
anxiety and conflict when it came time to name heirs. Antonia Fraser remarks that pregnant
or nursing women were not available for sexual intercourse with their husbands, as there
was a generally approved prohibition against it; this idea is especially interesting in
connection with Bucholz and Key’s evidence that pregnant women were more vulnerable,
along with the poor and the elderly. Furthermore, Anthony Fletcher points out the fears
associated with a woman’s confinement during childbirth. The birthing chamber was a
woman’s space, where men were not allowed for a significant amount of time. The fear was
that a woman could alter the child, turn the child against the father, or even conceal who
the real father was. While childbirth was a crucial part of a woman’s existence, it seems to
have caused anxiety from fear of the unknown for the male population and from the high
risk for the female. Without the active possibility of procreation, what value did a woman
have to society, or to her husband? And could she still hope for protection from him if he suspected her of plotting against him?

This leads to the possibility of divorce – if a woman was miserable, if her husband hated her, could she escape the marriage? Henry VIII demonstrated the difficulty of obtaining a divorce in the 16th century. The Catholic Church did not sanction it except in extreme cases (which often had political ramifications). According to Bucholz and Key, while divorce was nearly impossible, many communities tolerated a man and wife living separately when their living together had become untenable (*Early Modern England* 176). What was beneficent for the community was deemed more important than living according to canonical law, and of course, canonical law had become fairly fluid in the 16th century with the switch to Protestantism. In fact, there are historical records regarding women who defied tradition and their monarch by abandoning their husbands, managing their own estates, or even cross-dressing (see Fletcher (1995), Fraser (1984), Shapiro (1977), and Bucholz and Key (*Sources and Debates*, 2009) for specific examples). There are also records showing how such defiance was often punished, hunting down the fleeing wife and either forcing her to return to her husband, or punishing her publicly.

So far, women were expected to be constantly under the purview of a man, at least in the ideal Elizabethan patriarchal mindset. As a child, she was looked after by her father until she married and came under the domain of her husband. If she became a widow, even then it was hoped that she would have sons or brothers to take care of her. Her reputation was always paramount, and was most easily upheld by being under a man’s protection.

After her husband’s death, a widow had few options available to her. Fraser says “in a favorite comparison of the time, she emulated the turtle-dove by mourning her late
husband in solitude . . . her worldly duties being over she could spend the rest of her life a widow devoted to God’s service” (81). One side effect of the Reformation was that an older, single, poor woman who would once have gone to a convent to live out her life now had nowhere to go, since they had all been closed and the property seized. Instead, she had limited options to earn a living: doing washing, sewing, cleaning, and other such household duties, or turning to the illegal trades of beggary and prostitution. The number of children, and especially sons, would have dictated how much a widow stood to inherit from her dower, but only if she were wealthy would it have been enough to live on. In that case, she would have been expected to remarry quickly, with the image of the lusty, wealthy widow becoming quite common in the late 16th century.

In fact, a woman without a man was considered a dangerous thing. Without a husband or a father, a woman had no voice. She had little ability to participate in politics or to stand up for her rights, leaving her unprotected: in their book examining life in early modern England, Bucholz and Key suggest “this was a society which simply did not know what to do with or where to fit women with money and experience” (Bucholz and Key, Early Modern England 175). Fletcher further highlights how women could be seen as dangerous: “Women were seen as possessing a powerful and potentially destructive sexuality which made them naturally lascivious, predatory, and most serious of all, once their desire was fully aroused, insatiable” (Fletcher 5). A sexually experienced woman with means of her own to survive was not an acceptable presence in Elizabethan England; there were fears that a sexually experienced woman who was not being satisfied nightly by her husband would, quite simply, run rampant.
There was also the greater fear of (and fascination with) witchcraft. The majority of people tried and convicted of witchcraft were single women, particularly widows and poor women, women with no protection from men, and women who fell outside the confines of the maid/wife/widow identities. Stemming from humoral theory, it was feared that a woman’s leakiness could more facilely let in the devil. It would be easy for an angry woman to mutter a curse, or spout vindictive words, and when misfortune befalls the victim, it is blamed upon the devil’s influence, and she is labeled a witch. Language was one of her primary tools to defend herself, and often it was twisted against her.

There is an evident binary distinction drawn between man and woman, which evolves not from genitalia, but from a medieval understanding of the body wherein woman was weaker than man. This binary distinction allowed for the subjugation of women, explaining why men were the dominant sex. Within the tumult of the 16th century, it was easier to maintain a way of life if men and women had distinct gender roles. It was most convenient to define woman as the opposite of man as a way to control her, an opposition reinforced by the biblical portrayals of Adam and Eve. As can be seen from the previous pages, a large part of the Elizabethan female identity was rooted in the male fear of and desire to tame women (Orgel 36, 49). These images of the ideal woman only show certain preferred facets of the possibilities of being an Elizabethan woman. As with any age, what was considered the ideal and what actually existed were two different images. Naturally, there is more to an Elizabethan woman than merely what she was expected to, or what it was hoped she would, be. The ideal woman was a myth.
THE REALITY

Until recently, the story of women has been fairly one-sided. The “chaste, silent, and obedient” trope has pervaded scholarship, with the idea that a woman’s place was in the home becoming a ubiquitous belief. However, more recent and in-depth scholarship has begun to look for evidence of women in new places, attempting to define more realistically the life of an Elizabethan woman. The general consensus within this new scholarship is that history has suppressed the statistics regarding working women as a way to promote the dominant patriarchy, although Fletcher recognizes that this patriarchy is not “immovable and monumental . . . a system fired by an undifferentiated and consistent male commitment to domination and control in every sphere of life” (xvi) as it tends to be recognized today. This statement refers to a specific early modern patriarchy which was not necessarily intent on suppressing the “weaker sex” but was rather operating under misguided notions rooted in early philosophy as to what a woman was, and of what she was capable.

Greenblatt, Fletcher, and others have begun to find evidence of a stronger female presence in the guild rosters than was previously thought. Women may have comprised as high as 45% of guild members, in trades from wool to fruits and vegetables. Russell West-Pavlov highlights a parallel between the female shop-keeper and the whore: a customer is invited inside, often to the woman’s home, and sold something, which could easily be misconstrued as the woman’s body (172). This parallel mirrors the witchcraft accusation; often it was easier to deal with women by labeling them as whores and witches rather than addressing them as legitimate business owners and healers. They did not easily fall into the maid/widow/wife scheme, which made them problematic. Usually it was the widow whose husband had no heirs who would end up taking over the merchant business, or running the
estate until she could remarry or name an heir before her death. West-Pavlov notes that
“The profile of women’s work was undergoing transformation: women were being excluded
from some ‘public’ professions, and other occupations they undertook outside the home
were being redefined as ‘domestic’” (3). Through the Elizabethan period, as the early
modern world began to shift, so did business, and women were written out of the new
advancements. It becomes clear that keeping women out of the business realm was not only
a way to control women but also a way to control the economy, limiting the scope of agents
involved. Exploring the binary system of gender in the early modern period, West-Pavlov
concludes:

> It would seem that it became increasingly necessary in the English early
> modern context to reinforce and redefine this binary opposition by an
> intensification of the differentiating process, so as to strengthen the contours
> and the internal identities of patriarchal masculinity and its subordinate other
> within a rapidly evolving economic situation. (West-Pavlov 66)

Here West-Pavlov makes a crucial point. While women had been involved in the economy,
in all manner of business and societal affairs, drawing a distinction between the genders had
become economically and politically useful, even though the delineation of gender roles was
primarily a social imposition.

The definition of identity, and particularly gendered identity, in Elizabethan England
is difficult to establish, a dilemma articulated perfectly by Anthony Fletcher: “The sources
for the history of gender in early modern England are at the same time multifarious and
irritatingly unsatisfactory. For gender shows itself above all in the mind, in the intimacies of
personal behaviour and the unspoken and often unrecorded conventions of private and
public life” (Fletcher xix). Gendered identities are not a part of recorded history, as Fletcher
points out that identity is typically an internal property, therefore not one that is reflected in
the written record of daily life. Nor is it known how Elizabethan women understood their own identities, since again they did not write down analyses of their internal lives. What little is recorded is derived from many sources, creating a contradictory, evocative narrative instead of an authoritative view on identity. Alison Findlay notes, “New historicist and cultural materialist critics such as Greenblatt, Dollimore and Belsey have argued that, for Shakespeare’s contemporaries, the self was constituted by outside forces (social, linguistic and cultural) rather than existing as a unified inner core of identity” (189). This statement indicates that a woman would have been identified by the forces around her, instead of through an immanent, internal impulse to be her own person. Fraser identifies one of these major forces: “Since, in principle, Renaissance women were denied a public or social role except as negative reflections of their husbands or fathers, they lacked the foundation of an identity and were automatically ‘nothing’” (189).

The idea of man and woman as “thing” and “no thing” encapsulates how a woman’s identity existed as the opposite of a man; she was defined by what she was not. This concept indicates the 16th century’s understanding of gendered bodies; male and female were two states of being, not determined by genitalia but by medical humoural theory. Physicians believed women, like men, were ruled by their humours, but that their humours were the less desirable; Bucholz and Key relate how “humoral medical theory saw women’s bodies as excessively moist and cold, their spirits alternating between hysterical passion and stolid passivity” (Early Modern England 163). West-Pavlov articulates the humoural belief that women were especially “leaky,” weak and porous – the opposite of the ideal hard, masculine body (145-163). More fluids than usual came out of her (she cried too much, and menstruated every month), which caused her to talk more than usual.
Recent scholarship suggests that the Renaissance notions of gender were somewhat fluid as a result of the humours, which could be rebalanced with time and effort. The idea that gender is fluid originates with Galen, an ancient Greek physician and philosopher who also originated the idea of the humours. Stephen Orgel finds evidence of the belief that a woman could turn into a man at any time if her humours permitted, if she became hot enough, and a man could turn back into a woman if he did not maintain his heat. Orgel suggests also that many men, and society as a whole, were afraid this would happen: “Early modern moralists continually reminded their charges that manhood was not a natural condition but a quality to be striven for and maintained only through constant vigilance, and even then with the utmost difficulty” (19). Orgel presents this idea as being axiomatic, and has sources to back up his claim, but other scholars have not joined in its pursuit. Some medieval medical theory held that woman was merely the deformation of man, with the ovaries being internal testes that could drop at any time. West-Pavlov argues that, by the end of the 16th century, genital differentiation began to emerge as a way to understand gender: a woman’s womb was a separate body part from a man’s penis. These notions of gender fluidity contradict the rigid social roles portrayed in the recorded history. Perhaps gendered identity was similarly not as inflexible.

That is not to say that social roles were not informative of identity. Clearly, the physical body had a large impact on the perception of one’s identity; so too did one’s station in life. Several scholars have investigated the intersection of outer forces and inner being in Renaissance England. Stephen Greenblatt refers to the Renaissance practice of creating one’s individual identity with the term “self-fashioning.” He describes it as “the imposition upon a person of a physical form,” which Greenblatt extrapolates into the creation of “a
distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving” (Renaissance Self-Fashioning 2). Russell West-Pavlov has identified the private and public spheres as particularly central to identity, especially gendered identity. He notes how the idea of being in private was still a public state of being, and that each gender had different roles and rules in each space, suggesting that the early modern period was the beginning of a coalescence of gendered spaces (the masculine public, the feminine private) which continued through the 1950s. He also argues “contemporaries had a clear idea of interior selfhood, but one which was based upon an humoral equilibrium, so that the inner self was never hermetically sealed off from its surroundings” (42). Michael Carl Schoenfeldt’s book Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England (1999) elaborates the idea of humoural identity, suggesting that the Renaissance sense of self was developed based on what was put into and excreted from the body, though his analysis seems a bit reductionist. Religion’s effect on the creation of individual identity cannot be overlooked, particularly the role models depicted in the Bible as the nonpareil of character and behavior.

Ultimately, Greenblatt’s description of self-fashioning is the most useful in understanding the layers comprising an Elizabethan gendered identity:

[W]e may say that self-fashioning occurs at the point of encounter between an authority and an alien, that what is produced in this encounter partakes of both the authority and the alien that is marked for attack, and hence that any achieved identity always contains within itself the signs of its own subversion or loss. (Renaissance Self-Fashioning 9)

As shown above, woman was most often defined by what she was not: man. Greenblatt’s definition embraces the totalities described in many Elizabethan texts, while contextualizing identity within the Elizabethan hierarchy.
Stephen Orgel, writing on how gender is created, points out a pivotal idea – that just because the discourses demanded women fulfill one idealized notion, the actual fact of the early modern woman was that she could have just as many variances as the contemporary woman. “The Renaissance construction of women emanates from a variety of contradictory discourses. This does not distinguish it from the modern construction of women (or, for that matter, men), which is hardly single or unconflicted; but even within its own terms there is nothing anomalous about it” (Orgel 123). The Elizabethan woman should be “chaste, silent, and obedient,” yet she might have been a member of a guild. Divorce was nearly impossible but separate living was often tolerated. Multiple marriages were common and widows could be dangerously lascivious. Ultimately, it is reductionist to believe that all women strived to be “chaste, silent, and obedient,” or that they all were content in their marriages because their primary function was procreation. Orgel goes on to state that

It is an ideology that contains its contradictions by allowing them to be contradictions; the contradictions – what it sees as threatening it – are essential to it, what make it work. It sees itself as always in danger, and exerts its power by always discovering repetitions of a primary fall from grace, which, since this is a patriarchy, was a rebellion against the father. (124)

He goes on to point out that the prevailing ideology most often reflected the hopes of the ruling class, not the actuality. The actuality is nearly impossible to identify, though the preceding pages attempt to come near it.

Despite these contradictions, or perhaps even because of them, the role of women can be articulated in terms of the king’s two bodies theory. The gendered identities reflect the king’s two bodies theory in that one body natural, which is feminine and the weaker of the two, can become greater than it was, perfected through its union with the masculine, strong, perfect body politic. In fact, the union is desirable, and when the two bodies are not
in accord, chaos ensues. The king’s two bodies theory embraces the accepted contradictions of female identity and uses them to a political advantage. What can be concluded is that the perception of woman was nearly as important as the reality; the king’s two bodies theory often allowed Elizabeth to manipulate that perception during her reign.

**The Queens**

So far, most of what has been shown applies to the average woman; a woman who became queen had to be more than the average woman as a matter of necessity; she even had to be more perfect than the ideal. Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth had both grown up in the courtly world, learning how to navigate the morass of their father’s relationships and whims. Queen Catherine of Aragon, Henry’s first wife, had set a precedent as the first woman of the English Renaissance. A devout Catholic, she financially supported arts and philosophy in England. Reports indicate that she was the epitome of what a queen should be: well-loved by the people and weathering Henry’s interrogation of their marriage with grace. Henry’s subsequent queens had much with which to contend. While Catherine had occasionally been left as Queen Regent when Henry went abroad, of the following wives, only Catherine Parr served as Queen Regent. Catherine of Aragon became the standard by which Henry’s subsequent wives were judged; none of them lived up to her standard, either in the king’s eyes or the people’s. (To be fair, Jane Seymour may have done, had she lived beyond the birth of her son.) Catherine would have been the image in her daughter Mary’s mind when she came to the throne. Elizabeth, as Anne Boleyn’s daughter, would have had a slightly different perspective on queenship, though certainly Catherine had set the bar high for being loved by the people.
While Henry VIII famously wanted sons to ensure that his throne was secure, he certainly cared for his daughters as well. As biographer G. J. Meyer points out, both Mary and Elizabeth were educated, learning to read and write as well as to play music, to dance, to paint, and to embroider. Mary wrote and spoke Latin and French, loved music and dance, and played several instruments. She had been taught theology and Catholic literature by her mother, Catherine. As for Elizabeth, she was encouraged to become the equal of men in learning and to outdo ‘the vaunted paragons of Greece and Rome’ . . . she read and conversed fluently in Latin, French, Greek, Spanish, Italian, and Welsh . . . Her interest in philosophy and history was enduring, and throughout her life she would try to set aside three hours each day to read historical books. (Weir 14)

Following Henry’s death, his son Edward by his third wife (Jane Seymour) became King Edward VI at the age of 9. When Mary came to the throne six years later, she made it clear that she didn’t think Edward had truly been able to rule because he had been a minor for the span of his kingship. There was a small rebellion when the lord Northumberland attempted to put the Lady Jane Grey on the throne, as she had been named successor by Edward VI. But in the 1543 Act of Succession, Henry VIII had declared that if Edward died without heirs, Mary would inherit, and the heirs of her body, and then Elizabeth and the heirs of hers. Mary and Elizabeth were still considered bastards at the time of the Act, and Henry’s marriages to their mothers were still nullified, which G.J. Meyer identifies as “the first time in history an English king was claiming the right to choose his successors” (386, original emphasis). Mary had a stronger claim than Jane, but even if Northumberland had succeeded, it is clear that the only valid inheritors to the throne were women. Meyer also contextualizes the importance of this succession: “Throughout the thousand-plus years of post-Roman English history, there had been only one attempt to place a female claimant on
the throne, and that had led (back in the twelfth century, when King Henry I died leaving only a daughter) to years of disorder and war” (370). A woman’s right to the throne was a contested idea, but at least Mary had been selected by Henry VIII and was clearly in the line of succession; Jane’s claim was not nearly so strong or supported.

Mary’s gender immediately became a major facet of her reign, as she was the first queen regnant to be crowned; she was not queen by marriage (as a queen consort would be), but queen on her own account. Mary, and Elizabeth when her time came, dealt with this by using all the processes for her coronation as were used for a king, not a queen consort. Thus she announced herself as the true and legitimate ruler, despite her gender. She often referred to herself, and was referred to by others, as “prince,” a title meant to identify her power as being the equivalent of any man’s. Mary described herself as the country’s “sovereign lord and virgin bride” (Duncan 21), an identity that served her throughout her reign. Sarah Duncan describes hers as a “militant Marian identity” (28), wherein Mary attempted to play up her image as a virginal, benevolent mother figure who would fight hard for her people and her beliefs, especially when it came to restoring the Roman Catholic faith. Utilizing this Catholic religious iconography helped Mary to legitimize herself as a ruler despite her gender. In March 1554, several months after she ascended to the throne, Parliament passed the Act Concerning Royal Power, stating that “All Regall Power Digniti... etc. belong unto her Highnes... in as full large and ample maner as it hathe done heretofore to any other her most noble Progenitours, Kings of this Realme” (qtd. in Duncan 58). In other words, Mary had as much power as ruler as all previous kings, though they had not required an act of Parliament to affirm as much because of their gender. (This Act may also have been necessary due to Mary’s royal status; as Catherine of
Aragon’s daughter, she had been the first legitimate heir, then declared a bastard as her mother’s marriage was annulled, then reinstated to the line of succession in the last weeks of Henry VIII’s life. This Act prevented rebellion on the grounds that she was illegitimate.

Mary’s marriage was, of course, a critical decision early in her reign; after her father’s numerous wives and alliances, Mary’s husband had to be someone who would secure her queenship and not challenge her power. She had already gone through half a dozen engagements throughout her life, all for political purposes. An English nobleman would have been good for the country; a native-born man who could win over the people and who understood England. But the Great Chain of Being dictated that an Englishwoman be subservient to her husband, and a queen could not be ruled over by her husband and king consort. Yet marrying a foreigner could have disastrous consequences; England could find itself subjected to another country, or with a bad alliance.

In the end, Mary married Philip of Spain, a connection that caused no small amount of anxiety due to his Catholicism. There was an unusual inequality in their union; as king consort, Philip could not rule the kingdom on his own (which was no small point of contention for him, as he repeatedly tried to be named King, not king consort). In a new twist, Philip was the one in the relationship who had to insist on binding marital language before he would travel to England (usually it was the lady who was afraid to travel for fear of arriving at her new home and finding she was not wanted after all). There were two common types of marriage vows in medieval Europe – de praesenti and de futuro. De praesenti meant that the present verb tense was used, indicating that the marriage was immediately effective. De futuro used the future tense, as would be appropriate in the case of young nobles’ betrothals; the marriage itself was guaranteed, but had not yet taken effect.
Philip insisted on a de praesenti marriage before he would join Mary in England, a stronger and more immediate bond than the de futuro contract.

This is a prime example of how Mary took on the masculine role and Philip took on the feminine in their union. Their marriage was a necessary and difficult situation that the two had to negotiate; many feared that Mary would simply submit to Philip though he was a foreigner and a consort, and that he would end up ruling the country. But Meyer points out that “[t]hough Philip was to be styled king of England he was to assist Mary in ruling, not rule himself” (401), and his son from an earlier marriage was not admitted into the line of succession. Meyer later recounts that “Mary gratefully relied on Philip for guidance, support, and even leadership. Members of the council, even those opposed to a foreign marriage, found their dislike for the interloper overridden by their preference for dealing with a male rather than a female monarch. It seemed more natural” (412, original emphasis). Meyer calls Mary an “anomaly” for being a crowned queen not subordinate to a man. Duncan’s portrayal of Mary and Philip’s relationship contrasts with this, depicting Mary as the primary partner who kept Philip in his place. It is unclear how much power Philip truly had in the end, but with only five years in which to establish her rule and their marriage, and two phantom pregnancies as well as the return to Catholicism, Mary seems to have maintained her role as queen and kept Philip relegated to king consort. This clearly did not sit well with Philip, and after he left England in 1555 to return to Spain, he responded to Mary’s requests he return by saying he would only come back if he was formally crowned king, to which Parliament would not agree.

Upon Mary’s death, Elizabeth became queen at the age of 22 and the country settled under a single, strong ruler for the next 45 years, an era now (rather sentimentally) known
as England’s Golden Age. As can be seen in the preceding pages, Elizabeth inherited a country that had undergone several major political and religious upheavals in barely a few decades. When Henry VIII died there were still plenty of issues within the new church to be resolved; not only were people pulled between Catholicism and Protestantism, but many were unsure as to whether or not their souls were safe. Much of Elizabeth’s work built on what Mary had started but where Mary had only 5 years to accomplish her ends, Elizabeth had much more time to establish herself and enact change and stability.

Unlike Mary, Elizabeth’s Protestantism created an added question of whether or not a woman could be the head of the newly created church, particularly when a woman had no power anywhere else in the church. Most church members and clergy found it preposterous that a woman could lead the church, and would not have accepted Elizabeth had she attempted to take up Henry VIII’s position; in the end she was made Supreme Governor of the Church – not the Head, as Henry had been. It was a small concession, but enough to comfort the clergy that a woman was not in charge of ecclesiastical matters. Meyer explains the dilemma, saying that there was a universal conviction that it was unnatural for any woman not to be subordinate to some man (even nuns were “brides of Christ”), or for a queen to rule alone . . . [Elizabeth] took the position, rather, that though her reign was a departure from the natural order of things, God had permitted it as a necessary means of restoring the gospel in England and preserving the kingdom’s autonomy. (460)

Here again the idea of the Great Chain of Being is reflected, and of a woman’s place within it. Elizabeth recognized that she had to be different and become more than was expected of a mere woman in order to succeed and protect her kingdom; her God-anointed body politic allowed this.
There is a famous exchange between Queen Elizabeth and her Keeper of the Records, William Lambarde, regarding Essex’s rebellion, which is recorded in his family’s manuscript:

so her Majestie fell upon the reign of King Richard II. saying, ‘I am Richard II. know ye not that?’

W.L. ‘Such a wicked imagination was determined and attempted by a most unkind Gent. the most adorned creature that ever your Majestie made.’

Her Majestie. ‘He that will forget God, will also forget his benefactors; this tragedy was played 40th times in open streets and houses.’ (qtd. in Chambers 326-327)

The quote likely refers to the fact that one of Essex’s men, Sir Gilly Merricke, had commanded a performance of Shakespeare’s *King Richard II* to be performed the day before they undertook their rebellion with the hope that it would inspire the people to join them.

Elizabeth saw herself reflected in the character of King Richard. As Kantorowicz pointed out, the play engages the dualism of the king’s two bodies in remarkable ways. Kantorowicz divides the doubled bodies into stages: the King (seen in the Welsh coast scene), the Fool (Flint Castle), and the God (the deposition scene). This movement plays into Kantorowicz’s notion of the king’s two bodies theory as a political theology. However, one of the most famous speeches in the play offers a beautiful view of the body natural and the body politic as described in Plowden’s *Reports*. The scene comes in the middle of the play, III.ii., as Richard has returned from Ireland only to find out Bolingbroke is amassing followers.

Let’s talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs,
Make dust our paper and with rainy eyes
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.
Let’s choose executors and talk of wills.
And yet not so, for what can we bequeath
Save our deposed bodies to the ground?
Our lands, our lives and all are Bolingbroke’s,
And nothing can we call our own but death
And that small model of the barren earth
Which serves as paste and cover to our bones.
For God’s sake let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings -
How some have been deposed, some slain in war,
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed -
All murdered. For within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps death his court; and there the antic sits,
Scoffing his state and grinning at his pomp,
Allowing him a breath, a little scene,
To monarchize, be feared and kill with looks,
Infusing him with self and vain conceit,
As if this flesh which walls about our life
Were brass impregnable; and humoured thus,
Comes at the last and with a little pin
Bores through his castle wall, and farewell, king!
Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and blood
With solemn reverence. Throw away respect,
Tradition, form and ceremonious duty,
For you have but mistook me all this while.
I live with bread like you, feel want,
Taste grief, need friends. Subjected thus,
How can you say to me that I am a king? (III.ii.145-177)

Here Richard explores his permanence and impermanence. He wants to talk of wills, of
inheritance and bequeathals, but then bemoans that all belongs to Bolingbroke: Bolingbroke
embodies the new seat of eternity. Instead, Richard begins to focus on his mortality, how
Death permits kings to believe they are immortal, but ultimately Richard is human and feels
hunger, desire, overpowering emotions like grief, and need for human companionship. His
concluding question begs the very answer that the justices originally offered: what sets the
king apart from every other person? Elizabeth saw herself reflected in this overthrown king
as Shakespeare depicted him. Her use of the king’s two bodies theory, in many ways similar
to Richard’s contemplation, also created new connotations as a result of her gender.

Mary and Elizabeth embody the Elizabethan gender paradox: the role of a woman
was one of chastity, silence, and obedience, yet a queen could not be chained that way,
hence these women had to be so much more. They had to embody the ideals put forth for a Renaissance woman yet their positions as queen, their jobs by right and royal birth, required more from them. Had they conformed to those strictures detailed earlier, had they submitted to a man as a godly and obedient woman should, they could not have been effective rulers. Their submission would have wreaked a different sort of havoc upon the 16th century English Great Chain of Being, and on English politics and monarchical beliefs. As much as a woman was expected to submit to and obey her husband, a queen regnant could not submit to her king consort. Such submission would have put a divinely ordained authority into the hands of one who was not God’s anointed. Such acts had caused upheaval with the country in previous centuries, when Henry Bolingbroke took the throne from Richard II, when Henry VI came to the throne at the age of 9 months and had needed advisors to keep the crown in trust, and more recently, when Edward VI had become king at age 9 and his uncle the Duke of Somerset had slowly consolidated power until he was essentially acting king. England believed (and history seemed to substantiate this belief) that when the familial heredity was usurped and when power was seized by those not in the direct line of succession, chaos ensued. Mary and Elizabeth might have been women, but they were Henry VIII’s legitimate (albeit contested) heirs, and as such, were far more worthy to rule the country than any man they might wed.

In order to reconcile the two opposing forces embodied in these women, we look to the theory of the king’s two bodies. The feminine body natural and the masculine body politic, taken together, allowed Mary and Elizabeth to become more than what their gender alone dictated. Fletcher suggests that “[t]he gender system allowed Elizabeth to present herself as a man because of its lack of distinction between male and female bodies” (80). In
theory, Elizabeth’s existence as a woman could be overcome with the correct balance of humours, which were more influential than her genitalia. In acting like a man, Elizabeth could utilize her androgyne to deflect the issue of her sex. Findlay notes that being queen was fundamentally a performance: “The androgynous image of the queen pointed up the performative nature of monarchy, so undermining royal authority. At the same time, and perhaps even more disturbingly, it exposed the performative nature of gender itself; highlighting the arbitrary relations between sex, power and identity” (174). While Elizabeth’s androgyne did not necessarily undermine her ability to fulfill her role as queen (on the contrary, she negotiated the boundaries admirably between being a woman and being, by 16th century definition, a king), it is useful to consider the performativity of gender and queenship within the context of Elizabeth’s reign. Biographer Nigel Saul relates how Richard II used to throw luxurious dinner parties wherein he would sit upon a dais in full regalia, just to be looked at, clearly performing the role of king without actually enacting the duties required of a king (339-340). Mary and Elizabeth both utilized their gender as necessary, to their benefits. Alison Weir, in her biography of Elizabeth, describes how

[s]he had also learned to use her femininity to advantage, artfully stressing her womanly weaknesses and shortcomings, even [indulging] in effective storms of weeping, whilst at the same time displaying many of the qualities most admired in men. She had wisdom, common-sense, staying power, integrity and tenacity, which along with the ability to compromise, a hard-headed sense of realism, and a devious, subtle brain, would make her a monarch worthy of respect. (17)

Even her self-fashioned identity of the Virgin Queen, an icon that persists today, exudes a sense of performativity: Elizabeth’s own understanding of how she was identified and could be perceived by her people. “Like her father she had always been a master of political theater, creating a jewel-encrusted image with which to awe the whole world and
concealing herself behind it . . . fabricating the persona of Gloriana, the strong, wise and

good Virgin Queen” (Meyer 436). Given her dalliances with Robert Dudley and the Earl of

Essex, few historians believe that Elizabeth remained a virgin throughout her long life. But

her choice to portray herself as one, married to her country and her people, allowed her to

perform an aspect of her role as monarch: the dedication of her body to England. So
dedicated was she that another man could not take from her what belonged to England.

Elizabeth enhanced this depiction of herself in later years through the use of heavy white

makeup,\(^3\) coy flirtations at parties, and elaborate dress, wig, and jewelry, all designed to
maintain, and thereby perform, the image of herself in her younger, virginal days. This
depiction was manipulated when she needed to appear more masculine, as at Tilbury where
she rode horseback and carried a weapon. Orgel highlights how this particular instance
became a propaganda tool, saying that the recorded image “indicates the changing nature of
the ideological discourse of gender roles in the period: the armor is a Jacobean invention;
the contemporary account says only that Elizabeth was on horseback and carried a
truncheon” (117).

Elizabeth’s manipulation of her identity demonstrates the idea noted earlier of
gender fluidity. Had gender been rigidly defined by “penis” and “vagina,” Elizabeth’s
arguments about her “heart and stomach of a king” would have been useless. Within the
scope of gender fluidity, it becomes much more feasible for a monarch to have a feminine
body natural and a masculine body politic. This fluidity aided Elizabeth in utilizing the
theory of the king’s two bodies to her advantage, and further highlights the gendered
implications of the body natural and body politic.

\(^3\) The makeup was used to cover scars from a bout of smallpox a few years into her reign; Elizabeth
was notorious for her vanity.
Mary and Elizabeth both held masculine bodies politic in their feminine bodies natural. This invites a comparison of the body politic and body natural to the female gendered identity explored thus far. Many of the same language resurfaces: the body natural is the monarch’s private body, while the body politic is the public persona. Similarly, the private space is feminine and the public, masculine. The body natural is weak and fallible, corresponding to the language used to describe the female body in humoural theory as weak, porous, and leaky. By contrast, the body politic is perfect, which resembles the hard, ideal masculine body. The female body, as with the body natural, has many heirs of its body, but the masculine body can have only one successor. Finally, the female body is the corporeal body compared to the masculine spiritual body; the feminine commonwealth compared to the masculine head. In uniting masculine and feminine, Mary and Elizabeth were able to become fully their own women, the first Queens Regnant of England, complete with body natural and body politic.

Similar dualities characterize the women portrayed on the Elizabethan stage. An Elizabethan woman owed a duty to the men in her life, whether her husband or her father. When the man cannot fulfill his role by himself, she steps in, blurring the lines between masculine and feminine. She fights with passion, makes daring speeches, and alters the course of events as she struggles between the two sides of herself, ultimately redefining the limiting terms of being a woman in her position. The theater offered a forum wherein the major female characters – such as Marlowe’s Queen Isabella, Webster’s the Duchess of Malfi, Ford’s Putana, the anonymously created Alice, Shakespeare’s Queen Margaret, Lady Macbeth, Desdemona and Emilia, and the Nurse – all struggle with this duality, a duality which extends much further into the identity of a woman than has yet been explored. The
theory of the king’s two bodies subverts the expectations of gender, particularly as depicted in the marriage union. While in political theory it is hoped that the bodies natural and politic exist in harmony, on the stage they struggle against one another, creating tension and conflict. Through this struggle, Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights find new ways to depict women on the stage, reflecting England’s queens and permitting the early modern woman to inhabit more identities than merely “chaste, silent, and obedient.”
CHAPTER THREE

QUEENS

To begin analysis of early modern dramatic literature through the theory of the king’s two bodies, it is logical to apply the theory in its most literal sense: to monarchs. Queen Margaret from Shakespeare’s first tetralogy (Henry VI parts 1, 2, and 3, and Richard III) and Queen Isabella from Christopher Marlowe’s Edward II are excellent subjects for this task. Both acquire the body politic out of necessity, due to their marriages to weak kings who show no interest in properly ruling the country.

These plays are examples of the English history play, a genre popular during Elizabeth’s reign. They look back to England’s past, and help tell the story of how England arrived at its current state, with its current monarch. “Any story about an earlier monarch could, and would, be taken as reflecting upon, predicting, or praising the current monarch, or as offering a potential model or critique of living political figures” (Garber, After All 90). Edward II and Henry VI’s reigns helped lead England towards Queen Elizabeth, and the stories of their follies reinforced Elizabeth as the true and legitimate monarch. Mark Thornton Burnett sees Edward II as “a theatrical realization of political and sexual contests, which only brings to mind the contradictory position of the Queen in Elizabethan culture” (Edward II 93). Elizabeth’s precarious position meant continual investigations into the role of the monarch, and how exactly she had inherited the crown. Therefore these plays also investigate the question, as articulated by Matthew R. Martin in the introduction to Edward II, of “in what circumstances, by whom, and with what means can a monarch be legitimately resisted and even removed?” (22).
The *Henry VI* plays and *Edward II* were written around 1592-1593. It is unclear which play was written first, though many scholars enjoy speculating that one playwright built on elements provided by the other playwright. Regardless, numerous similarities arise between Shakespeare's Margaret and Marlowe's Isabella. Originally, the English traced their claim to the French throne through Isabella. Queen Isabella, coincidentally, was known as the “she-wolf of France” before Shakespeare used the term to describe Margaret in *Henry VI part 3*, exemplifying the many parallels between Marlowe’s and Shakespeare's heroines. While the stories told are rooted in history, Marlowe and Shakespeare fictionalize many aspects, including added romantic relationships and accusations of witchcraft. Both playwrights compress the stories, spanning decades in scenes and rewriting historical elements in order to create clear dramatic action. This sort of adaptation helps to demonstrate how Edward’s and Henry’s queens justifiably acquired a command of the body politic that rivaled the king’s power over it. Their portrayals on the stage highlight a possession of the body politic that originated in Elizabeth.

Shakespeare's first Henriad tetralogy relates the story of the Wars of the Roses, England’s civil war between the houses of Lancaster and York. The plays begin with a young Henry VI on the throne; *Part 1* focuses on the Hundred Years' War with France, highlighting Joan of Arc’s involvement and ending with Margaret and Henry’s marriage against political advice. *Part 2* details Jack Cade’s rebellion, a moment which demonstrated the king’s weakened power and allowed the other players to formalize their polarized sides. Margaret emerges as a powerful woman whose relationship with Suffolk undermines her authority over and creates additional resentment in the other noblemen. *Part 3* then focuses on the battles between York and Lancaster, including Margaret’s taunting and killing of the
Duke of York and the rise of his three sons. Richard III highlights the last of the Wars of the Roses monarch, his rise and fall from power, and the restoration of the “true” monarchy with Henry VII’s victory. Margaret remains on the scene but is no longer a major player in the political machinations, relegated to the role of witch.

Christopher Marlowe’s Edward II relates a similar era of civil turbulence in England’s history, perhaps the first one since the establishment of the monarchy. The play opens with Edward I’s death and Edward II’s coronation, upon which the new king recalls his favorite, Gaveston, from exile. Gaveston’s return and the king’s clear preference for his friend enrage the nobles; they believe Gaveston, who is of a lower status, is influencing the king to make poor decisions, spending lavishly on parties and entertainments instead of safe-guarding the realm. Queen Isabella, Edward’s wife, has been usurped in his affections by Gaveston. She and the lords unite to bring Gaveston down. Upon his death, Edward is enraged and declares war on the lords, elevating a new favorite, Spencer, out of spite. Isabella now gains the loyalty of the lords and aid from France; Edward is soon captured and his son Edward III named king, though Mortimer (one of the noble lords) and Isabella rule in his name. Edward dies in prison and Edward III blames Mortimer and Isabella; Mortimer is killed and Isabella banished.

Margaret and Isabella rise to power amidst civil war, as Elizabeth rose to power in the midst of religious and political turmoil, a time which Marilyn Williamson identifies as particularly traumatic:

Of all forms of human conflict, none is so terrifying as civil war, which sets neighbor against neighbor, father against son. Therefore, it seems quite natural that in writing the history of the Wars of the Roses, Shakespeare and the chroniclers on whom he depends would mitigate its horror by displacing much of the opprobrium for the conflicts on a series of women, who are frequently powerful and associated with one or more traditional qualities of
strong women: amazons, prophecy, witchcraft, unnatural ambition, sexual wantonness. (Williamson 41)

A civil war is an unnatural phenomenon in that it pits father against son and brother against brother. Playwrights needed to temper that unnaturalness; Williamson suggests that women are the scapegoat onto whom these “conflicts” are forced. Indeed, several scholars have written about Margaret as scapegoat through the Wars of the Roses tetralogy (see Liebler and Shea, M. Williamson). In light of the theory of the king’s two bodies, much of the unnaturalness within the warring country stems from a king who is incapable of his duty, which permits a queen to then acquire his body politic. Marjorie Garber articulates the implications of gender within the tetralogy:

> Queen Elizabeth herself was the descendant of the ‘union’ that took place after the Wars of the Roses, and the anomaly of her reign – a powerful woman on the throne, but an unmarried woman without an heir – is clearly reflected, and deflected, in the play’s models of English (male) heroism and dangerous French (female) opposition and perfidy. (Garber, After All 91, regarding *Henry VI part I*)

Margaret’s and Isabella’s stories reconcile the idea of a woman in power with securing the future inheritance, as shall be shown.

The worlds depicted in Shakespeare’s first tetralogy and Marlowe’s *Edward II* begin as male-dominated worlds into which women intrude. While Margaret and Isabella will be the focus of this chapter, other female characters in the plays should be noted briefly. Kathryn Schwarz, in her Lacanian analysis of the play, notes that “For the female characters of the first tetralogy, gendered convention is not only highly and self-consciously stylized but doubled, presenting femininity and masculinity not as oppositional or mutually displacing terms but as simultaneous performative effects” (142). Schwarz here articulates what distinguishes the ladies of the first tetralogy from other female historical characters;
Joan is considered an Amazon, and Margaret Amazonian, while Eleanor becomes a witch. “The attempt to relegate women to their place within masculinist hierarchies through the simple fact of recognizing them as women ignores another part of the play’s simple facts: that women may be masculine as well” (Schwarz 144, original emphasis). Many scholars attempt to reveal Margaret’s identity only by looking at the outside forces acting upon her (that she is French, beautiful, militaristic, Amazonian, etc.) and not by the gendered identities she lives with (as a wife, a mother, and a queen). Her identity includes all of these identities, making her a more fully-rounded character than the other women portrayed in the play who are purely warriors, wives, or witches. Each one of these identities has a parallel in another female character, but only Margaret embodies them all.

The only woman present besides Isabella in Edward II is young Margaret (not to be confused with Henry VI’s Margaret), Gaveston’s fiancée. However, her two scenes leave her appearing as a silly, love-struck girl with no real sense as to what her marriage to Gaveston will truly entail; she does not provide a gendered context for Isabella as happens in the tetralogy. Charles R. Forker believes that “Marlowe concentrates on the intersection of sexual magnetism with political power at the level of human desire and frustration” (102). Gaveston is required to marry, and Edward is not the only person in the play able to see his virtues. Margaret’s presence thus serves to demonstrate that everyone in the play, even the devil-may-care Gaveston, must navigate the swamp of political intrigue and romantic interest.

The stories of Margaret and Isabella cannot be complete without an aspect of love or sex as well. Whether this fictional addition is dramatically necessary, or just necessary to
link the woman to another man, is unclear. Forker, exploring the connection between carnal
desire and royal figures in history plays, suggests,

Sexual encounters involving royal persons have a potential for conveying the
mysterious power of history in the making, a sense of the future captured in
the instant; for, as is widely recognized, chronicle plays usually seek to embed
their dramatization of the immediate in the broader context of historical flux,
of causes and effects, of past and future – one reason that they typically seem
less self-enclosed than comedies or tragedies. Elizabethan history plays
occasionally use sexually charged moments or erotic situations to provide an
ironic flash of recognition – a kind of epiphany – of what the whirligig of time
has in store for its participants and successors. (124)

The intersection of sexual desire and royal persons is a topic that, historically, has
captivated the public. In recent history, the relationship and marriage between Prince
William and the now Duchess of Cambridge, Kate Middleton, has been highly popular, a
point of cultural fascination. Margaret’s fictionalized love story with Suffolk and Isabella’s
elaborated love story with Mortimer (particularly the early suggestions of it by Gaveston
and Edward) help to humanize these two queens. They are pulled out of the realm of myth
and history, allowing for parallels to be drawn with Elizabeth and her many favorites.
Furthermore, their romantic relationships help catapult them through the changing
relationships of their bodies natural and politic.

**The Body Natural**

England, at the start of both *Henry VI part 1* \(^4\) and *Edward II*, is in a state of uncertainty
that mirrored its position in the late 16\(^{th}\) century. In *Henry VI part 1*, King Henry V has just
died after heroically conquering France. A nine-month-old Henry VI is about to be

\(^4\) There is disagreement on the order in which the *Henry VI* plays were written. Some scholars believe
*Part 1* was written as a prequel, after *Part 2* and *Part 3* were written as a 2-part production. For the
purposes of investigating Margaret’s development as a character, I will be looking at them as though
they were written chronologically, as have many scholars since the 1960s (Pendleton).
crowned, meaning that England is, at the moment, essentially without a king. The language used in the opening scene to describe Henry’s death is finite, absolute; there is no mention of “The King is dead; long live the King!” Rather it appears that the body politic has also died, leaving a gap. The dukes say, “remember your oaths unto King Henry,” referring to Henry V, as Henry VI has not yet been crowned. This is a country looking to its past strength in an effort to keep itself from falling apart in the present power vacuum. Shakespeare does not introduce Henry VI as a character until the third act, by which point he has been described as “an effeminate prince” by his uncle the Duke of Gloucester, and set up in comparison to Talbot, the current hero of the English for his actions in France. Through the ensuing scenes, it becomes clear that Henry is ineffectual. Any time he asks that something be done, nothing happens; it is not until another, older duke speaks that change is effected. In terms of the theory of the king’s two bodies, the body politic is not in Henry’s possession; it is being shared amongst those who would be his advisors in appearance while ruling the realm. Though Henry is king in name, his actions (or lack thereof) demonstrate quite clearly that he does not command the body politic his father once did. The dukes exercise the ability to rule; Talbot commands the army; Henry appears periodically, a pawn in a political game he shows little interest in playing. Even when his marriage to the Duke of Armagnac’s daughter is discussed, Henry shows little interest in her as anything besides a match those who are older and wiser (and, implicitly, bear more power) deem appropriate. Without investment in a single body natural, the body politic is torn apart, ineffective, leaving a power vacuum behind.

Margaret enters into this world in Act V, captured by the Duke of Suffolk who almost immediately falls head over heels in love with her. Critical opinion on the ensuing
scene differs as to whether Margaret is a conniving schemer who immediately attempts to
turn the situation to her advantage, or an innocent virgin who has no clue what could
happen to her and puts herself in the hands of the nearest honorable-seeming man. Kathryn
Schwarz notes how

as she walks onstage, she has an odd effect on the doubled convention, erotic
and political, of fragmentation-as-synthesis: the metaphor that presents the
ruler as the head of the body politic, like the Petrarchan tropes that dissect the
body of the mistress for the pleasure of other men, is displaced by this
economy in which bodies, men's bodies, literally come apart. (155, original
emphasis)

By the end of the scene, Suffolk has clearly fallen in love with Margaret, and plotted to
marry her to Henry so as to keep her close in England. Marilyn L. Williamson recognizes
Suffolk as “the first of several men in the tetralogy for whom love represents a loss of control
over the struggle for power, though this pattern is not yet discernible” (47). The relationship
between Joan of Arc and the Dauphin reinforces this pattern. According to Schwarz, this
loss of control aids in the removal of the body politic from the king, since his body is
literally dismembering itself, dividing itself out of desire. Others have commented on
Margaret’s position as French, entering just before Joan exits the play permanently, serving
as a contrast to the woman who dominates most of Part I. However, David Bevington notes
how Margaret’s ultimate function is stronger than Joan’s: “Even if she is less openly evil
than Joan of Arc, her baleful influence is to be felt as participant, prophetess, and chorus of
doom throughout all the tetralogy” (56).

For most of the scene, Suffolk is a driving force, pushing her towards his ultimate
goal of getting her to England so he can be near her, though this means marrying her to his
king. There is no question that her body natural serves Margaret well in this scene; her
beauty is what spares her in the beginning. She demonstrates a shrewdness in observing
Suffolk talking to himself, and matches him wit for wit throughout their exchange. Her reactions demonstrate an attempt to make the most of a bad situation. Where she initially was a prisoner to an unknown lord, she walks out of the scene as a proposed fiancée to the King of England. As the daughter of an impoverished king, she could hardly hope to make such a good marriage. Her response to Suffolk’s inquiry if she would like to be queen, “To be a queen in bondage is more vile/Than is a slave in base servility;/For princes should be free” (V.iii.112-114), indicates a profound awareness of her situation. Margaret recognizes that her situation as Suffolk’s captive and the King of Naples’ daughter gives her few privileges, though there is hope. She takes her few advantages without crossing the boundaries of virginal propriety: Pennie Downie, who played Margaret for the Royal Shakespeare Company, believes that “given her family’s financial status, there must be the suggestion that her sexuality is all she has to trade for her freedom. She is very young but she also seems here to be experienced” (Jackson and Smallwood 120-121). At the end of the scene, when Suffolk kisses her, Margaret’s response, “That for thyself: I will not so presume/To send such peevish tokens to a king” (V.iii.185-186), indicates she knew what he was truly after, hinting at a depth of character that will be revealed in the following play.

As demonstrated in this first scene and reiterated two scenes later with Henry, Margaret serves as a French intrusion into the English world. She solidifies the royal family, promising heirs for the English throne through her marriage to Henry. She is necessary in that respect – Henry must have a wife, and he is entranced by her as soon as he hears of her, forgetting the earl’s daughter immediately – but she is also the Other. Margaret is French, which makes her exotic, alluring, and therefore powerful. As Gloucester and the others protest this new match, Suffolk argues that only Henry has the right to pick his wife. Suffolk
is reminding the others assembled, as well as Henry, that no one can command the body politic against its will. It belongs solely to Henry, and therefore no man can tell him what to do. This reminder to Henry prompts him to do perhaps more than Suffolk intended. Since Margaret’s father is poor, Henry orders an extra tax on the commons to pay for her dowry and to repay Suffolk, and gives some of the hard-won land in France back to the King of Naples. Though this action is impolitic, it is Henry’s prerogative, as Bevington explains:

First, a king’s will is law, even if it be a sudden, selfish, and unpoltic whim. Second, since even the best of men are occasionally sinful, a youthful desire for wanton delights must be condoned. Henry thus reduces his self-justification to the lowest common denominator of human conduct, the bestiality of which all men are capable. (57)

Henry, finally having owned his body politic in settling his own marriage, immediately begins to abuse it for that same marriage, for the wants of his body natural, which immediately sets him at a huge political disadvantage. By contrast, actress Penny Downie believes “we see [Margaret] acting politically while [Henry] follows his own spiritual and religious path” (Jackson and Smallwood 122), already showing herself capable of more than Henry. Suffolk, meanwhile, erroneously thinks he will be able to control Margaret and therefore the King; this misguided thought is further proof that England is still in need of a strong ruler, and that Margaret is ready to take up the vacant post. Forker points out that, “Ironically, it was Margaret who controlled Suffolk (as she controls the king) rather than the reverse, and we recognize that the duke’s fantasy of power was self-delusion” (Forker 118).

Curiously, in the very first meeting between Henry and Margaret, the language juxtaposing their misplaced feminine and masculine traits begins, which will continue for the rest of the tetralogy. Hall, one of Shakespeare’s sources for the tetralogy, describes Margaret:
of stomack and corage, more like to a man, then a woman,’ as ‘desirous of glory, and covetous of honor, and of reason, pollicye, counsaille, and other giftes and talentes of nature, belongyng to a man, full and flowing,’ and as a ‘manly woman’ who would come to dominate and govern her simpler husband. (qtd. in Garber 91)

Suffolk’s language in describing Margaret is very similar, “Her valiant courage and undaunted spirit/(More than in women commonly is seen)/Will answer our hope in issue of a king” (V.iv.70-72). The masculine terminology promises what shall be seen of Margaret in the coming play. Henry says shortly thereafter, “I feel such sharp dissension in my breast,/Such fierce alarums both of hope and fear,/As I am sick with working of my thoughts” (V.iv.84-86). In Engendering a Nation, Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin explore the formulation of gender, articulating how “In early modern sexual discourses, an effeminate man was typically one who, like the inferior being, woman, let passion control his reason” (67). Giving in to emotions like passion and fear indicates how Henry, already, begins to take the feminine role in his relationship with Margaret. He is the one prone to weeping; she is the fearless warrior. Eric Heinze defines these roles as “the idealistic ruler of law” and the Machiavellian (151); he also equates Henry’s style of reign with an outdated medieval political mindset. Heinze’s definitions highlight the opposition seen between Margaret and Henry; the lines quoted above predict the roles each will grow into in the ensuing plays. In the beginning of Henry VI part 2, Margaret is still introduced as wife and queen, known through her relationship to Henry and not yet a force on her own. She slips easily into the royal “we” after this introduction, but in the first scene of Part 2 it is still Gloucester and Winchester who are attempting to control the body politic. The power vacuum still exists, which justifies York’s belief that he will someday have the crown, though Margaret will take the body politic first.
Edward II begins with a power vacuum similar to, though a very different situation from, *Henry VI part I*. Edward has become king after his father’s death. Though he is not an infant like Henry, he is a similarly ineffectual ruler following on the heels of a militarily heroic king. Edward I had conquered much of the British isle, leaving his son to deal with continued unrest on the Scottish border and a war with France. Forker reads Edward thus: “what is natural and unnatural for a man who is both a head of state and a vulnerable human being – a figure hobbled by stubborn will and strong romantic desire coupled to a dependent personality” (104). As Gaveston runs home to rejoin Edward, recalled from banishment as the favorite of the new king, he meets poor men, one of whom was a soldier in the Scottish wars, now unemployed and discontent that he has been seemingly abandoned by his new king, Edward II. Edward has deserted his military and forsaken military endeavors, the first marks of an ineffectual king. Wolfgang Clemen notes that, though Edward II is the title character of the play, he is completely passive, always being acted upon and only acting on his own when he desires one of his favorites. This is particularly seen in Edward’s relationship with the lords, with their active denunciation of him. They openly challenge him, protesting against his relationship with Gaveston and the impropriety of recalling Gaveston from exile. They are so blatantly disrespectful of Edward’s crown that he confronts them: “Am I a king and must be overruled?” (I.133).5 This behavior continues throughout the play, escalating into a full civil war. If Edward were a proper king, if he fully and appropriately embodied the body politic, the lords would not be able to so blatantly defy him nor would they want to.

5 Citations from *Edward II* refer to scene and line numbers; the text is not divided into acts.
Isabella enters into this world as abruptly as Margaret; though, unlike Margaret, she has been a part of this world for a long time. Gregory Bredbeck, exploring the various narratives of and around the play, notices how “In other chronicles, the queen’s role is highlighted and demonized; in Marlowe’s play it is silenced and withdrawn from the audience” (145). In the first scenes, at least, Bredbeck is correct. Throughout Edward’s first confrontation with the peers and Gaveston’s arrival, no mention is made of the Queen, or of the fact that Edward is married. Yet her primary role, her first introduction to the audience, is as Edward’s wife, mourning his lack of husbandly affections. Holinshed, one of the main sources for Marlowe’s play, blames Isabella for the falling out between her and Edward, and therefore for much of what comes afterward:

[A] lamentable case, that such division should be between a king and his quene, being lawfullie married, and having issue of their bodies, which ought to have made that their copulation more comfortable: but (alas) what will not a woman be drawn and allured unto, if by evil counsel she be once assaulted? And what will she leave undone, though never so inconvenient to those that should be most deere unto hir, so hir owne fansie and will be satisfied? (qtd. in Bartels, Spectacles 152)

As Isabella enters the stage, Mortimer asks where she is going, to which she responds that she is going to the forest to live in her sadness since “my lord the King regards me not,/But dotes upon the love of Gaveston” (II.49-50). Her only function in the play, at this point, is as Edward’s wife and, therefore, as a contrast to Gaveston; Marlowe seems to disagree with Holinshed that the lords’ disagreement with Edward is Isabella’s fault, as their griefs are listed against Gaveston. Rather, Isabella’s presence highlights the difference between what Edward should do and what Edward wants to do, the difference between his body politic and his body natural. As a king, he should be paying attention to his country and his people; as a husband, he should be paying attention to his wife and queen. However, both are
superseded by his desire for Gaveston. Whether this desire is sodomitic, homoerotic, or purely rooted in friendship is irrelevant; the reality is that the desire of Edward’s body natural for his friend Gaveston has overthrown his duty as king and husband. Isabella, however, remains a dutiful wife. In her first scene, she demonstrates no ambitions beyond keeping king and country happy:

Then let him stay, for rather than my lord
Shall be oppressed by civil mutinies,
I will endure a melancholy life
And let him frolic with his minion. (II.64-67).

This outburst results from Lancaster and Warwick’s assertion that they will go to war in order to remove Gaveston from the king. Rather than burden her husband further, Isabella will be a good wife and tolerate her situation in favor of her husband’s happiness and safety. Her language focuses entirely on her marriage to Edward throughout the scene. Though some critics find evidence here of Isabella showing preference for Mortimer already through the use of endearments such as “sweet,” these endearments are common to Isabella throughout the play, and throughout Marlowe’s body of work. She shows little interest in Mortimer, though he is the only lord who talks directly to her. Unlike Margaret, Isabella gives no hint of what is to come, of what she will have to do; the lords provide that foreshadowing.

THE BODY POLITIC

Without a strong king embracing the body politic, potential arises for others to take control; Margaret and Isabella become the central figures on which the body politic settles. Through the aid of noble lords, and fed by illicit romantic relationships, Margaret and Isabella do for their countries what their husbands show no interest or desire to accomplish.
Margaret’s acquisition of the body politic begins in *Henry VI part 2* in I.iii., the scene with Suffolk and the supplicants. Many scholars interpret this scene as proof that Margaret has already gotten ahead of herself, comparing her with Eleanor, Duchess of Gloucester. However, as Queen, Margaret’s actions are justifiable. Schwarz argues that Margaret “in short, is dangerous in this play because she is conventional, because desire for her makes her husband an effeminate cuckold and because her own feminine vanity makes her a formidable political conspirator” (156, original emphasis). In other words, part of Margaret’s ability to climb stems from her introduction as primarily wife and queen, two conventional female roles. As the supplicants wave about their petition for the Lord Protector, Margaret takes it. Given that by this point Henry is of age and married, there is no more need for Gloucester to act as Lord Protector. Margaret, as Queen, has every right to take the petition, and the action asserts her ownership of the Queen’s body politic. Many queens, historically, responded to petitioners and the like, and would plead their cases with the king if they saw fit. While her response, tearing the petition in pieces, is undoubtedly harsh, it is not an inappropriate decision for her to make as Queen. This action is followed quickly by Margaret’s speech comparing Henry and Suffolk, “Am I a queen in title and in style,/And must be made a subject to a duke?” (I.iii.48-49), suggesting for the first time that Henry is not the king she expected, nor is he a good king, given as he is to piety. What follows in the scene shows Margaret continuing to take command of the body politic, wresting it away from Gloucester and Eleanor. However, the body politic is not in Margaret’s hands yet; the scene ends with Gloucester passing judgment.

Having seen the extent of Gloucester’s control over the government, Margaret begins to assemble her own power. Henry is clearly content to let Gloucester essentially act as king
and handle the business of reigning. Margaret is not, and so begins to point out Gloucester's overreaching to Henry. By the end of Act II, Henry has declared he no longer needs a Lord Protector and Margaret has taken Gloucester's place whispering in Henry's ear, “Why, now is Henry King, and Margaret Queen” (II.iii.39). Margaret then begins to work with the other lords (York, Warwick, Buckingham, and the Cardinal) to pull Gloucester down even further, first into banishment, and then death. Eleanor is accused of witchcraft, and the once solid hold the Gloucesters held over the kingdom is thoroughly broken.

Curiously, Margaret's contrasting relationships between Henry and Suffolk are very telling in her aspirations. When speaking to Henry, Margaret makes no pretensions to the body politic – it is as though she truly wants him to become the king England hopes for. She plays her role as wife and lover, making him think of her as a woman without a voice who must be defended against slander for Gloucester's death when, in reality, she was part of its cause:

It may be judg'd I made the Duke away:
So shall my name with Slander's tongue be wounded,
. . . Ay me, unhappy!
To be a queen, and crown'd with infamy! (III.ii.66-70)

She supports Henry and encourages him to make decisions, rule the country, and control the lords. Meanwhile, her relationship with Suffolk has clearly strengthened as well. He supports her in everything, and she uses her position and power to advance him wherever possible. Though there is nothing clear in the text to indicate they have begun a romantic relationship, most scholars agree that it is in full effect by now (see Howard and Rackin, Knowles, Forker). Suffolk directly orders the murder of Gloucester that Margaret seems to have conceptualized. When Henry berates Suffolk for attempting to comfort him, Margaret comes to Suffolk's defense, launching into her massive monologue that begins, “Was I for
this nigh wreck’d upon the sea . . . ” (III.ii.81). In this speech, Margaret questions whether Henry ever truly loved her and curses the day she came to England. She tells of a necklace she wore, which she threw towards England’s shore. “The sea receiv’d it,/And so I wish’d thy body might my heart:/And even with this I lost fair England’s view” (III.ii.108-110). Margaret frankly implies that Henry has not been an adequate husband to her. The fact that she says this in the presence of other lords is shocking. Where before she suggested to Suffolk that the king was not what she expected, now Margaret makes it clear that Henry has not treated her with the care and duty owed to a wife. She concludes, “Die, Margaret!/For Henry weeps that thou dost live so long” (III.ii.119-120). The tension between her love for Suffolk and her duty to her husband comes to a head when Henry banishes Suffolk. She waits to plead on Suffolk’s behalf until she is sure the members of the Commons won’t hear. For once, Henry’s response shows him acting like a king, protecting himself and his kingdom from the threat he sees in Suffolk. Henry’s exit leaves Margaret and Suffolk alone onstage for their farewell scene, in which they finally express the love they share. Margaret promises, “I will repeal thee or, be well assured,/Adventu to be banished myself” (III.ii.349-350). Either she has the power to bring him back, or she doesn’t and will therefore join him. This is a defining scene for Margaret; her relationship with Suffolk proves to be the alchemical element that pushes her past the desire to turn Henry into a king worthy of the body politic; now she has motivation to claim that power for herself.

This scene, and the romantic relationship between the two, is entirely unhistorical. Howard and Rackin point out that this type of fictional romance in a history play trivializes the woman, such that the women’s sexual transgressions seem almost gratuitous – dramatically unnecessary attributes, at best added to underscore their characterization as
threats to masculine honor, at worst unwarranted slanders, like the slander by which Renaissance women who transgressed in any way, even by excessive gossip and railing, were often characterized as whores. (62-63)

Margaret’s relationship with Suffolk certainly condemns her in the eyes of many, and aids in further dividing her from Henry. But Helen Mirren, who played Margaret for the Royal Shakespeare Company, does not see Margaret’s relationships with the two men as divisive or slanderous:

Margaret is of course sexually involved with Suffolk, but she is utterly loyal to Henry. He is the King, and she has a deep belief in hierarchy. She would leave Suffolk in a minute for the King. Henry isn’t what she expected, isn’t what she wanted – she had wanted him to be her hero – but she has no doubt about his right to the throne. He is King, she is Queen, and that’s that. (qtd. in Knowles 18)

Margaret’s relationship with Suffolk does not compromise her position as Henry’s wife – she still fulfills her duties as wife and queen, producing an heir. In giving Margaret the fictional love affair with Suffolk, Shakespeare creates an investment on behalf of her body natural which, when it is later eliminated, launches her forward, transforming her into the warrior woman of Part 3.

Towards the end of the scene comes a fascinating exchange:

Margaret: I’ll have an Iris that shall find thee out. Away!
Suffolk: I go.
Margaret: And take my heart with thee. (III.ii.407-8)

Margaret’s invocation of Iris demonstrates an ability to command gods, or natural forces (though certainly the statement is metaphorical). She demonstrates a new level of power in the statement, assuring Suffolk she will find him somehow through the powers of her body politic. Juxtaposing the image of Iris with that of her heart highlights the capacities of her
body politic with the simple wants of her body natural. Her heart belongs to Suffolk; her body natural desires him.

When next Margaret enters, she is cradling Suffolk’s head, an iconic image in this tetralogy. Suffolk was murdered at sea, accused of killing Gloucester and arranging the unfavorable marriage with Margaret for Henry, both moves which weakened the crown. The gentleman, however, promises to return Suffolk’s head and body, indicating some sympathy for Suffolk and Margaret. When Margaret enters cradling the head, her lines demonstrate perfectly the division of her body natural and her wifely body politic. Her lines given as asides embrace the mourning of her body natural over Suffolk’s loss. But when the king asks, “Still lamenting over Suffolk’s death?/I fear me, love, if that I had been dead,/Thou wouldst not have mourn’d so much for me,” she responds simply and as a wife: “My love; I should not mourn, but die for thee” (IV.iv.21-24).

Margaret remains silent in the following scene; the conflict with Cade’s rebellion hardly seems to touch her, mired as she is in Suffolk’s loss. But as York emerges as the true opposition in Act V, she proves herself his equal while Henry looks on. By the start of Henry VI part 3, Margaret is clearly the one in charge, as York says, “The Queen this day here holds her Parliament,/But little thinks we shall be of her Council:” (I.i.35-36). Margaret’s ability to call a Parliament clearly indicates that the body politic has vested itself fully in her in the midst of this civil war; after Suffolk’s death transformed her, Margaret has become the leading force for England. Henry continues to divest himself of the body politic throughout this first scene. Though he argues at first, he lets his arguments be overturned easily by York’s assertion that Henry IV had stolen the crown and disrupted the line of inheritance. When York demonstrates the strength of his forces and threatens to kill everyone in
England, Henry vows to give York the crown upon his death, an act everyone (in the play and out) agrees is unnatural:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clifford</td>
<td>What wrong is this unto the Prince your son!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warwick</td>
<td>What good is this to England and himself!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmoreland</td>
<td>Base, fearful, and despairing Henry!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifford</td>
<td>How has thou injur’d both thyself and us!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westmoreland</td>
<td>Farewell, faint-hearted and degenerate king,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In whose cold blood no spark of honour bides.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>Be thou a prey unto the house of York,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And die in bands for this unmanly deed!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifford</td>
<td>In dreadful war may’st thou be overcome,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Or live in peace abandon’d and despis’d!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Henry has lost the allegiance of all his lords in this act; what reverence they had for the body politic is gone. With the destruction of Henry’s oath as a father, no one else’s oaths to the king are worth anything either, and therefore they no longer owe Henry their allegiance (Hunt 148). This is further solidified in Warwick’s line “Long live King Henry!” to which Henry responds, “And long live thou and these thy forward sons” (I.i.208-209). Henry perverts the traditional hailing of the king, reinforcing the unnaturalness of the act.

When Margaret discovers what Henry has done, she is livid:

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Ah! wretched man, would I had died a maid.
And never seen thee, never borne thee son,
Seeing thou hast prov’d so unnatural a father.
Hath he deserv’d to lose his birthright thus? (I.i.223-226)
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Where before she restrained herself from the body politic since she functioned primarily as Henry’s wife, Margaret now feels and functions primarily as Edward’s mother and will fight for her son until the end, “Had I been there, which am a silly woman,/The soldiers should have toss’d me on their pikes/Before I would have granted to the act” (I.i.250-2). The language focuses on soldiers and pikes, the violence of men at war, making it a particularly masculine statement. The viciousness with which she condemns Henry’s weak actions

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proves that she has taken on a persona Henry never embraced; she has become more of a man than he is. Shortly thereafter Margaret verbally divorces Henry, vowing that the northern lords will fight for her:

But thou prefer’st thy life before thine honour:
And seeing thou dost, I here divorce myself
Both from thy table, Henry, and thy bed,
Until that act of parliament be repeal’d
Whereby my son is disinherited. (I.i.254-257)

At this point, Margaret has fully assumed the body politic. She vows to “spread her colors” and others will follow her “to thy [Henry’s] foul disgrace” (I.i.260). Margaret can command armies and will fight for her son’s crown, for proper ownership of the body politic. Henry cannot and will not. Margaret is now, essentially, acting King.

***

Just as Henry denies his duty as a husband to Margaret, in Marlowe’s Edward II Isabella is denied her wifely body politic by Edward. Emily C. Bartels, in exploring how Isabella is made “Other” within the drama, notes that “Although Isabella speaks of and through desire throughout the play, the only place Edward allows her is political. In Gaveston’s presence, he shuns her; in Gaveston’s absence, he enlists her to fight for the favorite’s return and, in effect, for her own sexual banishment” (Spectacles 169). Gaveston has usurped the king’s affections; he has gained multiple titles because of the high regard in which Edward holds him, through Edward’s abuse of the body politic. He has denied Isabella her rights as a wife, since Edward now gives his love, affection, and attention to Gaveston. As such, Isabella is stranded without any kind of body politic, either that of a wife or a queen. She feels “abandoned” (I.iv.177) and realizes what is required of her to reconcile with Edward:
I must entreat him, I must speak him fair
And be a means to call home Gaveston;
And yet he'll ever dote on Gaveston,
And so am I forever miserable. (I.iv.183-186)

In convincing the other lords to recall Gaveston from exile, Isabella is acting against the concerns of the country, but in favor of the concerns of the king, and herself as his wife. It makes her miserable to be forced into this position, and to take an active hand in placing someone between herself and her husband. It’s an oxymoron, that in order to be a good wife to her husband, she must allow her wifely and queenly place to be usurped by Gaveston. Shortly thereafter, Isabella convinces Mortimer and the other lords to allow Gaveston’s return, “And when this favor Isabel forgets,/Then let her live abandoned and forlorn” (I.iv.296-297). She already recognizes the strong relationship she bears with the lords, and though she may not realize it yet, she has begun to embrace the body politic. There is an alliance forming; Mortimer respects Isabella enough to hear her out and eventually the others accede.

In attempting to understand why Mortimer and the others agree to Isabella’s request to call Gaveston back, scholars such as Mathew R. Martin find evidence that Isabella comes up with the plan to murder Gaveston, which is how Mortimer sways the other lords. However, given that Isabella is attempting to bring herself closer to Edward by giving him his desire, it is difficult to believe that she would undermine her own goal by plotting the permanent removal of Gaveston. Furthermore, when Mortimer stabs Gaveston in Scene 6, Isabella’s response is shock, “Ah, furious Mortimer, what hast thou done?” to which Mortimer responds, “No more than I would answer were he slain” (VI.84-85). Had Isabella conceived the plan to murder Gaveston, she would not have reacted so negatively to Mortimer’s actions. She is genuinely concerned for Gaveston and angry with Mortimer, and
chooses to stay with the King and Gaveston through the following scene as Mortimer and Lancaster prepare for war. But why do the lords agree to Isabella’s request to return Gaveston to England? If the body politic is not vested in Edward, it resides in the closest body: the Queen’s. The lords’ acquiescence to Isabella’s request begins a series of events in which they and Edward are pitted against each other, with Isabella often standing between to prevent outright war, for example, at the end of Scene 4 when she says “Now is the king of England rich and strong,/Having the love of his renownéd peers” (IV.367-368). When Isabella and Edward work together, the body natural and body politic work in concert. Metaphorically, Edward represents the body natural, driven entirely by the intense emotion he feels for Gaveston. Isabella represents the body politic, continually attempting to do her duty as wife and queen, preventing war and pleasing her husband. There is hope through Isabella’s mediation.

Mortimer and the other lords do not fully condemn Edward until halfway through Scene 6, after Gaveston has been stabbed, and Edward has gone to check on him and returned. Mortimer has found out his father was captured on the Scottish border, and Edward shows little interest in trying to get Mortimer Sr. back. This prompts Mortimer and Lancaster to recite a litany of ways in which Edward has failed as a king, including overdrawing the treasury, failed wars in Scotland and France, disrespect from the other kings of Europe, and having foregone his queen. The end of this list is the declaration of civil war by the lords against Edward. The fascinating point is that this scene happens without Isabella present. Her presence heretofore has prevented war; she has been able to get both sides to compromise. Without her mitigating presence, the lords denigrate
Edward’s kingship. At this point, Edward no longer commands the body politic. It has begun to settle on Isabella, though she is not aware of it nor ready to take it on fully.

Scene 8 marks Isabella’s “divorce” from Edward, just as Margaret and Henry underwent a divorce in *Henry VI part 3*. Though she has stood by her husband and king, at this point he chooses Gaveston conclusively, leaving her with “Yes, yes, for Mortimer your lover’s sake” (VIII.14). Until now, the relationship between Isabella and Mortimer has been entirely political and appropriate. But Gaveston suggested early that there was something between the two, and Edward chooses to believe him. In the midst of battle, a heightened moment when the king should act as King, Edward chooses his friend over his wife, his favorite over his queen. Isabella mourns, “Heavens can witness, I love none but you./From my embracements thus he breaks away” (VIII.15-16). When Mortimer and the others enter, she betrays Gaveston’s location to them. This act has been condemned as treachery against the King, but Isabella specifically asks what the lords intend with the King, to which Lancaster replies they only want Gaveston. Knowing that Gaveston and Edward are not in the same place, Isabella does what is best for the country and tells them how to capture Gaveston. After they run off to pursue him, Isabella shows a proclivity towards Mortimer for the first time, “So well hast thou deserved, sweet Mortimer,/As Isabel could live with thee forever” (VIII.60-61). Isabella does not betray Edward or herself. She does not think of Mortimer until Edward has essentially divorced her, definitively picking Gaveston over her. Even then, she ensures her King is safe before allowing an army to pursue Gaveston.

Jonathan Goldberg, investigating *Edward II* through Foucault’s definition of sodomy (anything outside licit sexual encounters) notes that “She [Isabella] may claim the goddess of marriage as her avatar, but it is adultery she embraces. Like her husband, she refuses the
boundaries of the licit . . . Her ‘strength’ as a woman lies in refusing the limits of marriage” (125-6, original emphasis). Isabella begins to grow and strengthen once Edward severs the ties between them, and she joins forces with Mortimer. She no longer bears a duty to Edward as his wife.

The following scenes demonstrate continuously how the lords are fighting on behalf of the country and the people while Edward is fighting for himself. They no longer respect Edward’s right as king, denying him even one last look at Gaveston before murdering him. The final scene between Isabella and Edward, Scene 11 in a twenty-five scene play, shows just how clinical their marriage has become. As with Margaret, we now see Isabella with her son, Prince Edward (who will become King Edward III). Her position has morphed from wife to mother; at the same time she takes up a post as ambassador to France, taking her son with her. Edward continues his downward spiral, abusing his body politic even further by making Spencer an earl and using him to taunt the other side. In Scene 12, he fights with Mortimer:

Mortimer: Then, Edward, thou wilt fight it to the last
And rather bathe thy sword in subjects’ blood
Than banish that pernicious company?

Edward: Ay, traitors all, rather than thus be braved,
Make England’s civil towns huge heaps of stones
And ploughs to go about our palace gates. (XII.27-32)

This exchange demonstrates such a small amount of concern for the people and country for which Edward is responsible. Though Edward wins this battle, executing Lancaster and imprisoning Mortimer, he is no longer, in essence, King. Kent, Edward’s own brother, took the lords’ side early in the play; now, with Edward’s ego and impolitic decisions, Kent gives his allegiance to Isabella, “Proud Edward, dost thou banish me thy presence?/But I’ll to France and cheer the wrongéd Queen” (XIV.5-6). With Isabella, Prince Edward, Kent, and
Mortimer all in France, Isabella becomes the centralized embodiment of the body politic. Allegiance is given to her, she bears the power of the king, and becomes the active force driving Edward down from his throne.

**DEMISE**

The transfer of the body politic from king to queen has major ramifications. Once Margaret and Isabella are in full possession of the body politic, civil war breaks out, York vs. Lancaster and Isabella vs. Edward. Each queen commands an army, and though the outcomes differ, both put up a good fight.

When York’s sons reveal that they are not content to wait until Henry’s death to take control of the crown, Margaret’s army meets York’s in the field. Margaret has managed to raise 20,000 men, a strong show of support especially in comparison to York’s 5,000. Once she has defeated York, Margaret launches into the taunting scene, where she gives York a paper crown and wipes his tears with a handkerchief stained in his son’s blood. In these actions, Margaret accomplishes what was expected of Henry as king: dealing with traitors by battling and executing them. York wears the paper crown, highlighting the fact that he was never fit to be a true king, but merely had pretensions to the crown based on flimsy arguments rooted in a war two generations old. Yet he launches a counter-attack in the infamous “she-wolf of France” speech, the first time since *Part I* Margaret is classified as distinctly French. This speech highlights, more than anything else, all the ways in which Margaret is not a proper woman. She is Amazonian, evil, proud, shameless, cold, lacks virtue, and false, a “tiger’s heart wrapp’d in a woman’s hide!” (I.iv.137). But, in the world Shakespeare has created, it is obvious why Margaret seems so unwomanly, at least to York.
If Margaret, as a woman, had been weak, weepy, overrun by her emotions, and in need of a man, she would never have survived, and her family would have been destroyed by now, as York’s son was killed. Instead, because her king and husband could not, Margaret has assumed the body politic and developed beyond her expected role. She has embraced the role of both king and queen, becoming a Queen with her own royal body politic by protecting her son, fighting for her kingdom, and defeating York. Margaret stabs York with the line, “And here’s to right our gentle-hearted king” (I.iv.176). Even now, she invokes the name of the king, though he is not king enough; he is too gentle to do what is necessary. With this act and these words, Margaret shows what kind of Queen she will be. Marilyn French sees Shakespeare as “working towards in this tetralogy . . . a definition of legitimacy that is not limited to, but synthesizes claims based on bloodlines, prowess, or morality. True legitimacy consists in possession of all three. Neither Henry nor York possesses all three: neither does anyone else in the play” (53). Margaret proves herself fittest, the most legitimate possessor of the body politic.

After York’s death, his eldest son, Edward of York, rises as the next contender. Margaret now wages war on two fronts: she must ensure that Henry acts as a decent father to his son, Prince Edward, while preventing Edward of York from overpowering Henry. Henry knights Prince Edward, but only at Margaret’s behest; at this point in the cycle, the knighthood ceremony lacks meaning as Cade knighted himself, parodying the power of the king, and Henry has no military standing, since Margaret commands the army. In the Henry VI tetralogy, the relationship between fathers and sons is paramount; sons follow in their fathers’ footsteps, or fathers and sons become enemies in the midst of chaotic battlefields. Henry, however, seems barely aware of his son and disowns him “unnaturally.”
Margaret, by contrast, stands in as the guiding force and defensive presence Henry should have been, and ultimately ends up ordering Henry around as well. But Margaret’s presence, coaching Henry and challenging the Yorkists, enrages the other side:

Edward of York: I am his king, and he should bow his knee:
I was adopted heir by his consent:
Since when his oath is broke; for, as I hear,
You that are king, though he do wear the crown,
Have caus’d him by new Act of Parliament
To blot out me, and put his own son in. (II.ii.87-92)

Edward’s suggestion that Henry is king in name only and that Margaret has claimed the power proves that the others view Margaret’s acquisition of the body politic as usurpation. They go on to attack her birth and blame her for the loss of France, identifying her as the root of all their problems and therefore declaring war on her. Unfortunately for Margaret, bearing the body politic invites accusations and many declarations of enmity, few of support.

As Margaret arrives in France to seek aid, she retains her queenly position and title, even after it is discovered that Edward IV has taken a new wife and Margaret now shares the title of Queen of England with Lady Elizabeth Grey. When she first arrives, Margaret begins by saying she must “learn awhile to serve” (III.ii.5), seemingly having accepted her demotion, outside her country and without her power. But at the French King Lewis’ prompting, she reveals Henry’s fall and Edward’s rise. He calls her Queen three times before she tells the story and he promises to help if he can. In this exchange, Lewis validates Margaret’s body politic with his own as King of France: he asserts her right to rule, reinforces his faith in her title, and supports it literally with the promise of aid. Margaret’s right is further maintained by Warwick; as soon as he discovers that Edward has indulged his body natural and married Lady Grey, he gives allegiance to Margaret. As Warwick
returns to England to fight Edward, Margaret remains in France, to follow with more power.

At this point, Warwick takes up the cause while Margaret remains hidden offstage. It is curious that, for a time, when there is a strong, military, noble man present, Margaret need not be in the foreground. Warwick reinforces the royal language used heretofore, deliberately calling Edward a duke:

> Edward: Why, Warwick, when we parted, Thou calld’st me King.
> Warwick: Ay, but the case is alter’d. (IV.iii.30-31).

This quote is especially fitting, since Warwick’s line here echoes Plowden, “the case is altered” (Kantorowicz 25), referring to the state of the king being altered once he becomes King. As soon as Warwick dies, news arrives that Margaret is bringing a force from France. She compares herself and Prince Edward to the pilots on a sinking ship, an apt metaphor for rulers fighting to control a losing battle. Margaret then delivers a speech to the troops, controlling the tears in her eyes and laying out the stakes for the soldiers, commanding them into the final battle.

Demonstrating the height of her body politic, literally ordering the army forward, also signals the end for Margaret. In the following scene she is a prisoner, and watches her son stabbed to death in front of her. In the death of her son, with her husband imprisoned (and soon to be murdered by Richard), Margaret loses her body politic as well. Howard and Rackin comment on how, in this moment, Margaret also loses all masculinity, how she reverts to weeping, begging for death, having lost her reason. Though historically Margaret eventually returned to France and died there, Shakespeare condemns Margaret to living amongst her enemies. She begs them, “O kill me too!” (V.v.41). Richard offers to do so but,
at this point, it is not necessary to kill her. French, in her explanation of the play through the
demonized female sexuality, highlights the turning point for Margaret. “The death of her
son means her death as well, because children, procreation, are the end of the feminine
principle Margaret has, throughout this trilogy, repudiated” (62). Margaret has lost her bite,
her masculinity, her power, her body politic, in losing her family and losing the war. She is
no longer a threat, and will spend the following play cursing those around her.

In Richard III, Margaret is still referred to as Queen from her first entrance, “Enter old
Queen Margaret” (I.iii.sd), and in the dramatis personae. Margaret clearly still sees herself as
Queen, as evidenced in her interaction with Queen Elizabeth and Richard: “Thy honour,
state and seat is due to me,” (I.iii.111) she says to Elizabeth. She repeatedly undermines
Elizabeth’s title and reassigns it upon herself; for example, “As little joy enjoys the queen
thereof,/For I am she, and altogether joyless” (I.iii.154-155). This statement seems to echo
Richard II, “You may my glories and my state depose,/But not my griefs; still am I king of
those” (IV.i.201-202). Margaret lost her power when her son was killed before her eyes;
with Henry’s death as well, the body politic is definitively transferred to the Yorkists,
specifically Edward IV. But that does not prevent Margaret from sorrowing over the current
state of affairs in England and wishing it could have been otherwise. Margaret laments,
“Die neither mother, wife, nor England’s queen” (I.iii.208). She has lost all aspects of her
gendered identity: as wife, mother, and queen. What position is left to her in society? A
witch: she prophesies several times at the end of this scene. Every time her prophecies come
true, the characters (Hastings, Elizabeth, and Buckingham) remember her predictions.
Margaret has no political or military power, no family, no followers left to her but she has
her words and it turns out her words have power. Margaret Ranald believes that “Words,
then, are the weapon of the powerless, and all these women are ultimately victims of the masculine drive to power, possessing no political strength in their own right” (54). Ranald is incorrect that Margaret never possessed political strength in her own right; she commanded armies, and the opposition invoked her name with fear. Naomi C. Liebler and Lisa Scannella Shea point out that, by the time she arrives in Richard III, “Margaret’s curses are now her only weapon . . . her words are what Richard fears and loathes most” (92). As each statement comes true, her words echo through the pages, her power a shadow of its former self but still able to wound, to ruin, and to invoke fear.

In each of these plays, another female character parallels and foils Margaret, providing a counterpoint or alternative perspective, such as Joan of Arc in Part 1 and Duchess Eleanor in Part 2. Queen Elizabeth provides this foil in both Part 3 and Richard III, but also represents an echo of Margaret’s experience. By Act IV, Elizabeth mirrors Margaret’s previous position: a king’s widow, whose sons have been killed to make way for the new king. In an aside, Margaret perfectly sums up the cyclical nature of these wars: “Plantagenet doth quit Plantagenet” (IV.iv.20). Her language through the rest of the scene acknowledges this similarity, as she asks Elizabeth, “Thou didst usurp my place, and dost thou now/Usurp the just proportion of my sorrow?” (IV.iv.109-110). Later she goes even further, seemingly bequeathing her place to Elizabeth:

Now thy proud neck bears half my burdened yoke,
From which, even here I slip my wearied head
And leave the burden of it all on thee.
Farewell, York’s wife, and queen of sad mischance.
These English woes shall make me smile in France. (IV.iv.111-115)

This beautiful end to her long monologue both queens and unqueens Elizabeth in the same sentence, all while dethroning herself. Margaret bequeaths her burden to Elizabeth, leaving
her the remainder of Margaret's own body politic. But Margaret still refuses to call her Queen of England; rather Elizabeth is “queen of sad mischance,” a statement which removes any power she had as the now-dead Edward IV’s wife. Margaret's statements have nothing to do with external action, and everything to do with the power of her words. Elizabeth begs Margaret to teach her to curse, to which Margaret responds as a mother and prophetess before leaving the stage forever:

Forbear to sleep the night, and fast the day;  
Compare dead happiness with living woe;  
Think that thy babes were sweeter than they were,  
And he that slew them fouler than he is.  
Bettering thy loss makes the bad causer worse.  
Revolving this will teach thee how to curse. (IV.iv.118-123)

But something of Margaret's spirit remains, which Richard could never quite destroy. Penny Dowdie notes that Margaret is nearly untouchable by Richard, partially because the Yorkists had the chance to kill her when she begged for death, but did not. When Richard enters shortly after Margaret exits, the remaining women fight him with her venom. The Duchess of York curses the day she gave birth to Richard; Elizabeth vehemently protects her daughter, both before and after the marriage proposal. Margaret may have exited the stage but the power of her body politic continues to be felt.

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Whereas Margaret gains the body politic on behalf of the Lancastrian forces, fighting in place of a king who shows no respect for the position he holds, Isabella must take up the body politic against her husband and king. For Isabella, her son, another Prince Edward, is not ready yet to take up the mantle of the body politic, therefore it rests in her until his turn comes. Isabella likewise travels to France to look for help. She gets none, though the king, Valois, is her brother. Instead, she finds help in the forms of Mortimer and Kent who arrive
and immediately give their support. But when Mortimer attempts to give his fealty to the supposed heir to the body politic, Prince Edward refuses:

Mortimer: And lives t’advance your standard, good my lord.
Prince Edward: How mean you, and the king my father lives?
No, my lord Mortimer, not I, I trow.
Isabella: Not, son? Why not? I would it were no worse.

(XV.42-45)

After Edward’s refusal, Mortimer turns to Isabella, treating her as acting King. Sir John Hainault also comes to the rescue of “England’s Queen.” Though in the following scene Edward attempts to act like a king, his efforts serve only to try to regain and kill Mortimer, and frustrate the Queen’s efforts. His ineffectual response almost seems to reinforce the very real threat provided by Isabella’s body politic.

Like Margaret, Isabella has a speech to the troops after landing in England. In Isabella’s case, however, she grows too passionate, letting her womanly emotions run away with her. She parallels Margaret in the beginning, invoking the wrongs done to the country through these civil brawls, but whereas Margaret restrains herself to a harsh list of the wrongs committed, Isabella lets loose her anger towards Edward. This prompts Mortimer to step in and finish the speech himself. Though he invokes “this prince’s right,” he ends the speech with the hope “That England’s Queen in peace may repossess/Her dignities and honours” (XVII.23-24). Whatever outward cause has been invoked for Prince Edward, clearly it is Isabella who will rule and who thanks God for the victory. Immediately, she crowns Prince Edward as King Edward III:

Successful battle gives the God of kings
To them that fight in right and fear his wrath.
Since, then, successfully we have prevailed,
Thanks be heaven’s great architect and you.
Ere farther we proceed, my noble lords,
We here create our well belovéd son,
Of love and care unto his royal person,
Lord warden of the realm. (XVIII.28-35)

The phrase “lord warden of the realm” typically would refer to the lord protector, someone in charge while the king is underage, which makes poor sense in this context. Edward is underage and therefore someone else should bear the wardenship. It seems as though Isabella is saying that he is now King Edward III, and technically bears the wardenship of the realm, but since she created him as such, she keeps the power. Kent reiterates that Edward II no longer bears the body politic though he still lives: “Nephew, your father; I dare not call him king” (XVIII.42). Later, when Rhys Ap Howell presents Isabella with Spencer Sr., she easily slips into the royal we: “We thank you all” (XVIII.62). By the end of the scene, Isabella demonstrates concern for her husband, but justifies her actions as those belonging to the body politic: “I rue my lord’s ill fortune, but alas,/Care of my country called me to this war” (XVIII.73-74). When Leicester arrests Spencer and Baldock, it is in the name of the Queen, not Prince Edward, though he has been crowned by now. Isabella is clearly in full possession of the body politic.

Much of Edward’s time in prison is spent contemplating the power of Isabella. He invokes her before offering his crown to the Bishop of Winchester:

Then send for unrelenting Mortimer
And Isabel, whose eyes, being turned to steel,
Will sooner sparkle fire than shed a tear.
Yet stay, for rather than I will look on them,
Here, here. (XX.103-107)

In this speech, Edward almost seems to fear Isabella’s power. His language denotes a masculinity in Isabella, an edge that the audience has only glimpsed in the speech before the troops. When he finally gives up the crown, he entrusts it to her:

Bear this to the queen,
Wet with my tears and dried again with sighs.
If with the sight thereof she be not moved,
Return it back and dip it in my blood. (XX.117-120)

At first, Edward embraces the language of emotion, entrusting Isabella with his soul. But, if that is not enough (he seems to say) then she can have his body as well. Edward invokes both parts of himself, king and King, in deposing himself.

Isabella differs from Margaret in her following actions. Kent quickly abandons Isabella when he realizes that “Mortimer/And Isabel do kiss while they conspire” (XVIII.21-22), rededicating his loyalty to Edward. Isabella, just as Edward did before her, and as Edward IV did in Henry VI part 3, has given in to the wants of her body natural, and begins to abuse the body politic as a result. Mortimer suggests to her, “Be ruled by me, and we will rule the realm” (XXI.5). F.P. Wilson sees contrasting faces reflected in Isabella’s actions: “Now Isabel plays she-Machiavel to Mortimer’s Machiavel. Cruel as well as unfaithful, she has nothing to learn in the art of turning and dissembling. In public she is full of concern for the state of the country and the King’s misfortunes . . . in private, there is no villainy of Mortimer’s which she does not aid and abet” (Wilson 134). However, it is also possible that she is struggling to reconcile her actions against her former husband with the need to keep the country running. As has been shown in Chapter 2, a Queen who is queen in her own right cannot be subservient to a man, yet Isabella’s response is for Mortimer to “Conclude against his father what thou wilt,/And I myself will willingly subscribe” (XXI.20). Isabella willingly resigns Edward’s fate into Mortimer’s hands, knowing he must die but hesitant to do harm to him herself: “I would he were, so it were not by my means” (XXI.45). The end of the play juxtaposes scenes of Mortimer and Isabella’s reign with images of Edward imprisoned, undignified, and dishonored. Though Kent acts as the
mediator between these two worlds, he is ineffectual and his returned allegiance to Edward II is too little, too late. This is loyalty born more out of brotherly love than any true devotion to the body politic, which is clearly no longer vested in Edward. But Isabella does not command it either.

Isabella does not take control of the body politic as Margaret did; she instead trusts it to Mortimer, who abuses it terribly: “The prince I rule, the queen do I command,/ . . . /I seal, I cancel, I do what I will . . . /They thrust upon me the Protectorship” (XXIII.46-54). Though Edward III is formally crowned, he is incapable of even pleading for his father’s life with the Lord Protector:

Edward III: Sweet mother, if I cannot pardon him, Entreat my lord Protector for his life. Isabella: Son, be content, I dare not speak a word. (XXIII.91-93)

Isabella stands by and gives tacit consent to Mortimer’s rule through her inaction. Even Kent is killed at Mortimer’s explicit command, not Isabella’s: “Either my brother or his son is king,/And none of both them thirst for Edmund’s blood” (XXIII.103-104). Mortimer orders Kent taken away. At Mortimer’s command, and by his plot and minions, Edward II is killed most ignobly in prison. Isabella mishandles her body politic in facilitating Edward’s death and preventing her son’s full accession to the throne.

When Edward II finally dies, the body politic is no longer torn apart, tied to the original king so long as he was alive but wielded by the Queen and her lover while ostensibly vested in the prince. Bredbeck identifies this ending as “[creating] a bifurcated world in which the rhetoric of the kingly body politic exists simultaneously with a world that does not allow it to mean” (149). Upon Edward’s death, Edward III immediately takes up the mantle of the body politic, wresting it definitively from those who would own it,
becoming King absolutely. This is clearly evidenced by his title in the script; though he was crowned seven scenes ago, it is only in the final scene that he is referred to as King Edward III. Michael A. Winkelman, in examining the effect of desire and power on the state, states that, “From a wider point of view, the body politic cannot heal until Edward and the mutinous instruments of his removal, Mortimer and Isabella, have been purged” (177). Isabella is accused of Edward II’s murder and of conspiracy. She abused the power that was entrusted to her in a time of need, the body politic that she held in trust for her son. At this point, Isabella has failed as a wife to her dead husband, as a queen to her country by letting Mortimer rule, and as a mother to her grieving son. She makes one last attempt to reconcile herself as Edward’s wife: “Shall I not mourn for my belovéd lord/And with the rest accompany him to his grave?” (XXV.87-88), but in the end, she has only one option: “Then come, sweet death, and rid me of this grief” (XXV.92). Isabella briefly managed to gain the body politic in the absence of an appropriate vessel, and in so doing delayed disaster, commanded armies, and kept the throne safe for her son. But she fell victim to her body natural, a common ailment amongst kings and queens (and, as shall be seen, almost everyone), thereby abusing her body politic.

Deats notes that, at this point in the play, “Isabella’s movement from emotional, effusive language to spare, functional speech thus marks her transition from the feminized to the masculinized woman” (Sex, Gender, and Desire 171). However, Isabella’s language only becomes functional for the few scenes when she cedes control of the body politic to Mortimer, caving into her body natural’s desires and incapable of inflicting further harm on Edward. When her son condemns her, Isabella’s language is just as rich and emotional as in the beginning, fearful as she is of losing her last remaining identity as a woman. She can no
longer claim any of the ideal identities of maid, widow, or wife. With Edward’s death, she is no longer a wife; with Mortimer’s, she is no longer a lover. With Edward III’s condemnation, she is no longer a queen or a mother. As with Margaret, Isabella has lost all of her gendered identities, leaving her with nothing but a small prophecy of her death.

CONCLUSION

In the end, Margaret and Isabella both possess the royal body politic through their ability to command (armies, loyalty, and political moves) and through their protection of the royal lineage for their sons, their husbands’ heirs. Their ability to take on the body politic arises from the power vacuum created by weak kings. However, their fates diverge through their use and abuse of the body politic once in power.

Margaret creates her own punishment. In setting herself up as Henry’s proxy, in speaking for him and ruling (ostensibly) on his behalf, in fighting for his throne more than he does, Margaret creates enemies. The Yorkists would have won the Wars of the Roses much more easily without Margaret combatting them. After Henry has taken York as his heir, Margaret begins to challenge him openly:

King Henry: Have done with words, my lords, and hear me speak
Queen Margaret: Defy them then, or else hold close thy lips.
King Henry: I prithee give no limits to my tongue:
I am a king, and privileg’d to speak.

(Henry VI part 3 II.ii.117-120)

By the end of this scene, Margaret’s control of the body politic prompts Edward of York to declare war on her:

Not willing any longer conference,
Since thou deniest the gentle King to speak,
Sound trumpets! let our bloody colours wave!
And either victory, or else a grave. (II.ii.171-174)
Margaret takes what Edward believes is his birthright, but is hers by title; it escalates the civil war to the point of patricide and filicide.

The brutal killing of family and youth foreshadows Margaret’s ultimate downfall: the death of her son, Prince Edward. While Margaret is captured towards the end of the play, she does not completely break down until her son dies. Her love for her son, and the investment of her body politic fully in Prince Edward’s future, becomes her weakness. While this is partially a weakness of her body natural, the maternal feelings also stem from her body politic owed to Prince Edward as his mother. Therefore the feelings are justifiable, warranted in their extremity and her reaction to his loss. By investing herself so fully in Prince Edward, Margaret creates her own torment when he dies. She no longer has anything to live for. Her punishment is that she must live with this failure. Ranald claims that, “She has learned no charity, no resignation, and above all, she practises no repentance” (58). But while historically Margaret returned to France for the rest of her days, Shakespeare’s Margaret spends most of Richard III lamenting her loss; she may not repent, may not desire her actions otherwise, but she certainly feels the repercussions, and wishes for an alternate outcome. Her fictional presence while England’s body politic and the female influence is corrupted and undermined even further is the torture she must now endure, “I was [banished], but I do find more pain in banishment/Than death can yield me here by my abode” (Richard III I.iii.167-168). Margaret lives in a prison of her own making, trapped and unwanted, bitter as she promises Elizabeth: “Thyself a queen, for me that was a queen,/Outlive thy glory, like my wretched self” (I.iii.201-202).

Isabella, by contrast, has her punishment meted out by society, through the hand of Edward III, her son. Isabella did not fight for her husband; she fought solely for her son,
and for the future of England. Though she regrets the actions taken against Edward, she believes it was done for the best. Her punishment is more severe and absolute than Margaret’s, since she fought against her husband and, in the end, gave in to her body natural’s desire for Mortimer. While Margaret had an illicit affair with Suffolk, she did not let that affair affect her body politic; rather it transformed her into a warrior. Isabella’s relationship with Mortimer included elevating him to Lord Protector over her son and giving him care of the country, allowing him to rule in her name. Edward III cannot forgive her. She has betrayed her body politic as queen, her body politic as wife and mother, and her body natural in committing adultery against her husband. It is not enough to let her live with her loss, as Margaret does. Instead, she must be definitively condemned for her crimes. Edward sends her to the Tower, and promises that he will only show mercy if she is not guilty of conspiring to kill Edward II. Historically, Isabella continued to live in England with an allowance, and remained an active member of court. For Marlowe, it seems to be more important to punish Isabella for the iniquitous actions she took against her husband and king.

Ultimately, in addition to the appropriate use of the body politic, Margaret finds a better balance between body natural and body politic than Isabella. Margaret uses her body politic as a monarch should – in service of those for whom she bears responsibility. Isabella begins operating on behalf of the people of England, but gives way to her body natural once Edward II is no longer a threat. It is important to note that neither woman usurps the succession. They do everything they can to preserve the hereditary line. They are not stealing the body politic for themselves, like Henry IV or Edward IV. They are not overthrowing the royal bloodline. This was a big argument in favor of Elizabeth’s reign, that
while she may have been a woman, she was Henry VIII’s daughter and therefore a more legitimate heir than any male contender. Margaret and Isabella are doing what they can to perpetuate the succession when the king does not. However, Margaret fights for Henry VI, taking on his body politic on his behalf; Isabella fights against Edward II, removing his body politic so as to disempower him. This makes Margaret’s punishment worse than Isabella’s; Margaret has done nothing wrong, and must live with her failures, whereas Isabella’s inaction on behalf of her husband can only lead to her removal from power. Edward III’s condemnation of her is entirely expected and appropriate.

As queens, it must also be noted, Margaret and Isabella bear more responsibility than most women. They are mothers and wives in addition to their political positions, caring for their country. They represent the most literal interpretation of this theory on the stage. Margaret and Isabella both have to choose between the duty owed to their husbands, the duty owed to their sons, and the duty owed to their countries. They want a better future, but reconciling themselves to traditional gender roles does not permit them to effect change. In the end, they choose son and country – the future – as opposed to the past and present, the current state of affairs. They are able to make this choice by breaking free of the constraints placed on them as wives, by taking on the body politic. Their portrayals as powerful queens are important considering Elizabeth was the current queen. They are depicted with similar military acumen, power at court, and sexual allure. But Elizabeth was not a mother or a wife; she remained married to her country. Elizabeth always placed the body politic first.

Margaret and Isabella have both been accused of being irreconcilable characters, power-hungry and lacking justifiable, unified reasoning for their actions. Marilyn French states, “Shakespeare omits reference to Margaret’s real power and ability, and he ‘taints’ her
with sexual ‘impurity’ . . . it is difficult to understand why Margaret, as she is depicted, should constitute such a threat” (54). Sara Munson Deats discusses Isabella as “the dissembling female and the virile queen” (Sex Gender and Desire 171); Winkelman sees her as a single mother to Prince Edward and a victim to her “[a]morous ardor . . . capricious, willful, and bloodthirsty” (173); Charles Forker calls her “a loving wife . . . an adulterous predator” (122). But when analyzed through the theory of the king’s two bodies, their motivations become clearer, and their characters are each reconciled into single yet complex figures. Their arcs present a unified journey, two female characters dealing with the bad situations that arise at the hands of their husbands, rectifying the country. Penny Downie, who played Margaret in The Plantagenets for the Royal Shakespeare Company, responded to those who saw Margaret as a disjointed character by saying that “the same woman who cradles the head of her lover is capable of the atrocity and depravity of the molehill speech” (Jackson and Smallwood 115). Deats claims that

In Isabella . . . Marlowe has created one of English drama’s first androgynous women. Her masculine virtues – assertiveness, resourcefulness, discipline, resolution – prove her (in some respects) every inch a queen. Yet she also exhibits serious feminine weaknesses – guile and excessive passion – as well as grave masculine vices – ruthlessness and ambition. She thus combines both commendable and deplorable traits while fusing traditional feminine and masculine qualities. (Sex, Gender, and Desire 173)

When it becomes necessary, each woman unites the masculine and the feminine, and takes on the body politic. Margaret and Isabella are not psychotically power-hungry viragos, determined to ruin their countries because they are ruled by their libidos. They also do not represent a contradictory personality, changing their minds every five minutes, never wanting the same thing for more than one scene. They are fighting for their families and for their country, reconciling multiple desires with varying obstacles, which necessitates growth
according to the circumstances and development beyond the generic female roles, as permitted by the theory of the king’s two bodies.
CHAPTER FOUR

NOBLEWOMEN

Margaret and Isabella offer a clear, straight-forward dramatic interpretation of the king’s two bodies theory. As queens, they embody dramatically much of what Elizabeth endured historically. Their roles as wives enhance their bodies politic, naturalizing their reigns in a way that Elizabeth couldn’t, since they had husbands and sons for whom they were fighting while she had none. The two characters featured in this chapter, Lady Macbeth from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and the Duchess of Malfi from John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*, offer a different perspective on the body politic of rulers and wives. Lady Macbeth begins as a wife and a noblewoman who gains a body politic when her husband is elected king. The Duchess of Malfi already rules Malfi; her body natural becomes divided when she marries Antonio.

While Margaret and Isabella both became more than mere wives and queen consorts out of necessity, because their husbands weren’t fulfilling their duties as kings and husbands, Lady Macbeth and the Duchess each function as halves of a whole, representing the soul to a husband’s corporeal body. The body natural then becomes the site of conflict, torn between its corresponding body natural and the body politic. When they are united with their other halves, they are at peace and command their full powers, untouchable and perfect. When they are divided, when the soul no longer has a complete body in which to rest, or when the body no longer contains a soul, then everything falls apart. Neither body can function without the other, and both plays end in tragedy.

Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* begins with the Scots defeating Norway; King Duncan immediately names his son Malcolm as his heir. Macbeth, on his way back from battle,
meets three witches who promise he will become king. The letter he sends to his wife, Lady Macbeth, ignites her desire for this future. When Duncan and his retinue come to stay at their castle Inverness for the night, the Macbeths take their opportunity and kill him in his sleep. Macbeth is then elected king; no sooner has he achieved the promised fate than the world collapses. Macbeth sees a vision of Banquo (whom he had also had killed) and tries to return to the witches for more information, but is shown only horrors. Lady Macbeth begins to sleep-walk, unknowingly confessing her sins. Malcolm, meanwhile, has raised an army in England and marches against Macbeth at Dunsinane. The witches’ prophecies come true, Lady Macbeth commits suicide, Macbeth is beheaded, and Malcolm claims the throne.

John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* begins with Antonio’s return from the French court, which he claims is far less corrupt than that of Malfi. The Duchess meets with her brothers, who attempt to convince her she should never remarry. However, as soon as she is alone with Antonio (who is her steward), she woos and weds him. They keep their relationship secret for several years, but when her brothers discover the truth, they are forced to flee separately. The Duchess is captured and imprisoned; her brother Ferdinand tortures her then has Bosola (his spy, whom the Duchess trusted) kill her. Ferdinand begins to develop lycanthropy; her other brother, the Cardinal, confesses the truth to his whore, Julia, then kills her. Meanwhile, Antonio has returned to Malfi with his eldest son and hears the Duchess’ voice as he nears her tomb. Bosola turns against Ferdinand and the Cardinal (the other brother), accidentally killing Antonio, then stabbing the Cardinal, then fighting Ferdinand whereupon they both stab each other and die. The Duchess’ and Antonio’s eldest son inherits the dukedom.
Though both of these plays are sourced from historical records, they are not considered English history plays. Shakespeare and Webster take liberty with the historical truth to tell the dramatic story, rewriting certain aspects to highlight Jacobean interests and direct audience sympathies. The timeline of Shakespeare’s Macbeth covers a few months at most; Macbeth’s historical reign lasted seventeen years. The story is designed to legitimize James I’s reign five centuries later through Duncan, Malcolm, and Banquo and his heirs. Sources indicate that Macbeth’s reign was, in fact, just as legitimate as Duncan’s, and relatively peaceful and stable. In the introduction to the Arden edition, Kenneth Muir states,

Macbeth, according to Holinshed’s account, has a genuine grievance against Duncan who, by proclaiming his son Prince of Cumberland, went against the laws of succession, and took away from Macbeth the prospect of the throne; which he had every reason to hope for, since he could claim it on behalf of his wife and her son by her first husband. Shakespeare suppresses these facts, because he wished for dramatic reasons to accentuate Macbeth’s guilt and to minimize any excuses he might have had. (xxxvii-xxxviii)

Lady Macbeth seems to have been cobbled together from various Scottish women in Holinshed’s Chronicles. Historically, her name was Gruoch, and she had a son by her first marriage, Lulach, who was briefly crowned before Macduff killed him. Holinshed describes her in a brief passage, “[she] lay sore upon him to attempt the thing as she that was verie ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to beare the name of a queen” (qtd. in Bedard 40). But Bedard goes on to say, “The fact remains that Lady Macbeth’s direct role in the murder of Duncan, her later remorse, her sleepwalking, and her apparent suicide have no counterparts in Shakespeare’s sources” (40). Most of her ambition and drive comes from descriptions of Donwald’s wife, who pushed Donwald to kill King Duff, and her fierceness from an account of nursing mothers coupled with women’s fierceness in battle:

in these daies also the women of our countries were of no lesse courage than the men; for all stout maidens and wives (if they were not with child) marched
as well in the field as did the men, and so soone as the armie did set forward, they slue the first living creature that they found, in whose bloud they not onlie bathed their swords, but also tasted thereof with their mouthes. (qtd. in Asp 382)

Similarly, Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* confuses the succession issue by allowing the Duchess’ eldest son by Antonio to inherit the dukedom after her death, not her son by her first husband, for whom she was regent historically but who is mentioned only once in the play. The historical figure of Giovanna d’Aragona is nearly completely obscured in the play by the identities placed upon her by Ferdinand and the Cardinal. Giovanna was 26 at the time described in the play; she had been named regent after her husband’s death and before the birth of his son and heir. Leah Marcus points out that “The historical Antonio was a gentleman from a distinguished family that had gradually decayed” (32); Webster sets Antonio even lower, creating a class issue with the marriage that may not have been an issue in reality. Giovanna’s twin, Carlo (not Ferdinand, who is supposedly a combination of Ferdinand of Aragon and other members of Giovanna’s real family), was not implicated in her death, though her brother the Cardinal was. The location in Italy is important; Italian society placed greater restrictions on women but Dympna Callaghan discusses how widows could “appear in court, do business, and deal in property” (“Early Modern Widows” 275). Callaghan goes on to postulate, “it is certainly the case that, as a widow, the Duchess has the potential she did not possess as a wife to wield power independently of a husband and to sever allegiances with other male kin” (277). The Duchess certainly shows an independent nature, despite her brothers’ wishes. Webster’s sources, aside from the story of the Duchess, included William Painter’s *The Palace of Pleasure* and the story of Lady Arbella Stuart, James I’s niece who married without his consent and died in prison. Theodora Jankowski describes *The Duchess of Malfi* as “an unusual play not only because it
explores questions of rulership as they relate to a female sovereign, but also because it explores these questions as regards the sovereign’s marriage” (222). Webster alters his sources in the dramatization in order to focus on the justification of the Duchess’ fate.

Both plays are set in a time and place where the central characters are in charge of smaller areas of land, holding allegiance to a king. Macbeth is the Thane of Glamis, and holds fealty to Duncan, who is King of Scotland. England waits patiently in the wings to conquer Scotland, and wins in the end by assisting Malcolm in defeating Macbeth. The Dukedom of Malfi (or Amalfi) holds fealty to the King of Naples, a kingdom constantly torn between Spain and Rome. Lady Macbeth and the Duchess both have bodies politic from ruling over their subjects, but also owe fealty above their bodies politic to their kings who, in this case, are not their husbands. For Lady Macbeth, it is the denial of this fealty and corruption of her owed duty that brings about her downfall. For the Duchess, it is the denial of her body politic by her brothers that brings her down. Both women are known only by their titles, an indication of their connection to the men through whom they gained those titles, as well as evidence of their primary function as women of their domain.

Both plays employ humoural imagery frequently; Macbeth is steeped in blood while the Malfi court has an overabundance of melancholy. Both plays also have been frequently addressed from a feminist standpoint by scholars such as Marjorie Garber (2005), Carolyn Asp (1991), Lucy Brashear (1980), Judith Haber (2010), and Theodora A. Jankowski (1990), examining and exalting the strong female characters who instigate and drive the action. Often, however, these critiques fail to identify Lady Macbeth and the Duchess in their full capacities, seeking to limit them to mothers or wives, without accepting their multitudinous roles in cohesion. Their existence as all of these identities is accepted and
even explained within the parameters of the king’s two bodies theory. They are not limited to one identity, but allowed to function in multiple roles, as so much more than the idealized “chaste, silent, and obedient;” as, in fact, the equal of a man.

To begin with, it will be seen how Lady Macbeth and the Duchess both function as halves of a whole; they are most complete and effective when they are with their corresponding bodies natural, Macbeth and Antonio. The reveal of the body politic is, for Lady Macbeth, in the murder of Duncan and fears associated with the ascension to the throne. For the Duchess of Malfi, it is in the reveal of her marriage to Antonio and the pregnancy. This revelation leads to the separation of each woman from her husband, destroying the body natural in which the body politic is vested and leading to its demise.

**The Body Natural**

*Macbeth* begins with witches concocting trouble, tales of war, and a kindly king praising his lords for keeping his kingdom safe. Duncan immediately bestows on Macbeth the title Thane of Cawdor for the “worthy service” he has done in defeating Macdonwald. The world created is a meritocracy, where a person can prove his worth and receive praise and accolades, raising his status. While Duncan rewards Macbeth and Banquo for their work, he makes Malcolm, his eldest son, his heir, though Malcolm has not yet proved himself. Malcolm first appears with Duncan, having fought and nearly been captured in battle. He is not a heroic figure like Macbeth, who “unseam’d [Macdonwald] from the nave to th’chops” (I.ii.22), yet he is promised Scotland and made Prince of Cumberland during a period when the crown of Scotland was not usually passed on hereditarily. Macbeth has earned his titles; Malcolm has not. Where Duncan had previously operated in a meritocratic
society, he now contradicts this framework in creating Malcolm Prince of Cumberland. Duncan therefore opens the door to the actions Macbeth and Lady Macbeth undertake.

_The Duchess of Malfi_ begins with Antonio’s tales of the French court’s magnificence, corruption at the court in Amalfi, and two brothers plotting to keep their newly widowed sister from marrying again. Here the problems are already in place; the court is at odds with itself, a situation that Antonio believes can be rectified if it is cleansed at its source:

> Considering duly that a prince’s court  
> Is like a common fountain, whence should flow  
> Pure silver drops in general. But if’t chance  
> Some cursed example poison’t near the head,  
> ‘Death and diseases through the whole land spread.’ (I.i.11-15)

He creates the image of the Duchess as the fountain of the court, the center and source, the head: the body politic. If she is corrupted or poisoned, then the whole land will sicken and die. Conversely, her purity or goodness, in theory, can cleanse the land. As the Cardinal employs Bosola’s services, it becomes clear that the poison runs deep and that the Duchess’ brothers aim to control the source of the fountain.

Lady Macbeth and the Duchess are introduced into these male-dominated worlds. Unlike Margaret and Isabella, each woman is spoken of before she enters. In celebration of their battle victory, Duncan tells Macbeth that he will be coming to Inverness. Macbeth responds, “I’ll be myself the harbinger, and make joyful/The hearing of my wife with your approach” (I.iv.45-46). This introduction sets the Macbeths up as equals; Lady Macbeth is presented in conjunction with the home as the future hostess of the king. It is as important for her to know that Duncan is coming as it is for Macbeth. There is a double meaning in Macbeth’s words; given the letter he has already sent, which Lady Macbeth reads in the following scene, of course she will be “made joyful” when she discovers that Duncan is
coming so much sooner than they could have expected. But the audience is not yet aware of any murderous plots, only the witches’ double-tongued prophecies. Freud first expounded the theory of the Macbeths as two halves of a whole, saying “Together they exhaust the possibilities of reaction to the crime, like two disunited parts of a singly psychical individuality, and it may be that they are both copied from a single prototype” (Freud 44). Donald A. Stauffer, a literary critic and professor of English at Princeton in the 1930s and ‘40s, elaborates this synchronicity: “Macbeth may be seen in his wife, who has no name but his. They are bound in a terrible sympathy” (232). Lady Macbeth is introduced as Macbeth’s wife, as the keeper of the home, and as the softer, feminized soul of his masculine, brutal body. “The exact key to her character is given by regarding her as the antithesis of her husband, and an embodiment of the inner life and its intellectual culture so markedly wanting in him” (Moulton 68).

The Duchess is introduced by Antonio, her future husband, though he doesn’t yet know it. In I.ii., she has entered silently and stands apart with others of the court while Antonio and Delio discuss Ferdinand, the Cardinal, and her:

But for their sister, the right noble Duchess,  
You never fixed your eye on three fair medals  
Cast in one figure of so different temper.  
For her discourse, it is so full of rapture,  
You only will begin then to be sorry  
When she doth end her speech, and wish in wonder  
She held it less vainglory to talk much  
Than your penance to hear her. Whilst she speaks  
She throws upon a man so sweet a look  
That it were able raise one to a galliard  
That lay in a dead palsy, and to dote  
On that sweet countenance. But in that look  
There speaketh so divine a continence  
As cuts off all lascivious and vain hope.  
Her days are practised in such noble virtue  
That, sure, her nights – nay more, her very sleeps -
Are more in heaven than other ladies’ shrifts.
Let all sweet ladies break their flattering glasses
And dress themselves in her. (I.ii.105-123)

This is a much more extensive introduction than that given to Lady Macbeth; Antonio already idolizes the Duchess, thinks her the paragon of womanhood and far above her scheming brothers. Much of this description mimics Suffolk’s acclaim of Margaret when she first appears; both speeches share an element of performativity, of a man telling the audience what a woman is. This description, given to the audience before the Duchess has spoken, defines her character in advance of her opportunity to depict her own character. Most often this character is described through the language of the body politic, which Dympna Callaghan pinpoints as the “juxtaposition of two exceptions to the norm of femininity – the virtuous woman and the woman ruler” (Women and Gender 149). She is described as being more than any other woman or person. She has the power to raise a dead man to dancing and even bears an aspect of divinity, closer to heaven in her sleep than most women are during prayer. Antonio’s introduction of her immediately defines her as the soul, as a perfecting element bearing aspects of divinity. So lost is he in this flowery description that Delio immediately thereafter calls him “Antonia” (I.ii.123), feminizing his name and indicating how lost he is in the feminine soul embodied by the Duchess. But of course, the ideal woman and the ideal ruler are two diametrically opposed ideas, and ultimately the Duchess struggles to fulfill both roles (Callaghan, Women and Gender).

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Lady Macbeth enters reading the letter her husband sent her regarding the witches’ prophecy: “This have I thought good to deliver thee (my dearest partner of greatness) that thou might’st not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promis’d
thee” (I.v.10-13). Again, she is presented as his equal, his partner, who stands to gain just as much as he does. They are united whatever comes their way. The letter leads Lady Macbeth to consider how Macbeth is “too full o’ the milk of human kindness,/To catch the nearest way” (I.v.16-17). Macbeth writes of vague promises and Lady Macbeth seems to know that he does not have the iron will to take what he believes he deserves; it should be given to him as an earned merit. She wants the best for him, and vows that he will receive what has been promised to him (though the promises were made by witches). Marjorie Garber views her as

[seeing] herself as the stronger, the dominant, the more conventionally ‘masculine’ of the two. I think we can say with justice that those unisex witches, with their women’s forms and their confusingly masculine beards, are, among other things, dream images, metaphors, for Lady Macbeth herself: physically a woman but, as she claims, mentally and spiritually a man. (Garber, After All 713)

Garber is a little ahead of herself here; it is not until she discovers that Macbeth is on his way and that Duncan will spend the night at Inverness that Lady Macbeth launches into the “unsex me here” speech, a favorite speech of scholars to prove how unwomanly she is. With the announcement of Duncan’s imminent arrival, vague promises become a concrete future; at the opportunity presented, Lady Macbeth must immediately find the capacity within herself to get for her husband what he will not take. Garber also points out the performativity of language in this speech: “Neither manliness nor womanliness can be taken for granted in a world, and on a stage, where gender is by definition an act” (After All 713). Just as language can identify night or the battlefields of France (as in Henry V), it has the capacity to transform Lady Macbeth, to give her the additional body she needs to accomplish her goals. As a simple wife and hostess, she is not capable of helping her husband to get what he deserves, especially not within a matter of hours. Carolyn Asp, in exploring how the play blurs gender stereotypes, considers that “Lady Macbeth consciously
attempts to reject her feminine sensibility and adopt a male mentality because she perceives
that her society equates feminine qualities with weakness. The dichotomy between role and
nature which ensues ends with her mental disintegration and suicide” (377-378). The
“unsex me here” speech is her attempt to become what is required of her to effect change in
a male-dominated, violent world. Stephanie Chamberlain, contextualizing Lady Macbeth
within early modern motherhood, argues, “What she craves instead is an alternative gender
identity, one which will allow her to slip free of the emotional as well as cultural constraints
governing women” (79-80). Bruce Smith reads the speech through a presentist analysis,
believing she actually means “ungender me here” (25): “What Lady Macbeth describes in
her ‘unsex me here’ speech is not gender but what it feels like to possess gender, and she does
so in terms specific to early modern culture. The sexed body is fundamental to how, in this
particular time and place, gender feels” (“Resexing” 40-41, original emphasis). She cannot,
however, merely undo her own gender; as Christina Leon Alfar points out, “that Lady
Macbeth requires help to pervert her emotions suggests that she is not innately wicked”
(189). She calls on outside forces to help subvert her own womanly body natural, denying it
in order to merge more fully with her husband’s body natural, uniting in order to achieve
their promised future.

Once Macbeth enters, their dialogue overlaps. They share lines until Lady Macbeth
promises “O! never/Shall sun that morrow see!” (I.v.60-61). The shortened feet of the
second line indicates some physical reaction from Macbeth, which she then goes on to
assuage, ending with “Only look up clear;/To alter favour ever is to fear./Leave all the rest
to me” (I.v.71-73). Macbeth shies away from taking the kingly body politic by force, but
Lady Macbeth promises to use her position as his wife and the lady of the house, easing his
worry and sharing his burden, which Asp believes she does because “she must appeal as a woman to his manliness as well as channel her energies into maintaining a persona of masculine courage” (383-4). In the following scene Lady Macbeth greets Duncan and his retinue alone. She plays the perfect hostess, reiterating the witches’ double-speak, “twice done and then done double” (I.vi.15), but never giving a hint that something is amiss. She utilizes her position as lady of the house to set the trap, which Alfar believes provides “a parodic inversion of the ideal wife [that] allows Shakespeare to put pressure on masculinist and violent structures of relations that depend on women’s abject confirmation for their unremitting self-perpetuation” (Alfar 180).

In the final scene leading up to the murder, Macbeth doubts their agreed-upon course of action. Lady Macbeth carefully works within the framework of their relationship to coerce him. She uses her position as his wife, never commanding him but compelling him as the thinking soul does the feeling body: “Art thou afeard/To be the same in thine own act and valour/As thou art in desire?” (I.vii.39-41). Because she is his wife, she is able to compare this lapse in performance with the love he has for her: “From this time/Such I account thy love” (I.vii.38-39). Macbeth is failing in his union with Lady Macbeth until she challenges him, eliciting his response “I dare do all that may become a man;/Who dares do more, is none” (I.vii.46-47). This statement bears much weight; Macbeth claims that he is only a man, and that contemplating this act fundamentally alters him. By acting upon it, he is no longer a man: he becomes more than just a man. Heather Love, locating the play’s queerness at the intersection of time and desire, posits: “If manliness demands courage, ruthlessly murdering a defenseless creature at the moment of greatest vulnerability demands a woman’s touch” (205). Therefore the union of man and woman acting together allows
them to achieve more than if each acted alone. Lady Macbeth dares do more, and she is not a man; the two together are so much more than merely “man.” In their greater capacity as united body and soul, they are capable of what one alone is not.

Lady Macbeth’s response to this speech, “I have given suck,” is another moment often cited as proof against her femininity. But her speech does not purely display her willingness to murder her own baby and thus deny her identity as woman; it is a metaphor indicating the strength of her promise, “had I so sworn/As you have done to this” (I.vii.59-60). Had she sworn to murder her baby as Macbeth has sworn to murder Duncan, then she would fulfill that oath. She makes a comparison originating from within her feminine body, equating the unnaturalness of the act of a mother murdering her child with that of a subject murdering his king. This speech recognizes Lady Macbeth’s position as female in the male-dominated world she inhabits, and explains the ruthlessness required for Macbeth to gain the kingly body politic. Alfar excuses her behavior: “Lady Macbeth is not an anomaly of female evil too gross to be imagined but a woman whose actions conforms to a masculinist culture of violence” (186). While most interpretations of Macbeth condemn Lady Macbeth as the poisonous, corrupting force in the play, it is actually the two of them, with two united bodies natural, who corrupt the kingly body politic by taking it without right. Lady Macbeth’s language in unsexing herself and plucking the smiling gums from her nipple are attempts to reconcile the harsh, unyielding, masculine world and her position in it with her feminine body, as Alfar suggests: “Set within a structure of power dependent on violence for stability, Lady Macbeth’s behavior adheres to rather than transgresses her gender role” (181). Janet Adelman investigates Macbeth’s response “Bring forth men-children only!/For thy undaunted mettle should compose/Nothing but males” (I.vii.73-75) in light of Lady
Macbeth’s acquired masculinity: “Through the double pun on mettle/metal and male/mail, Lady Macbeth herself becomes virtually male, composed of the hard metal of which the armoured male is made” (59, original emphasis). Lady Macbeth’s success, and the ultimate union of their two bodies, is embodied in Macbeth’s resolution: “I am settled, and bend up/Each corporal agent to this terrible feat” (I.vii.80-81). He essentially turns off his brain, his soul, his head, and resigns himself to using purely his physical body in accomplishing the task, leaving the spiritual body with Lady Macbeth, the two of them functioning as one.

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The Duchess of Malfi enters in I.ii, along with her brother the Cardinal, her waiting-woman Cariola, and the Cardinal’s mistress Julia. Through this first scene, the Duchess seems relatively subordinate and reactive, not driving the action but following where others lead her. She is a widow, and still young enough that Ferdinand and the Cardinal extract a promise from her to never marry again. They give many examples of how the Duchess would be considered lascivious if she were to wed anew. Her identity as a widow is firmly established in this scene, as Dympna Callaghan explains, “Widowhood was simply an intensified condition of early modern femininity, just as female sovereignty might be said to be an exaggerated one – womanhood in extremis, so to speak” (“Early Modern Widows” 273). Already she embodies a heightened form of womanhood, which will alter with her marriage. By contrast, her brothers’ language is extremely materialistic, concerning “youth, high promotion, eloquence . . . honour” (I.ii.211-212), diamonds, and whores. They are concerned primarily with the body natural, with the physical elements associated with her remarriage and her status. But they do not necessarily have the right to command her body politic as they do. Muriel C. Bradbrook, a well-known Shakespearean scholar, explains:
The absolute authority of the head of the family over all members was not disputed, and the natural subjection of sister to brother appears in a number of English plays. But imposing on the Duchess the heroic role of Virtuous Widow – a role which the individual could certainly choose, which was seemly for older women, which could confer extraordinary power on a Catherine de Medici – was tyrannical. (“Renaissance Contexts” 48)

When Ferdinand and the Duchess are left alone onstage (with Cariola in the background), she criticizes him for how well-planned his and the Cardinal’s speeches were, to which he retorts, “You are my sister./This was my father’s poniard” (I.ii.246). This statement distinguishes between the male Ferdinand and female Duchess, and suggests a sexual reference to, and masculine domination of, the Duchess by her twin brother, who will later demonstrate an obsession with her body and sexuality. However, given the materialistic nature of the earlier coercion, this statement can also be seen as highlighting Ferdinand as the hand, the muscle, the body which is capable of doing. He lacks the Duchess’ body politic, the additional spiritual element which makes her divine, ephemeral, and intangible as seen in Antonio’s description of her, contrasted to Ferdinand’s corporeality. This reading is supported twelve lines later, when the Duchess says:

And even now,
Even in this hate, as men in some great battles
By apprehending danger have achieved
Almost impossible actions – I have heard soldiers say so -
So I, through frights and threatenings, will assay
This dangerous venture. (I.ii.258-263)

The Duchess is no mere woman; she is so much more than what a woman was expected to be, fulfilling the requirements of someone in a position of political authority by proving herself capable of encountering and overcoming danger even as a man does in battle.

After Ferdinand leaves, the Duchess confides to Cariola that she has a secret and shortly thereafter calls in Antonio to look over the house accounts: “It’s fit like thrifty
husbands we enquire/What's laid up for tomorrow” (I.ii.281-282). She refers to herself in both the masculine and feminine genders in her discussion with him. Immediately it becomes clear that a gender role reversal is happening. The Duchess acts as the “thrifty husband,” while Antonio manages the details of the estate and must account to her. As the scene slides closer to the marriage vows, as the Duchess begins to approach the addition of “wife” to her identity, she switches back and forth between using the first person singular and the royal “we,” referring to herself “as ’tis fit princes should” (I.ii.291). Antonio’s presence and their gradual coming together create a conflict between her body natural and body politic. In her attempt to become wife, the Duchess continues to represent the soul, seeking union with a second body natural in which to harbor herself, a metaphor which is embodied in the language she uses to woo Antonio. But for one who already has the equivalent of a queenly body politic, marriage is a delicate business (a delicate business Queen Elizabeth intimately knew), as shall be explored in the following section.

**THE BODY POLITIC**

The body politic for each of these characters is corrupted through binding action: murder and marriage. Lady Macbeth achieves her body politic through the murder of Duncan. Very quickly it becomes apparent that she is not ready for the consequences of an ill-gotten queenly body politic. The Duchess divides her body natural between body politic and husband through the secret marriage to Antonio, witnessed by Cariola. She holds onto and manages her body politic quite a bit longer than Lady Macbeth, primarily through secrecy. This allows her to contain it, but not fully embody its powers. For each character, the body politic is not what was expected, or what was promised.
Lady Macbeth enters into II.ii. having given Duncan’s grooms drugged wine in preparation for Macbeth, who is now in the chamber with the sleeping Duncan. She exalts, “That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold:/What hath quench’d them hath given me fire” (II.ii.1-2). The wine has effectively separated her mind from her body, suppressing her body natural. Her body natural is the source of human weakness, in this case doubt, as evidenced by her hesitation on “Had he not resembled/My father as he slept, I had done’t” (II.ii.12-13). Garber points out how “[t]he choice of husband or father . . . is a recurrent dilemma for Shakespearean women, and it marks not only a space of psychological sundering and individuation for these women . . . but also something structural about the plays” (After All 715). While Lady Macbeth is willing to cross the boundaries drawn between king and subject, guest and hostess, she does not dare cross the father/daughter bond. Mark Thornton Burnett, attempting to reinvestigate Lady Macbeth, highlights why this moment is so popular:

Critics quote these lines with an enthusiasm which borders upon relief – finally the woman in the unwomanly Lady Macbeth is glimpsed. In fact, her comment only reinforces an awareness of her oppression by patriarchy: at the crucial moment, the law of the father intervenes, insisting upon filial obedience, a dim memory stirs, and Lady Macbeth is paralyzed. (“The fiend-like Queen” 14)

While critics certainly do have a tendency to overwork this particular line, Lady Macbeth’s response to her inability to murder a sleeping man is perfectly reasonable within a human who has for the first time been confronted with the reality of murder. These lines highlight the unnaturalness of the act.

As Macbeth enters having done the deed, he and his wife continually share lines, starting at noises and leaning on one another, relying on their union as two halves of the whole to confront the completion of the deed. Their two bodies natural together can
accomplish what one alone could not. When Lady Macbeth spies the daggers, chastising Macbeth for taking them with him and urging him to return them to the scene of the murder, he refuses. His body natural has gone as far as it unthinkingly can; it seems now the sight of the murder was too much for his mind and he obsesses over the minutiae. It is left to Lady Macbeth to think of the future, anticipating the consequences and covering their tracks: “If he do bleed, / I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal, / For it must seem their guilt” (II.ii.54-56). She leaves to deposit the daggers; her return brings her closer to Macbeth’s state of mind: “My hands are of your colour; but I shame / To wear a heart so white” (II.ii.63-64). This line invokes the language of the body and soul, that her hands are stained with blood, just like Macbeth’s, but her heart is technically pure, unstained with murder as his is. Yet the action seems to already weigh heavily on her soul.

As the murder is revealed early the next morning, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth play the part of grieving subjects amongst the assembled lords. Macduff attempts to disregard Lady Macbeth’s request for information as she is a woman, “O gentle lady, / ’Tis not for you to hear what I can speak: / The repetition, in a woman’s ear, / Would murther as it fell” (II.iii.81-84). But of course, Lady Macbeth is no mere woman, she is much more, having already seen (and caused) the gory faces that horrify Macduff. Her response to Macduff’s disclosure of the murder to Banquo, misguided though it may be, stems from the role of hostess she has played in public heretofore: “What! in our house?” (II.iii.86). Her only other role in this scene is the fainting fit, which stops Macbeth in the midst of his passionate defense of his killing of the grooms, “Who could refrain / That had a heart to love, and in that heart / Courage, to make’s love known?” (II.iii.114-116). It is possible that here he is contemplating confessing the murder; his love for Duncan enforces him to come clean.
There is no clear consensus on whether Shakespeare intended the fainting fit to be real or faked. There is a certain ambiguity to the moment, seen in its unexpectedness and Macbeth’s lack of reaction to his wife’s faint – perhaps she is trying to create a distraction to remove suspicion from herself and her husband. Whatever Lady Macbeth hears in his words, her faint could be played as a believable reaction to the horrifying descriptions of Duncan’s corpse and Macbeth’s murder of the two grooms, particularly knowing as the audience does that she has seen the corpse herself. Reliving the experience is too much to handle (Bradley 391). Though she certainly has shown fortitude until now, it is entirely possible that her body natural has reached its breaking point, and even her connection to Macbeth, despite the power and perfection of marriage, simply cannot push her further. The fact remains that under the circumstances, Shakespeare does not have anyone in the scene question her faint. Lady Macbeth has done all she can as lady and wife, and now her overwhelmed body natural dictates the response.

At this point, Lady Macbeth’s identity as a wife has been horribly abused. She used her position as Macbeth’s wife in order to question his capacity, to spur him on, and to ensure he was capable of more. In order to take advantage of the opportune moment, Lady Macbeth broke the bonds of hostess, giving Duncan the illusion of safety and security only to use it against him. As Macbeth says:

He’s here in double trust:
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then as his host,
Who should against his murtherer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. (I.vii.12-16)
She has used her capacities in unnatural ways in order to achieve a body politic for herself and her husband. The unnaturalness of her coercion means that the new, queenly body politic she believes she has earned will never sit naturally upon her.

In the first scene of Act III, Lady Macbeth appears for the first time since the murder, now Queen. She and Macbeth immediately use “our,” speaking as a unit and utilizing the royal “we”:

Macbeth: Here’s our chief guest.
Lady Macbeth: If he had been forgotten
It had been as a gap in our great feast,
And all-thing unbecoming. (III.i.11-13)

It is interesting to note that, unlike the history plays, their titles do not change in the line assignations. Even in stage directions, they are still referred to as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, not King and Queen. James Wells, exploring the dramatization of identity within the play, explains that “For [Macbeth’s] wife, to raise one’s stature, to become a greater version of the self, even by means of apparent self-dislocation, is simply to be more of what one already is” (233). Fundamentally, she has not altered; she does not embody the queenly body politic. This is the only scene where the Macbeths appear happily crowned; they very quickly begin to deteriorate under the pressures of the kingship. In fact, Lady Macbeth is referred to as “queen” only twice in the play: once by Seyton as he tells Macbeth of her death, and once by Malcolm in the closing speech. Clearly the title does not hang upon her as it did Margaret or Isabella. By the very next scene, Lady Macbeth is fearful:

Nought’s had, all’s spent,
Where our desire is got without content:
’Tis safer to be that which we destroy,
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy. (III.ii.4-7)
Already she fears that they have wagered everything, staked her soul and stained his body, in an unnatural act that will ultimately destroy them. So early into her reign,

[T]he glory of her dream has faded. She enters, disillusioned, and weary with want of sleep: she has thrown away everything and gained nothing . . . Henceforth she has no initiative: the stem of her being seems to be cut through. Her husband, physically the stronger, maddened by pangs he had foreseen, but still flaming with life, comes into the foreground, and she retires. Her will remains, and she does her best to help him; but he rarely needs her help. (Bradley 287)

When Macbeth enters just as disturbed as she, Lady Macbeth attempts to console him but seems unable to do so. The connection between their bodies natural is eroding. No longer does she question his ability as a man, nor comfort him with promises of the future, summing up everything with “what’s done is done” (III.ii.12), almost as though telling a child to stop crying about the past. He responds, “We have scorch’d the snake, not kill’d it:/She’ll close, and be herself; whilst our poor malice/Remains in danger of her former tooth” (III.ii.13-15). Macbeth now seems to have the clearer vision of the future. He sees that the appropriate lineage of the crown was disrupted, but not permanently diverted. The body politic will pass on to whom it belongs, and he dreads condemnation and retribution for the interference. Her words no longer affect him.

Lady Macbeth’s final scene in which she clearly bears the body politic is the banquet scene, which is coincidentally the last scene in which she and Macbeth appear together.

Macbeth enters,

Ourself will mingle with society,
And play the humble host.
Our hostess keeps her state; but, in best time,
We will require her welcome. (III.iv.3-6)

Lady Macbeth responds “Pronounce it for me, Sir” (III.iv.7). Macbeth clearly distinguishes between “our” referring to himself, and Lady Macbeth, who is “she.” Lady Macbeth
responds by using the first person singular. Though she is acting Queen and speaks according to the requirements of that position, they no longer feel like two halves of a whole, but two separate entities. Macbeth as king no longer relies on his wife as he once did; his kingly body politic has usurped his need for his wife by his side, and their actions have permanently sundered one from the other. Lady Macbeth no longer functions as wife and hostess; she has been corrupted too far by her actions taken against Duncan.

As Banquo’s ghost appears, Macbeth fluctuates between the first person singular and the royal “we.” Lady Macbeth does her best to calm him down; she maintains a queenly façade in front of the lords, though her connection to Macbeth seems to have dissolved and she is ineffective at assuaging his madness. Where her body politic is apparently in place and functioning, the divide of her body natural from his is becoming clearer. When she finally breaks through to him and gains his attention, his response is disturbing:

You make me strange
Even to the disposition that I owe,
When now I think you can behold such sights,
And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks,
When mine is blanch’d with fear. (III.iv.111-115)

He sees her as more than a woman, more than himself, and it terrifies him. The Arden edition explains in the footnote, “He had thought himself brave; now, when he sees her unmoved at sights which appal him, he is staggered in his estimate of himself” (qtd. in Muir 96 footnote). For Macbeth, the reaction is entirely corporeal, draining his face of blood. Lady Macbeth’s reaction is cerebral, lodged in her head, with the effects blotting her soul: she cannot see the ghost, but fears for Macbeth’s well-being. Shakespeare scholar A.C. Bradley articulates her transformation at this point, saying “We begin to think of her now [at the end of the banquet scene] less as the awful instigator of murder than as a woman
with much that is grand in her, and much that is piteous. Strange and almost ludicrous as the statement may sound, she is, up to her light, a perfect wife” (288).

In their final moments together, alone in the banquet hall after she has sent the other lords away, their interaction becomes quiet and informal, with her worrying, “You lack the season of all natures, sleep” (III.iv.140). His response is simple and direct after his outbursts railing against the ghost, his fears that “blood will have blood” (III.iv.121), and his plans to demand knowledge from the Weird Sisters: “Come, we’ll to sleep. My strange and self-abuse/Is the initiate fear, that wants hard use:/We are yet but young in deed” (III.iv.141-143). Alone with her, Macbeth has used the first person singular pronoun; the use of “we” in these final lines is a last moment of solidarity between the two of them. However briefly, he returns to their marriage, though Lady Macbeth will have no further inclusion in his future plans or actions. From here on, his body natural is divided from her body natural, the two halves of the whole divided. The separation leaves the body politic without a whole unit in which to be vested, anticipating their downfall.

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The Duchess of Malfi creates conflict within her body natural through her marriage to Antonio. The wooing scene shows a Duchess who knows what she wants; while Antonio doesn’t seem to actively pursue her, he certainly flirts back a little, and admires her greatly. Their relationship is already one of familiarity; they share lines and build off each other’s thoughts:

Antonio: I’d have you first provide for a good husband: Give him all.
Duchess: All?
Antonio: Yes, your excellent self.
Duchess: In a winding sheet?
Antonio: In a couple. (I.ii.302-304)
They show concern for one another, and there seems to be a balance between them throughout the scene. The Duchess is clever in her wooing, using wordplay to get her point across within the bounds of propriety, given her status and Antonio’s employment. In her line, “You may discover what a wealthy mine/I make you lord of” (I.ii.2340-341), “mine” can both refer to her estate/title and her body, all that is herself. But the dual language finds its pinnacle in her speech:

The misery of us that are born great!
We are forced to woo because none dare woo us.
And as a tyrant doubles with his words
And fearfully equivocates, so we
Are forced to express our violent passions
In riddles and in dreams, and leave the path
Of simple virtue, which was never made
To seem the thing it is not. Go – go brag
You have left me heartless: mine is in your bosom;
I hope ‘twill multiply love there. You do tremble.
Make not your heart so dead a piece of flesh
To fear more than to love me. Sir, be confident -
What is’t distracts you? This is flesh and blood, sir:
‘Tis not the figure cut in alabaster
Kneels at my husband’s tomb. Awake, awake, man!
I do here put off all vain ceremony
And only do appear to you a young widow
That claims you for her husband; and, like a widow,
I use but half a blush in’t. (I.ii.351-369)

Here the Duchess translates much of the double language of the king’s two bodies to her situation. Antonio represents the body natural, the simplicity with which the Duchess attempts to express herself, despite her status. Her body politic is her title, the “figure cut in alabaster” that kneels at her husband’s tomb, which she can never completely be rid of but which she attempts to put off, speaking to Antonio as a widow and nothing more. Chris McMahon, investigating the Duchess as a progressive reformer, believes that,
Since this arrangement does not only concern a man and a woman but a prince and her servant, however, the equality of their gestures symbolically links a regime of mutually supportive matrimony with prospects of meritocratic state reform. In short, Antonio is simultaneously rewarded for his good service and enters into a relation of symbolic equality with the Duchess, his prince and his beloved. Antonio kneels before his prince only to be lifted up by his wife. (171)

As with the fountain image, the hope is that, should the Duchess marry a man of such high internal morality as Antonio, it will be good for her and thus good for the people; the fountain that springs from the Duchess will be improved. John Selzer sees the Duchess as justified in her choice since “to her, true worth is determined by high moral value . . . not by high birth . . . [her] actions reveal that the Duchess has earned, not merely inherited, her position and our admiration” (93). Webster’s choice to set Antonio lower than the Duchess changes slightly the implications of her marriage; if the Duchess has earned her position, then Antonio’s inner worth is highlighted as well. But the less equal match also means that the Duchess is indulging her body natural as woman more than her body natural as bearer of the body politic. In her essay “Defining/Confining the Duchess,” critic Theodora A. Jankowski quotes Joyce E. Peterson who writes, “the Duchess improperly sets the private claims of her body natural above the public claims of her body politic” (qtd. in Jankowski 223). Jankowski’s use of the king’s two bodies theory (which the above quotation is used to support) incorporates theory from Catherine Belsey and Susan Wells; thus she misses some of the nuances of the original theory. Jankowski is correct when she suggests that the Duchess “is represented as demonstrating her own right to choose a husband and her right to determine how she – as ruler of Malfi – will legitimize her choice” (234). She goes on:

However, despite her attempt to take political control over the marriage ceremony, the Duchess does not make the marriage part of her strategy for rule. That she is presented as opting to keep her marriage secret indicates that
she has not determined an effective way to integrate marriage into her public life as ruler. (ibid)

The Duchess does prioritize the wants of her body natural at this moment, and then uses her body politic to mask her marriage. However, Jankowski assumes the Duchess’ actions are meant to effectively separate two bodies which, by definition, cannot be separated except by death. In order to fully embrace her marriage to Antonio, the Duchess would need to recognize the marriage as Duchess, which she cannot do without compromising her body politic. Her body natural is torn between her body politic and her marriage to Antonio.

Pregnancy disrupts her hopes of keeping her marriage secret. Sid Ray recognizes that “As a site of sexuality, regeneration and doubleness and as a literalization of the two-bodies-in-one construction of absolute power, the Duchess’s pregnancies . . . not only recast female authority as natural but also subvert the underpinnings of absolutist discourse” (17). The social implications when the pregnancies and marriage are revealed upheave Ray’s theory; they do not naturalize the Duchess’ reign, but call into question her motivations and abilities. Though she has done a remarkable job of playing the game of appearance between the widowed duchess and a wife pregnant with Antonio’s child, her body natural speaks, betraying her with oversensitivity to smells and a reaction to Bosola’s apricots. Instead she must rely on Antonio to screen what’s happening; his body natural must shield hers, legitimizing it in a way her body politic cannot any longer. He guards her while she is in labor, protecting her from Bosola’s probing inquiries. Delio suggests hiding her labor by implicating that Bosola poisoned her with the apricots, and that she won’t see physicians for fear of more poisoning. This excuse, historically, would have been a legitimate fear because she was the Duchess, regent of Amalfi, whom many may have wanted to poison and thus
control (Marcus 182 footnote). Her body politic here serves to mask her body natural by providing a valid reason for her to be in bed, unwilling to see a physician.

It is also interesting to note that Ferdinand and the Cardinal have not been seen since the Duchess and Antonio wed. The Duchess feels complete with Antonio, but Ferdinand and the Cardinal believe his lower status has diminished her. When Ferdinand and the Cardinal do return, they discuss the Duchess’ new lover and how her relationship has tainted them. Ferdinand vows revenge for her falsity:

That I might toss her palace ‘bout her ears  
Root up her goodly forests, blast her meads,  
And lay her general territory as waste  
As she hath done her honours. (II.v.18-21)

The specific items he wishes to destroy are all emblems of the Duchess’ body politic – her palace, her territories, her resources. In Ferdinand’s mind, the liaison of her body natural has voided her body politic, and he will destroy it accordingly. The Cardinal likewise points out, “Shall our blood/The royal blood of Aragon and Castile,/Be thus attainted?” (II.v.21-23). This question perfectly encapsulates the combination of the royalty of the body politic with the blood of the body natural, the interconnectedness of the two such that if one is stained, the other is affected. The house of Aragon and Castile is corrupted by the Duchess’ lust for and relationship with the common Antonio.

The Duchess manages to keep her secret, bearing Antonio three children before Ferdinand returns to Malfi. Antonio relates the public suspicions that have arisen regarding his relationship with the Duchess in the interim:

They do observe I grow to infinite purchase  
The left-hand way, and all suppose the Duchess  
Would amend it if she could. For, say they,  
Great princes, though they grudge their officers  
Should have such large and unconfined means
To get wealth under them, will not complain,  
Lest thereby they should make them odious  
Unto the people. For other obligation  
Of love and marriage between her and me,  
They never dream of. (III.i.28-37)

It seems that the general public assumes the Duchess acts purely with her body politic, with no hint of the relationship she has cultivated with Antonio on behalf of her body natural. It is inconceivable that she would commit an act so much for the benefit of her body natural when her identity as the Duchess demands otherwise. Her body politic, and the assumptions that go along with it, has protected her relationship with Antonio numerous times.

Act III scene 2 offers a last glimpse of the bodies natural and politic in harmony. As Antonio and Cariola converse humorously with the Duchess, her thoughts turn to her reflection in a mirror. This scene, light-hearted and merry, is the epitome of the body natural, of the Duchess’ happiness and completeness with Antonio, kept secret in the privacy of her bedroom. As Antonio and Cariola leave, the Duchess contemplates how her looks are fading, reflecting the impending decline of her body natural as her union with Antonio is about to be challenged. She says, “But you'll say/Love mixed with fear is sweetest” (III.ii.64-65), as though the love of the body natural, which she shares with Antonio, is made sweeter by the fear of discovery produced by her body politic. Immediately before Ferdinand reveals himself, she vows “For know, whether I am doomed to live or die,/I can do both like a prince” (III.ii.69-70). It is unclear whether she thinks she’s still talking to Antonio, or knows that Ferdinand is behind her. Either way, in this last moment of safety and security, she is and will always be the Duchess of Malfi.

From this point forward, she will be separated from Antonio. Like Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, the separation of husband and wife makes the body natural suffer, resulting
in the loss of the body politic. The difference here is that the separation is forced by Ferdinand. Similarly to Lady Macbeth, the Duchess has abused her position as duchess by rewarding Antonio, elevating him higher than he was as her steward. Unlike Lady Macbeth, this is not nearly as gross an abuse of her body politic as Lady Macbeth’s transgression. In elevating Antonio, the Duchess has in fact counteracted much of the corruption at the heart of the Amalfi court. Antonio was appalled at the corruption; his higher status can only aid in cleansing the court and adopting the French customs that he so admires. His inherent worth allows him to be a good match for the Duchess. Lady Macbeth’s abuse of her body politic leads to the destruction of a king, an act that affects the entire country, as evidenced throughout the text via the metaphor of the diseased land. Thus Lady Macbeth’s downfall is largely of her own creation, while the Duchess’ is created by society, represented in her brothers Ferdinand and the Cardinal. Yet for both women, the separation of body natural and body politic sets them on the path to their inevitable end.

DEMISE

The demise of the body politic in these two plays begins with the separation of the spouses’ bodies natural from each other. The body politic cannot survive without a body natural; it must be attached to something corporeal in order to function. The body natural, once it has known the body politic, no longer sees the point in living without a soul. Both characters die because their bodies natural alone, lacking the marriage partner, are insufficient to fully house the body politic.

After the banquet scene, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are never seen together again. In fact, she nearly vanishes from the play until the fifth act. The feminine force is briefly
usurped by the Weird Sisters, who deliver to Macbeth their final, twisted prophecies to ensure his downfall. While many people credit the witches with Macbeth’s bloody tragedy, they simply offer him words that he takes for gospel. His actions, his choices, lead him as fatefully to his death as he believes their words do. Lady Macduff also makes her single-scene appearance, conveying through her agony how inverted the natural order has become when husbands leave their wives and children to be slaughtered, where a woman “[is] in this earthly world, where, to do harm/Is often laudable; to do good, sometime/Accounted dangerous folly” (IV.ii.74-76).

The Doctor and the Gentlewoman relate Lady Macbeth’s new proclivity for somnambulation since becoming Queen. The madness of Lady Macbeth is one of the most fascinating aspects of her character. How could such a strong woman be reduced to a shadow of her former self, so innocent in her sleep as to confess her sins without knowing it, when she kept the secret before? A.C. Bradley points out that, “if the Lady Macbeth of these scenes [in the first half of the play] were really utterly inhuman, or a ‘fiend-like queen,’ as Malcolm calls her, the Lady Macbeth of the sleep-walking scene would be an impossibility” (Bradley 282). Therefore she must have more depth than the blood-thirsty shrew some assume her to be. Juliet Dusinberre connects her conflicting female identities:

Lady Macbeth’s sense of self is rooted in a traditional pattern of femininity—mother, wife, helpmeet. . . . Seeking to be more than a woman she becomes less than one—the shadow of the sleep-walking scene, as unsexed as the witches themselves. (284)

The loss of Macbeth’s body natural, and the acquisition of a body politic as Queen which she took unnaturally, have served together to unhinge her mind and set her own body politic afloat. Lady Macbeth returns to her original state, to an identity that was entirely her own prior to the corruption and abuse of her self. James Wells delineates her madness by
arguing that “The present for Lady Macbeth is a perpetual reiteration of the past, and she is clearly ‘rapt,’ insensible alike to both temporal states of selfhood” (236). The Doctor stares on, unable to help her as she revisits Duncan’s corpse and once more tries to wipe the blood from her hands. After she leaves, he laments, “More needs she the divine than the physician” (V.i.71). Her soul needs tending, not her body. Her soul no longer has a body natural to harbor it, and it has driven her mad. As Dympna Callaghan notes, “Lady Macbeth becomes one of the most notable suicides in dramatic history, killing herself not because she has been violated, dishonored, grief-stricken, or the victim of unrequited love, but because she has descended to the depths of a peculiarly modern despair” (“Wicked Women” 368). That despair is the result of a disembodied, unnatural soul and an abused body politic.

When the Doctor meets with Macbeth, Macbeth pleads for his wife’s state and the Doctor’s inability to help through the language of the body and soul; he wants to treat the soul as one medically treats the physical body:

Macbeth: Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas’d, Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow, Raze out the written troubles of the brain, And with some sweet oblivious antidote Cleanse the stuff’d bosom of that perilous stuff Which weighs upon the heart?

Doctor: Therein the patient Must minister to himself. (V.iii.40-46)

The Doctor’s response implicates how much of Lady Macbeth’s affliction is affecting Macbeth as well; though they have physically separated one from the other, their married bodies natural continue to influence each other. Lady Macbeth cannot help but share her burden with Macbeth, just as the soul influences the body. Macbeth’s following speech concerns the land, diseased at it is, as though he takes the Doctor’s words to heart and turns
his concerns to himself and the body natural. The land is poisoned and reflects Macbeth, the physical manifestation of the poisoning of Lady Macbeth’s soul by their unnatural deed.

As the battle at Dunsinane commences, Macbeth seems nearly impregnable, “I have almost forgot the taste of fears” (V.v.9). Upon hearing of the Queen’s death, his attitude changes completely, and he mourns, “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow” (V.v.19). With Lady Macbeth’s death, Macbeth’s soul has gone. An unending litany of days stretches before him, soulless and alone. All his actions, their deeds, have led to no more than death, just like all other men. Life has no meaning, and his body politic is, in essence, gone. He is a walking shadow, a poor player strutting and fretting but without meaning. His life now means nothing without his Lady. As he exits to fight Malcolm’s forces, he seems to give up: “I ‘gin to be aweary of the sun,/And wish th’estate o’th’world were now undone” (V.v.49-50).

The final scene of the play significantly has Macduff entering having beheaded Macbeth offstage, “Behold, where stands/Th’usurper’s cursed head” (V.ix.20-21). Macduff carries the body politic, which transfers to Malcolm in front of the assembled men, an act which Marjorie Garber finds horrific because “The decapitation of the state, the severing of the head from the body politic, was at the same time unimaginable, and offered to the reader (or audience) to imagine” (“The Male Medusa” 85), and, Garber argues, recalls the beheading of Mary, Queen of Scots, James I’s mother. It is not accidental that Shakespeare has Macbeth die in this manner. James I also invoked the head as body politic in the Basilikon Doron (1599), which is said to be one of Shakespeare’s inspirations:

And for the similitude of the head and the body, it may very well fall out that the head will be forced to garre cut off some rotten members (as I haue already said) to keep the rest of the body in integritie: but what state the body
can be in, if the heade, for any infirmitie that can fall to it, be cut off, I leaue it to the readers iudgement. (qtd. in Garber, “The Male Medusa” 85)

The state is in chaos, the natural world plagued by storms and disease, and Lady Macbeth has taken action against herself. Order is restored with Malcolm’s acquisition of the body politic, taking the place of the head. Malcolm’s final words of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are the damning epitaph: “Of this dead butcher, and his fiend-like Queen,/Who, as ‘tis thought, by self and violent hands/Took off her life” (V.ix.35-37). He vows to deal with them later, as though they are an after-thought, a nuisance which must be dealt with amongst much more important matters.

Lady Macbeth is spoken of at the end when her body politic is broken, and her final image is one allying her with forces of evil. Yet that is not the sum of the character Shakespeare wrote. As B. J. Bedard argues, “the text reveals little of her beyond her obsession to bend all things to her husband’s ambition and to unsex herself that she may become the man needed both to prompt him to the deed and to assist in its execution. She is destroyed because she does not know the effect of her action upon herself” (42). Her abuse of the body politic, the unnatural treatment of her soul, and her separation from her husband meant that suicide was the inevitable end. Lady Macbeth’s demise belongs to both her and her husband, but the consequences, and her death, were entirely within her own power.

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The Duchess’ demise begins in the middle of III.ii. with the reveal to Ferdinand of her marriage to Antonio. Immediately Ferdinand says of her, “Or is it true thou art but a bare name,/And no essential thing?” (III.ii.72-73). He denies her existence as a person, identifying her as an empty title (while invoking the “no thing” definition of woman), and
then proceeds to deny her voice, cutting off her explanations. He then appears to usurp Antonio's place as body natural:

Ferdinand: Thou art undone. 
And thou hast ta'en that massy sheet of lead 
That hid thy husband’s bones and folded it 
About my heart. 
Duchess: Mine bleeds for’t. (III.ii.110-113)

Ferdinand places himself where the Duchess’ first husband, the dead Duke, once stood. The Duchess attempts to fight back,

Why should only I, 
Of all the other princes of the world, 
Be cased up like a holy relic? I have youth 
And a little beauty. (III.ii.135-138)

She recognizes her unique position as a female prince, and argues she should be allowed to determine the course of her own life, but the matter is taken out of her hands. Ferdinand disappears, Antonio and Cariola reenter with just enough time for the three of them to make plans, and then Bosola arrives with officers to arrest Antonio on a false charge. Once the marriage has been revealed, their courses are forever altered by those who don't approve.

Bosola sums up their union perfectly,

Last, the neglected poets of your time, 
In honour of this trophy of a man, 
Raised by that curious engine, your white hand. 
Shall thank you in your grave for’t. (III.ii.294-297)

Her hand is the body natural imbued with the body politic, capable of raising Antonio into marriage with her, though from now on they are divided.

The Duchess and Antonio part ways, knowing it's safer. Their parting words continue to reflect his presence as the body and hers as the soul:
Duchess: Your kiss is colder
Than that I have seen an holy anchorite
Give to a dead man’s skull.
Antonio: My heart is turned to a heavy lump of lead,
With which I sound my danger. Fare you well.
Exit [with his elder son].
Duchess: My laurel is all withered. (III.v.86-91)

Without the Duchess, Antonio’s heart is useless; without Antonio, the Duchess’ soul has
dried up. Though she retains the title and outward appearance of the Duchess, she no longer
seems to contain the power associated with it. Her body politic has lost the house of the
body natural, and so is powerless. Her statement, “When Fortune’s wheel is overcharged
with princes/The weight makes it move swift. I would have my ruin/Be sudden” (III.v.94-
96), conveys how, now she has started on the downward path, she wishes for a quick end,
and as a prince she is likely to get it. When Bosola challenges her feelings for Antonio, the
Duchess does not react as the body politic in full power would; she is only capable of
denying his words:

Bosola: Forget this base, low fellow –
Duchess: Were I a man
I’d beat that counterfeit face into thy other.
Bosola: - One of no birth.
Duchess: Say that he was born mean -
Man is most happy when’s own actions
Be arguments and examples of his virtue. (III.v.114-119)

Even her statement “Were I a man/I’d beat that counterfeit face into thy other” reflects her
powerlessness without Antonio. She may still be a prince, but she no longer straddles the
line that Elizabeth walked between feminine and masculine. Without the presence of both
bodies, she has no power.

Her imprisonment continues to highlight her function as the body politic. When
Ferdinand asks, “How doth our sister Duchess bear herself/In her imprisonment?,"
Bosola’s response indicates his own changing perspective regarding the Duchess’ identity and trials:

Nobly. I’ll describe her.
She’s sad, as one long used to’it, and she seems
Rather to welcome the end of misery
Than shun it – a behaviour so noble
As gives a majesty to adversity.
You may discern the shape of loveliness
More perfect in her tears than in her smiles.
She will muse four hours together, and her silence.
Methinks, expresseth more than if she spake. (IV.i.1-10)

She still retains that indefinable quality which Plowden’s Reports called the body politic, which Forset called the soul, and from Bosola’s description she seems to have lost corporeality, except in her tears and a few smiles, both emblematic of feminine emotion. This is a far cry from the first words used to describe her. Her bodies’ disconnect becomes complete with the reveal of the wax figures meant to represent Antonio and the children:

Duchess: There is not between heaven and earth one wish
I stay for after this. It wastes me more
Than were’t my picture, fashioned out of wax,
Stuck with a magical needle and then buried
In some foul dunghill. And yond’s an excellent property
For a tyrant, which I would account mercy –

Bosola: What’s that?
Duchess: If they would bind me to that lifeless trunk,
And let me freeze to death.

Bosola: Come, you must live.
Duchess: That’s the greatest torture souls feel in hell –
In hell! – that they must live and cannot die. (IV.i.60-69)

She is now a soul without a body, a body politic without a body natural to house it, which is tantamount to the pain of burning in hell. The union of the Duchess and Antonio is so complete that she could not be in more pain had it been herself stabbed and buried. It is agony for her, and she has essentially ceased to live. Wishing to die with Antonio’s perceived death, the Duchess laments,
Entreat him live,
To be executed again. Who must dispatch me?
I account this world a tedious theatre,
For I do play a part in’t ‘gainst my will. (IV.i.79-82)

The body politic cannot be ended simply by willing it to be so.

The play has many self-referential allusions; the one above highlights both the actor onstage and the Duchess’ role, created by her brothers and Antonio, who introduced her before she had a chance to speak onstage. Now she cannot leave until they permit it. She is so reduced that Bosola begins to pity her. She responds, “Thou art a fool then,/To waste thy pity on a thing so wretched/As cannot pity it” (IV.i.85-87). In her mind, she is no longer a person, but a thing – an object incapable of being pitied, which Christy Desmet sees as the result of her multiple, colliding identities: “potential paradoxes – the female ruler, the widowed bride, and the princely mother – dissolve into incoherence. The Duchess, in the end, has not many identities but none” (85). Ferdinand justifies this reading of her, valuing only her body natural: “Damn her! That body of hers,/While that my blood ran pure in’t,
was more worth/Than that which thou wouldst comfort, called a soul” (IV.i.118-120). Ferdinand never respected her body politic, her position as Duchess or her choice in relationship. Desmet also identifies this aspect of her tragedy: “The pathos of the Duchess’s fate, however, comes less from her loss of masculine will than from the fact that both sovereignty and respectable female roles – as wife and mother – are systematically denied to her” (82). He only ever saw her as his material sister, the connection he shares with her body natural, prizing it above her body politic, which is an inverted order of appraisal. The body politic, Plowden documents, is the greater of the two bodies, and so the body natural cannot be held above it. This fundamental distinction is the foundation of the conflict within the Duchess, and thus the root of conflict in the play.
To torture her in her imprisonment, Ferdinand has madmen brought about her, which only serves to prove the inverted natural order, that she is all soul with no body: “nothing but noise and folly/Can keep me in my right wits, whereas reason/And silence make me stark mad” (IV.ii.5-7). This kind of corporeal madness actually keeps her sane because it is embodied. She is surrounded by those who are of the body natural, which she desperately craves. Not having it, being alone with the body politic, drives her madder than the noise and folly. She is a shadow of herself, lacking physical manifestation and having instead only the reminder of corporeality:

Duchess: Who do I look like now?
Cariola: Like to your picture in the gallery:
A deal of life in show, but none in practice;
Or rather like some reverend monument
Whose ruins are even pitied. (IV.ii.29-33)

Even Bosola agrees with this assessment, invoking as Leah Marcus sees it “a standard Platonic and Christian image of the immortal soul trapped in the mortal body” (46), though he uses it in an attempt to break her out of her mental confinement:

Bosola: Didst thou ever see a lark in a cage? Such is the soul in the body: this world is like her little turf of grass; and the heaven o’er our heads, like her looking glass, only gives us a miserable knowledge of the small compass of our prison.
Duchess: Am not I thy Duchess?
Bosola: Thou art some great woman, sure, for riot begins to sit on they forehead, clad in grey hairs, twenty years sooner than on a merry milkmaid’s. Thou sleepest worse than if a mouse should be forced to take up her lodging in a cat’s ear. A little infant that breeds its teeth, should it lie with thee, would cry out as if thou wert the more unquiet bedfellow.
Duchess: I am the Duchess of Malfi still.
Bosola: That makes thy sleeps so broken:
‘Glories, like glow-worms, afar off shine bright,
But looked to near have neither heat nor light.’ (IV.ii.125-140)
With everything he offers her in this exchange, she latches onto her identity as the Duchess of Malfi. Though many scholars interpret her line, “[I] am the Duchess of Malfi still,” as her final declaration, petulantly insistent that she is still in control even at the point of death, there are approximately another 100 lines before she is strangled; she has not yet seen the executioners or the coffin. Her statement reflects her only remaining identity: her husband is gone, her children too, and her brother treats her in a most unbrotherly manner. Her one remaining identity is as the Duchess, her body politic, a title she earned with her first marriage and which cannot be removed, except in death. She is a soul trapped in a cage, unquiet in her solitude, lost without a sufficient body natural; Bosola recognizes that identity as the source of her inquietude. It is no surprise, then, that she shows a calm resilience when the coffin is brought in, with Bosola’s line, “A long war disturbed your mind;/Here your perfect peace is signed” (IV.ii.177-178). It is the last house for her body natural, and will release her body politic; there will be peace once it embraces her. Death is welcome to a soul without a body. Her final words are not the concern for her children most people remember (which are her last words to Cariola, and therefore, perhaps her last public words), but instead reflect her life as a prince:

.. heaven gates are not so highly arched
As princes’ palaces; they that enter there
Must go upon their knees. [Kneels.]
………………………………………………
Go tell my brothers, when I am laid out,
They then may feed in quiet. (IV.ii.224-229)

Once she is dead, her brothers will be able to siphon off her power, controlling her as they never could in life because of her body politic, which will have moved on with her death. Judith Haber argues this speech “is uttered as a (characteristic) defense against Bosola’s (characteristic) attempts to identify her once again with the despised – and necessarily
grotesque – body (which must be cast off to free the soul . . . )” (Desire and Dramatic Form 83). After she is strangled, Ferdinand seems to regret the action, and reveals that they were twins, wondering “Was I her judge?/ . . . Where shalt thou find this judgement registered/Unless in hell?” (IV.ii.288-293). He cares more about his moral implication in the action than the damming action itself.

One element of the demise of the body politic is that it must have a place to go next. The Duchess wakes just enough:

Bosola: She stirs! Here’s life. -
Return, fair soul, from darkness, and lead mine
Out of this sensible hell. – She’s warm, she breathes! –
(IV.ii.330-332)

Bosola, calling her “soul” as thought that is the epitome of her identity, reveals that Antonio and her children are alive after all, to which she simply responds, “Mercy! She dies.” (IV.ii.342). With her body natural broken beyond repair, and the confirmation that her husband and children are alive, the body politic may now pass to her eldest son, and she is finally free.

After her death, Ferdinand develops lycanthropy. His madness results from his abuse of the Duchess’ body politic, but also from her existence as the body politic. Without her, he reverts completely to the body natural, descending to a form less than human without a soul to guide him. He illicitly attempted to possess and command the body politic, and suffers the consequences.

As Antonio and Delio approach the Cardinal’s home, Antonio echoes Cariola’s earlier assessment of the Duchess as ruins:

I do love these ancient ruins.
We never treat upon them but we set
Our foot upon some reverend history.
But all things have their end:
Churches and cities, which have diseases like to men,
Must have like death that we have.
Echo: ‘Like death that we have.’ (V.iii.9-19)

The Echo has long been understood to be an echo of the Duchess. It functions as the Duchess’ voice, still protecting Antonio, still making him more than he was alone. In the final scene, Bosola references this moment, “We are only like dead walls or vaulted graves/That, ruined, yields no echo” (V.v.95-96). The Duchess is more than the average man because of her body politic. The body politic, the soul, stays a little while to help Antonio before finally leaving on “‘Never see her more!’” (V.iii.41). When he dies in the following scene, mistakenly stabbed by Bosola, his lament is for the physical, corporeal body: “I would not now/Wish my wounds balmed nor healed, for I have no use/To put my life to” (V.iv.61-63). Without his soul, without the Duchess, life has no meaning, just as it did for Macbeth. Death is preferable.

The final scene of the play is designed to rectify the injustices perpetrated on the body politic, just as in Macbeth. The main difference lies in the sympathy felt for the Duchess, versus the condemnation heaped on the Macbeths. Bosola kills the Cardinal in revenge, invoking the power the Cardinal disrupted by his machinations: “When thou killed’st thy sister,/Thou took’st from Justice her most equal balance,/And left her naught but her sword” (V.v.37-39). Delio enters with the Duchess’ eldest son by Antonio, whom all agree to support as heir to the duchy. Though historically the Duchess’ son by her first husband inherited the title, Webster seems to have rewritten the ending in order to rectify the wrongs committed against the Duchess and Antonio, who are more victimized in the play than the Duchess’ first husband, and who embody the duchy’s body politic. Therefore,
the “just” ending, and the one which restores order by restoring the body politic, is for the
Duchess’ and Antonio’s son to inherit.

**CONCLUSION**

In both of these plays, it is clear that the main female characters are torn between
body natural and body politic. Their bodies natural are connected by marriage to men, but
also house the body politic. The body politic thus becomes compromised by the divide
within the bodies natural, and ultimately undergoes a demise because it lacks a sufficient
body natural to house it.

Lady Macbeth begins the play as Macbeth’s wife, and her primary purpose
throughout the play returns to that identity. Her coercion of Macbeth, her hospitality
towards Duncan, even her reaction to Duncan’s death stem from her role as Macbeth’s wife
and the lady of the house. But the unnatural acts in which she participates gain her the title
of Queen as well, a title that never settles comfortably on her. The unnaturalness of the act,
the abuse of Lady Macbeth’s identity as wife to gain her queenly body politic, overwhelms
her mind and drives her to suicide, ensuring Macbeth’s end as well. They are irrevocably
connected, as A.C. Bradley says: “These two characters are fired by one and the same
passion of ambition; and to a considerable extent they are alike. The disposition of each is
high, proud, and commanding. They are born to rule, if not to reign . . . They have no
separate ambitions. They support and love one another. They suffer together” (266). And
ultimately, they end together.

Sid Ray, in his exploration of the Duchess and motherhood, concludes, “All told,
Webster makes the Duchess one part of a doubled body in three ways (as a pregnant
woman, as a twin and as a wife, one half of her husband), yet she is two in one – a body natural and body politic and a unified head and body. She is not split by the doubleness, but rather made grander by it” (28). The Duchess of Malfi begins as only a title, a Duchess. She is able to woo Antonio because of that position, because he is her steward and therefore works closely with her. Their marriage is not unnatural as Lady Macbeth’s act is, but it is secretive; only Cariola witnesses their marriage vows, and the secret is maintained for at least the span of three pregnancies. In Jacobean England, it was becoming more common to announce the marriage and have it sanctified by the Church, no longer sufficient as simply a private affair. But the Duchess’ and Antonio’s de praeenti vows were certainly binding; yet Jankowski highlights the complication: “although the Duchess’s marriage to Antonio itself is legal, the consummation of it is irregular and would open the couple to ecclesiastical penalties” (233, original emphasis). Ultimately, it is unclear whether or not their marriage was completely legal, which casts a shadow over whether her title of “wife” is legitimate. This shadow and her brothers’ corruption lead to the lovers’ separation from one another and the Duchess’ torment, which thus separates the body natural from the body politic.

Ultimately, these plays demonstrate that the separation of body natural and body politic is destructive. The original source material initially discussed the two bodies as dependent on one another, and never mention what could happen if one is forcibly removed from the other. But the body politic needs the body natural in order to survive and thrive. A headless body is chaos; a bodiless head is madness. For both Lady Macbeth and the Duchess, their souls cannot exist without the physical body formed from their marriages as an anchor; the division of the bodies natural leads to the demise of the body politic, passing it on to the next inheriting body natural.
Lady Macbeth and the Duchess of Malfi’s marriages begin to demonstrate a secondary application of the king’s two bodies theory. As has been shown, the metaphor of the king’s two bodies can be extrapolated into the head and the body, as well as the soul and the body. Indeed, both characters are frequently referred to as the “soul” by their husbands, and function as the guiding, conscience-like half in their unions. The household can be seen as a microcosm of the kingdom, with the master of the house functioning as the king, responsible for the welfare of its occupants. The union between husband and wife also mirrors the union of monarch with country during the coronation ceremony, explored in Chapter 2. In becoming Queen, Elizabeth’s body natural was made more perfect by its union with the queenly body politic. In that union, Elizabeth gained a new status and an additional identity, as well as added responsibilities to her people. Lady Macbeth’s marriage to Macbeth accomplishes much the same: they are more perfect when united, and her marriage to him creates a new status and responsibilities that did not exist before her marriage (though the audience never sees her prior to marriage). The same changes in identity and responsibility are seen in the Duchess of Malfi’s marriage to Antonio.

The responsibilities created in their marriages give each woman a “wifely” body politic. The marriage changes the woman’s status. It makes her more than what she was before; she is no longer woman, now she is wife, the way Elizabeth is no longer woman but now Queen. She holds responsibility within the household, and the decisions she makes as wife affect the rest of the household as the Queen’s decisions affect the country. The wifely body politic cannot be commanded by the body natural, as Queen Mary could not allow her body politic to be commanded by her love for her husband Philip. However, the wife does owe fealty to the husband and a duty to her household, as the Queen owes fealty to God.
and a duty to her people. Yet in these plays, the women are not subservient to their husbands. Lady Macbeth and the Duchess of Malfi function best with their husbands, as two halves of a whole. Unfortunately, Lady Macbeth uses her position as Macbeth’s wife when convincing him to murder Duncan. This action essentially abuses her wifely body politic, taking advantage of the identity and responsibility derived from her union with him. These actions are done for themselves, not for the benefit of their people. The Duchess’ wifely body politic must ultimately be made subservient to her body politic as ruler, forestalling her ability to fully embrace the identity of wife and denying a complete union with Antonio, dividing her body natural.

In her union, Elizabeth’s female body signified the body natural, while her body politic was the masculine body politic of her father and his forebears. In these plays, the body politic, the perfecting, intangible element, is feminine. Lady Macbeth and the Duchess of Malfi repeatedly embody the language of the soul as put forth by Forset throughout these plays. Lady Macbeth is the thought, the metaphysical, and the spiritual for Macbeth’s body natural, which acts without thinking. B.J. Bedard believes her “function is simply to be foil to Macbeth: her determination emphasizing his scrupulousness . . . her guilt and apparent madness contrasting with his resolve to wade in blood” (42). The Duchess of Malfi is the soul of Amalfi, the one bastion of good in a corrupt, physical court embodied in her brothers; her connection with Antonio gives her a worthy body natural through which she grows and multiplies, bearing children and thriving for years until the marriage is made public. Haber explains that “[the] play does not simply call our attention to the constructedness of gender definitions or try to reverse them: it attempts to open up a space of sexual difference, a space in which ‘woman’ can exist – not as container, a box, a body
for a man, but for herself” (Desire and Dramatic Form 84). Dramatically, these two female characters demonstrate through their marriages the union of bodies natural and politic, functioning as the soul to their husbands’ bodies natural. The following chapter will investigate two characters whose main identity and function within their plays is as wives; their wifely body politics are the cause and site of their demise.
CHAPTER FIVE

WIVES

The female characters examined thus far – Margaret, Isabella, Lady Macbeth, and the Duchess of Malfi – have all been married, but while their married lives have been important, they have not been the defining element of their identities. Their marriages act as a social construct, creating a springboard for the action of the plays. What’s more, they have all been women of the ruling class. Margaret and Isabella were queens, while Lady Macbeth and the Duchess of Malfi occupied queen-like positions. The next two women, Desdemona and Alice Arden, are defined solely by their roles as wives and their bodies politic are derived entirely from their relationships to their husbands, without a larger political commonwealth to which they answer. Desdemona’s story springs from her marriage to Othello; her actions are defined by their marriage, as his are defined by the appearance of their marriage. Alice’s identity is as Arden’s wife; little is said of her life before marrying him, and her actions are defined by attempts to end their marriage via his death. For both characters, their primary identities are as wives.

The union of husband and wife has been seen to be analogous to the union of monarch and country; therefore it can be extrapolated that in the marriage ceremony, the union of husband and wife creates a marital body politic, separate from that derived from governance, but in many ways equally potent. Ideally, in the perfect marriage, the body natural of one spouse craves the body natural of the other. In marrying each other, the husband and wife both gain a responsibility to the other, most often categorized such that the man provides the means to live while the woman maintains the house. Their identities are altered to include and relate to the other person, with the relationship between them
comprised of both desire for the spouse and duty to the spouse. The decisions of one spouse affect the other, such that they function as two halves of a whole. For Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, and the Duchess and Antonio, this was particularly seen in the ladies’ existence as the men’s souls. Desdemona and Othello, and Alice and Arden, show a similar inability to fully function when in conflict with the other, so that the conflict of their bodies natural and politic becomes the central conflict of the plays.

Shakespeare’s *Othello* opens with Iago (Othello’s ensign) spreading rumors that Desdemona and Othello have eloped. An emergency meeting of the Senate is held in which Desdemona passionately defends her actions in marrying Othello without her father’s blessing. Othello is then given a command in Cyprus to defend against an invasion by the Turks. By the time Othello and Desdemona arrive in Cyprus, the Turks have been defeated by a storm; the lovers prepare to celebrate while Iago crafts a plan to drive them apart. He plants the idea in Othello’s mind that Desdemona has been deceitful, just as she was with her father, centering his machinations around a handkerchief Othello had given her. Othello is enraged by jealousy; he strikes Desdemona in the street. By the end of the play, Iago has so addled Othello’s mind with his insinuations and twisted lies that Othello kills Desdemona, then himself. Emilia, Desdemona’s maid and Iago’s wife, illuminates Iago’s villainy, for which he kills her, and Iago is arrested, unrepentant.

Shakespeare wrote *Othello* sometime around 1601, sourced mostly from Cinthio’s *Hecatommithi*, a collection of Italian short stories from the 16th century. A.C. Bradley recognizes this play as “a drama of modern life; when it first appeared it was a drama almost of contemporary life for the date of the Turkish attack on Cyprus is 1570” (133-134). In both the original short story and the play, Othello is characterized as an “Other,” a
person outside of Venetian society whom the society admires for his leadership in war and despises for his foreign heritage; this contradictory view of Othello is one of the defining elements of the play. It is commonly believed that Shakespeare based at least some of the character on the ambassador to the King of Barbary, who had visited Elizabeth in 1600 for six months (Honigmann 3). Bradley makes a good point when he responds to those who claim the tragedy stems from Othello’s Moorish blood dominating his passions and therefore actions:

I do not mean that Othello’s race is a matter of no account. It has . . . its importance in the play. It makes a difference to our idea of him; it makes a difference to the action and catastrophe. But in regard to the essentials of his character it is not important; and if anyone had told Shakespeare that no Englishman would have acted like the Moor, and had congratulated him on the accuracy of his racial psychology, I am sure he would have laughed. (139)

It is not just Othello’s skin that alienates him. It is also important to note that Othello is older than Desdemona (some scholars place him in his forties, or even as old as his sixties), and that he is a member of the military while she is a member of the Venetian nobility. While many scholars have investigated Othello’s race in depth, for the purposes of this discussion it is enough to recognize him as an Other. For as Emily C. Bartels relates,

[I]n the end, what makes this play particularly fascinating . . . is that it refuses to nail Othello categorically down, forcing us rather to take him on and in his own terms. However much the discourse of gender may approximate his vulnerability, and however much the discourse of race may blacken his self-image, in Othello as in Renaissance culture, the Moor’s uniqueness hinges on the fact that, instead of being easy to read, characterize, classify, and contain, he is intriguingly not. (“Othello” 150, original emphasis)

Othello’s actions cannot be attributed to any one of his qualities; he is a character like Hamlet, or Lear, subject to his own insecurities for a multitude of reasons. Ultimately his actions are the actions of a man and, particularly relevant to this discussion, the actions of a husband.
The anonymously written *Arden of Faversham* begins with Arden’s gain of the lands of the Abbey of Faversham, but instead of celebrating, he laments that his wife, Alice, seems to be having an affair with Mosby, her maid’s brother. Arden leaves for London and Alice confirms to the audience her love for Mosby. Mosby and Alice plot ways to kill Arden so that they can be together; many of their plots involve promising Susan (Mosby’s sister) to various men in exchange for their help. One of their collaborators, Greene, is a former tenant on the Abbey lands, who is angry at Arden as well and hires Black Will and Shakebag to kill him in London. There are multiple comical failures in the attempt to murder Arden; meanwhile Mosby doubts Alice’s verity, and Alice repeatedly woos him back. Arden returns from London and at last the plot to murder him succeeds. Immediately, the town is at the door; the bloodstains won’t leave the floor, and the body is quickly discovered. Mosby, Alice, and the other conspirators are arrested. Though Alice repents, she is burned at the stake as a traitor.

*Arden of Faversham* was written around 1592 and based on true events that occurred in 1550-1551 during Edward VI’s reign and shortly after the dissolution of the monasteries during the Reformation. The true story of Alice Arden’s murder of her husband Thomas and love for Mosby had been recounted in several chronicle books, including Holinshed’s *Chronicles*. It was a rather sensational tale that cautioned against giving one’s wife too much freedom, and proved quite popular, reprinted twice in the 1590s alone. Though the title character is Alice’s husband, Garrett A. Sullivan Jr, argues “it is hard to understand Alice as ‘inferior,’ at least dramatically. *Arden of Faversham* is largely Alice’s play; she is the most compelling character and the one with the most complexly rendered interior life” (“Early Modern Household” 79). Alice Arden stands alone amongst the Elizabethan canon of
female dramatic characters, a historically real figure who committed the unthinkable act of
mariticide. Though she has often been maligned as a bad person and an inconstant
close character, she offers a fascinating portrait of the Elizabethan perception of unhappy wives.
In many ways, Alice relates to the more mythical notion of women seen in Chapter 2; her
body natural rules her decisions, and she repeatedly relies on men to enact her plans. Alice
demonstrates the weaknesses believed to be associated with the feminine body.

Both plays are classified as domestic tragedies. *Arden* is thought to be one of the
earliest domestic tragedies, and certainly one of the most popular extant. *Othello* is
sometimes classified as a domestic tragedy, but this is controversial given that the genre
usually deals with common characters. In *Othello*, Desdemona is the daughter of a senator,
ranking her the equivalent of nobility in 16th century Venetian culture. Othello and his
cohorts are all in the military, ranking them above commoners. However, their story
revolves around domestic strife, and the focus is on Othello and Desdemona’s relationship,
not their class. This fact reinforces the earlier point regarding Desdemona’s and Alice’s
identities: if both women are portrayed through domestic tragedy then it is logical that the
primary function of each is being a wife. And, as Orgel points out, “Marriage is a dangerous
condition in Shakespeare” (17).

Both plays also demonstrate a concept of woman as property owned and controlled
by a man, as Dympna Callaghan elucidates:

> Even the necessity that a woman move from father to husband is formulated
> as female inconstancy and punished as demonic metamorphosis in the
> patriarchal fantasy of the other. Woman’s position in relation to the symbolic
> and social order is, then, largely a function of her status as passive object of
> exchange between men in a cycle of relegation and reinstatement. (*Women
> and Gender* 112-113)
According to the Elizabethan feminine ideal, a woman was expected to remain in her father's house until she moved into her husband's house; she always operated under the purview of a man. Desdemona moves directly from her father's house to her husband’s house; the swiftness of that movement and the fact that it happened without her father’s permission is later demonized, so that even her acceptance of traditional gender roles becomes grounds for suspicion. *Arden of Faversham* is known for its comparison of women and land, and Arden’s similar treatment of both.

As domestic tragedies, these plays do not feature the body politic as it has been seen thus far. Alice and Desdemona are not queens, nor are they portrayed as noblewomen in charge of a duchy or fiefdom. Here, the metaphor of the house as a microcosm of the kingdom becomes crucial. In uniting with the husband, the wife gains a new status, a new identity with added responsibilities and duties owed to the people in the household: she gains a body politic. In the Great Chain of Being, she has ascended to “wife,” the head of the household, answering to her husband and responsible for the health and well-being of the house’s inhabitants; she is expected to bear children, to manage the accounts, and to support her husband. Marriage alters a woman’s identity, just as the justices said of Edward VI that if he committed his acts as King, then “the case is alter’d,” to quote Plowden, meaning he did not simply do them as a man. If a character acts as wife, it is different than if she acts as woman. The wifely body politic alters her, creating a duty to her husband and household. Identifying Desdemona’s and Alice's wifely bodies politic clarifies each character’s motivation and fuses action into a cohesive character that represents a person, not a caricature.
In the case of both characters, the body natural is the desiring body. It is imperfect, most often revealed in private (though dragged into the public eye in both plays), and definitely feminine. The imperfection is particularly linked to the feminine through sexual infidelity. Desdemona craves Othello, so much so that she marries him without her father’s permission. Iago then builds a lie out of her perceived sexual infidelity that Othello is surprisingly willing to accept. Alice craves Mosby, so much so that she plots Arden’s murder to be with Mosby. The body politic, however, arises through their unions with Othello and Arden respectively. The intersection of marriage allows for these characters to grow and change their identity, gaining a body politic within their microcosmic version of the world. The ramifications of the body politic mean that if one spouse is corrupted, the other must react to attempt to find balance between the bodies. Once Iago drives a wedge between Othello’s and Desdemona’s bodies natural, the body politic urges Desdemona to counteract Othello’s increasingly irrational behavior by more fully embracing the ideal feminine role. As Alice pulls further away from Arden and allies her body natural with Mosby, Arden fails in his duties as a landowner; neither partner is fully capable of embracing the body politic, so the union fails.

It is important to note how the body natural and body politic can be divided into desire and duty. The body natural is often motivated primarily by visceral human desires; the body politic is motivated by a sense of duty outside oneself. When the body natural desires to fulfill duty, or when the body politic’s duty is desire, then the bodies natural and politic are properly aligned. But when desire and duty are opposed, the bodies come into conflict as portrayed in these plays. As the theory is applied to characters more and more removed from the monarchy, the duty vs. desire trope becomes crucial in distinguishing the
two bodies. Desdemona particularly displays a noteworthy intersection of desire and duty. As Brabantio’s daughter, she bears a filial body politic towards her father, a duty owed to him which is put to the test when she meets Othello. Her desire for Othello grows until it is stronger than her filial body politic, at which point the two elope and Desdemona gains the wifely body politic. Her desire and duty are united within the wifely body politic. While her wifely body politic remains obedient to Othello throughout the play, the earlier betrayal of her filial body politic offers the foundation for Iago’s deceptions, thereby influencing the appearance of her wifely body politic.

This appearance indicates the last important element of both plays – one cannot trust one’s sight to tell the truth; appearances are deceiving. In this deceptive world, the order of body politic and body natural becomes inverted as well. The body natural takes on the qualities of the body politic, and the image of the body politic can be manipulated by the body natural, usually to harm. In both situations, the body politic is subverted to the wants of the body natural, lessening the body politic instead of making the body natural greater through their union. The overturned order leads to the divorce of the two bodies, inevitably leading to a demise which can only be remedied in death. The first section of this chapter will examine the union of body natural and body politic: for Desdemona, encapsulated perfectly in her union with Othello; for Alice, divided between Arden and Mosby, though she convinces herself that her love for Mosby is more perfect than her love for Arden. The second section will explore the betrayal of the body politic. The image of Desdemona’s body politic (her apparent failure in her duties as Othello’s wife, represented in the supposed unfaithful desire of her body natural) is manipulated by Iago in order to corrupt Othello, while Alice manipulates the image of her own body politic to achieve her body natural’s
goal of mariticide and desire for Mosby. The final section explores the demise of both women due to the corrupted image of their bodies politic and the resulting lies; in the end, death reveals truth, and body natural and body politic are reunited once more.

**THE BODY NATURAL**

It is nearly impossible to completely separate body natural from body politic in Desdemona and Alice. Unlike the women previously explored, they do not change their status through the course of the play but instead shift or are shifted from their already existing positions. Therefore, the analysis will begin with their marriages, the initial state of their bodies natural and politic.

Desdemona often serves as a conundrum for scholars. Is she truly as virginal as she appears? Does her marriage with Othello in some way ostracize her from Venetian society, and is the rest of the play retribution for this early social transgression (Draper 51)? Iago describes her in bestial terms, which in turn bestializes her (Boyarin 256); Karen Newman sees her overt sexuality as a threat to the patriarchy. Dympna Callaghan reads her as “a tabula rasa . . . pure, white, and also blank; existing and not existing, and, since blank, open to any inscription, and therefore, in a sense, undecipherable. Othello’s judgement of her as whore is the inscription she must bear” (*Women and Gender* 78). W.H. Auden believed that the supposed transgression with Cassio was merely a forerunner to the desire Desdemona surely would have eventually developed for someone other than Othello. Perhaps Emily C. Bartels comes closest to a non-polarizing view of Desdemona: “In telling Desdemona’s story and recording Iago’s lies, Shakespeare critiques the suspicion of female wantonness (not female wantonness itself) as a destructive social force that leaves no safe space for the
expression of female desire” (“Othello” 147, original emphasis). The point is not whether Desdemona desires; the point as W.D. Adamson articulates it is that she appears to desire illicitly, “Desdemona’s innocence coexists with a rich sexuality, and the conspicuous expression of her innocence is her vital exuberance, including the hot, moist hand of sexual vitality. She herself is a natural alternative to ‘saint or strumpet,’ which is all along a tragically false dilemma exploited by Iago” (179-180).

The above polarizing views of Desdemona rarely take into account her first action in the play: deceiving her father in order to marry Othello. It can be argued that a daughter has a body politic derived from her parents, a relationship with them that shapes her identity. However, this filial body politic must inherently cede to the marital body politic if a woman is to progress through the “maid, wife, widow” cycle. Desdemona’s acquisition of the marital body politic happens to not just replace her filial body politic but overthrow it entirely. In eloping with Othello, Desdemona defies and deceives Brabantio. Her body natural’s desire for Othello gains for her the wifely body politic, but in doing so, her body natural negates the filial body politic. She undergoes the natural life cycle of a woman, but her initial movement from “maid” to “wife” is forced by her body natural without the approval of her father, and therefore the support of her filial body politic. While the filial body politic is clearly a topic which warrants further study, it is enough to say for now that this particular relationship between filial and marital bodies politic lays the groundwork for the deception Iago builds throughout the rest of the play.

The existence of Desdemona’s two bodies also help to clarify some of the confusion caused by her character; she does not have to be polarized into either a virgin or a whore, but can be both innocent and sexually adventurous, afraid and defiant. Her body natural is
that of a young woman coming of age and finding herself attracted to a man who becomes her husband; she desires Othello. Her body politic once she is married to him then allows her to develop the sexuality which has been so often condemned; through their marriage, it is entirely possible for her to be virginal, dutiful, and desiring.

Desdemona is described for two scenes before the audience meets her, creating an impression that is immediately proven false. Othello’s ensign Iago, Roderigo (who tried and failed to court Desdemona), her father Brabantio, and Othello himself all offer small morsels inscribing her character; it isn’t until I.ii. that the audience even learns her name when Othello says, “But that I love the gentle Desdemona” (I.ii.25). The general impression given is that Desdemona is innocent, a “white ewe” (I.i.88), reasonable, intelligent, humble, afraid of the dangers of the wide world; this description refers to the generic body natural of the ideal Elizabethan woman described in Chapter 2. However, Othello is the only person at this point who truly knows Desdemona in her full capacity: as both Brabantio’s daughter and his own wife, and therefore bearing a wifely body politic. While Roderigo and Iago arguably know that she is Othello’s wife (Othello himself does not confirm this until I.iii.), they speak as though she is still primarily Brabantio’s daughter, referring to her as “his.” They do not know for certain that Othello and Desdemona are married; the first mention of Desdemona is Iago’s “Call up her father” (I.i.66), a line which emphasizes Desdemona’s connection to Brabantio moreso than her connection to the Moor. Multiple suggestions follow that Othello and Desdemona are making “the beast with two backs” (I.i.115), and one reference from Roderigo that Desdemona has tied herself to the Moor. All of these innuendos refer to a sexual desiring of the body natural. There is no hint that Desdemona’s relationship with Othello may have been legitimized through marriage, and therefore with
the body politic. In fact, Brabantio finds it so difficult to believe that she would secretly marry Othello that he swears magic must have been involved to so coerce her body natural into deceiving him. These men do not know the true Desdemona: they do not know that her identity has altered, that she has acquired a wifely body politic, though they suspect it. Their perspective, A.C. Bradley asserts, reflects that of the audience:

> [W]hen first we hear of her marriage we have not yet seen the Desdemona of the later Acts; and therefore we do not perceive how astonishing this love and boldness must have been in a maiden so quiet and submissive. And when we watch her in her suffering and death we are so penetrated by the sense of her heavenly sweetness and self-surrender that we almost forget that she had shown herself quite as exceptional in the active assertion of her own soul and will. (151)

Bradley highlights what the play suggests, that Desdemona’s powerful love for Othello has changed her very personality. Her new persona results from the wifely body politic, the love she bears for Othello in marriage, which she asserts fervently and repeatedly. The body politic has expanded Desdemona’s character beyond the innocent daughter she used to be; her identity as wife makes her nearly unrecognizable to others. Appearances, including what others believe about Desdemona and her love for Othello, are deceiving.

When Desdemona finally speaks for herself, her first act is to clarify her position,

> My noble father,
I do perceive here a divided duty.
To you I am bound for life and education:
My life and education both do learn me
How to respect you; you are the lord of duty,
I am hitherto your daughter. But here’s my husband:
And so much duty as my mother showed
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor my lord. (I.iii.180-189)

This speech perfectly reflects the theory of the king’s two bodies. Desdemona speaks of her dual duties owed to both her father and Othello. They cannot both be her lords; she will
always be her father’s daughter, but from the moment she married Othello, as with her mother’s marriage to Brabantio, she now owes fealty to Othello. This act is what was expected of a daughter, that one day she would leave her father’s house and change her identity as “daughter” to that of “wife,” allying her body natural with another’s, developing a wifely body politic, and owing her primary allegiance to her husband. In Desdemona’s case, this natural progression was corrupted because it did not happen with Brabantio’s knowledge and blessing. Bradley recognizes this as “the emergence in Desdemona, as she passed from girlhood to womanhood, of an individuality and strength which if she had lived would have been gradually fused with her more obvious qualities and have issued in a thousand actions, sweet and good, but surprising to her conventional or timid neighbours” (152). Brabantio refuses to acknowledge her acquisition of the wifely body politic, insisting that she is still his daughter. At this point, the wifely body politic cannot be removed just because Brabantio disagrees, however, his curse casts a pall over the marriage. Had Desdemona and Othello married more openly, with Brabantio’s blessing, Iago may not have been able to insinuate her infidelity and drive the two apart.

Regardless, from this point on, it is clear that Desdemona now lives with, and for, Othello. Brabantio no longer wants her in his house; Othello requests that she be allowed to join him in Cyprus, so much do they loathe being parted. Desdemona affirms the strength of their love: “I saw Othello’s visage in his mind,/And to his honours and his valiant parts/Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate” (I.iii.253-255). This is not an infatuation of the body natural, fleeting and easily satisfied with sex. Carol Thomas Neely believes “[s]he loves Othello for his body and mind, for his reputation and actions; she consecrates herself to him spiritually and practically” (75). Desdemona fell in love with Othello’s soul, and
therefore gave him hers. They are firmly, utterly united in their bodies natural, that union creating the body politic. This image is confirmed with their arrival in Cyprus, beginning with their cries:

Othello: O my fair warrior!
Desdemona: My dear Othello! (II.i.180)

The shared line indicates their shared mindset. Othello’s denomination of her as a “fair warrior” demonstrates what others failed to see before; where they believed she was merely “daughter,” she had developed more depth and strength to her, a beautiful soul capable of fighting for her beliefs and her love: a body politic. The term “warrior” is particularly important, as Joan Ozark Holmer points out that Hippolyta is the only other woman in the Shakespearean canon to receive that epithet; therefore it cannot be meaningless.

Desdemona has fought for her love with Othello, her other half, just as he fights on behalf of Venice. Othello’s next speech reiterates the strength of their intertwined natures:

O my soul's joy . . .
If it were now to die
‘Twere now to be most happy, for I fear
My soul hath her content so absolute
That not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate. (II.i.182-191)

Again, Shakespeare uses the language of the soul to define the marriage relationship, and genders the soul as female; it could even be that Othello is referring to Desdemona as his soul, perfectly content in their union. Othello’s soul is complete with Desdemona, which in turn indicates a harmonious body politic. Their reunion is powerful enough to set all right in Cyprus. The Turks are defeated in the storm, and a night of rejoicing will ensue.

But is all well? Emily C. Bartels points out that,

Although Turkish forces held Cyprus at the time the play was written and so posed an impending threat in the Mediterranean, in the play the Turks are
destroyed by a storm at sea before they – and Othello – ever reach Cyprus. In revising history thus, Shakespeare turns our attention from the political to the domestic, leaving the Moor in Cyprus without an ‘occupation’ (3.3.362). (“Othello” 145)

By taking away Othello’s purpose as a war-time general, Shakespeare sets him adrift; his only anchor is his marriage to Desdemona. Marjorie Garber points out how “the end of these external wars means . . . the beginning of internal war, civil war: first, the drunken brawling of Cassio and the troops, stage-managed by Iago, and second, the war that ensues within Othello himself, as Iago’s monstrous birth comes to light and reveals itself as the monster jealousy” (After All 600). And still Brabantio’s parting line echoes, suggesting the first seeds of discord to Othello: “Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see; / She has deceiv’d her father, and may thee” (I.iii.293-294). Though they seem to mean little at this point in the play, Othello’s lack of purpose, his perfect union with Desdemona, and Brabantio’s curse are the foundations on which Iago will build his deceptions. Desdemona’s acquisition of the wifely body politic, especially without her father’s permission, provides the opportunity for Iago to mastermind Othello’s downfall.

***

The beginning of Arden of Faversham is not quite so optimistic as Othello. Arden returns home to Faversham, having obtained letters patent from his majesty Edward VI via the Lord Protector (Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset) for the lands of the Abbey of Faversham, which have been sold following the dissolution of the monasteries. However, while his concerns should be focused on his new landholding, Arden’s thoughts instead fixate on rumors of his wife’s actions:

Love letters pass ‘twixt Mosby and my wife,  
And they have privy meetings in the town.
Nay, on his finger did I spy the ring
Which at our marriage day the priest put on. (I.15-18)

Fifteen lines into the play, the playwright has established the parallel between, and incongruence of, Arden’s fascination with his wife and his land. He knows he owns the land and makes no effort to control it; he also thinks he owns his wife and is incapable of controlling her. Franklin (Arden’s closest friend) responds that “it is not strange/That women will be false and wavering” (I.20-21), as though Alice’s behavior is almost to be expected. He then counsels Arden not to yell at her, but to be nice to her and leave for London, “For women when they may will not,/But being kept back, straight grow outrageous” (I.52-53). Franklin explains that women, when given ample opportunity, have no desire to be unfaithful, but once they are told they are not allowed, they will immediately desire another man. In short, he expects Alice to give in to the desires of her body natural, but assumes she will only do so out of some sense of being wronged in her body politic.

Alice uses the inversion of her bodies natural and politic frequently, challenging her lover and her husband with counterintuitive logic. For example, when she first enters, Arden suggests that she dreamt of Mosby the previous night; deftly she turns the apparent dream into a mere nothing:

Arden: Ay, but you started up and suddenly,
Instead of him, caught me about the neck.
Alice: Instead of him? Why, who was there but you?
And where but one is how can I mistake? (I.69-72)

With Arden mollified, she then bids him off to London for a month. No sooner has he left the stage, however, than she confesses:

Sweet Mosby is the man that hath my heart,
And he usurps it, having nought but this –

---

6 Citations from Arden refer to scene and line numbers; the text is not divided into acts.
That I am tied to him by marriage.
Love is a god, and marriage is but words,
And therefore Mosby’s title is the best. (I.98-102)

In this quote, the inversion of body natural and body politic becomes apparent. To Alice, marriage is a superficial state of the body natural created by words, whereas love is the true, deep state of being, the union that births the body politic. This sets Mosby’s claim to her above Arden’s since Mosby loves her and Arden is simply married to her. Alice has convinced herself that her body natural, which craves Mosby, is in fact her body politic, the metaphysical, intangible spirit that unerringly steers her course. This belief usurps her wifely body politic and sets the stage for the upcoming four separate plots for Arden’s murder. Through her mistaken conviction, Alice places her body natural (her love for Mosby) above her body politic (her marriage to Arden), thereby corrupting the harmony of the two bodies.

Many scholars have commented on how this play conflates land ownership with marriage, essentially consigning the wife to the husband’s property. Sullivan, Jr., drawing on the connection between the household and the kingdom, argues “the ‘deformation’ of Thomas Arden’s family is the result not only of the murderous actions of his wife, servants, and tenants, but also of Arden’s own failures as husband, landlord, and ‘little king’” (“Early Modern Household” 80). Arden has only just barely gained ownership of the Abbey lands, and twice is his ownership publicly contended. In the first scene, Greene begs Arden to honor his former grant of the land, which Arden denies. In Scene XIII, Reede calls out Arden, “My coming to you was about the plot of ground/Which wrongfully you detain from me” (XIII.12-13). He asks Arden to let his wife and children maintain the rent of the land, as it will be their only source of income while he is away at sea. Arden, however, refuses saying that he bought the land from Reede, even though it was already his. Reede
then curses the land (and his curse comes true, coincidentally). Though Arden’s ownership of the Abbey lands appears legitimate historically (see Keller, “Arden’s Land Acquisitions”), the play paints him as the villain, a man who cares little for the needs of his neighbors and takes no pity on women or children. Arden abuses his position as landowner, his own body politic in a domestic sphere.

In a similar disagreement, Arden argues with Mosby over Alice,

\[
\text{As for the lands, Mosby, they are mine}
\]
\[
\text{By letters patents from his majesty.}
\]
\[
\text{But I must have a mandate for my wife;}
\]
\[
\text{They say you seek to rob me of her love. (I.300-303)}
\]

The lands are the publicly disputed object, which Arden has been given rightfully by the crown but tends less than perfectly; his wife is the privately disputed object, which has been given him rightfully by the Church, and which Alice claims he tends less than perfectly (though she seems to be lying, or at least exaggerating). Sullivan, Jr.’s exploration of the connection of land and love within the play relates the central issue:

\[
\text{The point is not merely that Arden sees Alice as a piece of property who might be stolen by Mosby, but that Arden’s relationship to the land is intertwined with his relationship with his wife. Mosby constitutes a threat to the passing down of Arden’s property to his heirs, and Alice’s love for Mosby cannot be separated from the potential mismanagement of her husband’s affairs. (“Arden Lay Murdered” 244)}
\]

Alice should be treated with respect, just as Arden should respect the land. He owes a duty to both. The combination of the land disputes with his wife’s actions serves to depict Arden as a less-than-diligent landlord and husband, one who abuses his body politic in both situations through neglect and absence in London. The land, represented by the people who have worked it and are connected to it, seems to reject Arden’s ownership. As for Alice, Sullivan, Jr. sees it as “through her refusal of the role offered to her by ideologies of
marriage and household order that Alice’s character is articulated. The violation of household order goes hand in hand with this presentation of female subjectivity” (“Early Modern Household” 79). This violation again highlights the inverted order that will allow Alice to commit her foul deed, desecrating her marriage and therefore her body politic as well, though it is interesting to note that Alice’s and Arden’s failings in the body politic are not directly related to each other.

Alice’s topsy-turvy vision of her two bodies is proven two-thirds of the way through the first scene: “Oaths are words, and words is wind,/And wind is mutable. Then I conclude/’Tis childishness to stand upon an oath” (I.436-438). This statement comes back later when Black Will affirms, “I have broken five hundred oaths!” (III.82), and may just as easily break his vow to murder Arden except for the promised gold. Oaths based on metaphysical ideas, such as love or promises of power or reprieve, are as insubstantial as wind and carry no weight. Gold, on the other hand, is a concrete object, not merely an empty promise but something of material worth. In this world, the promise of gold is far more effective than the promise of loyalty, derived from honor, from love, or from sex.

Carol Mejia LePerle, studying Alice’s use of rhetoric, highlights how “Alice effectively disengages devotion from convention, love from marriage; this disengagement enables a privileging of her desire over her duty” (183). Alice’s words prove that the world in which she lives is of the body natural – gold means more than vows. If oaths are meaningless, then marriage vows mean nothing and the body politic doesn’t exist for there is no true union of bodies natural. The promises she and Mosby make to each other are empty, just as she believes her marriage vows to Arden are, as are the promises made to Clarke, Greene, and Michael (especially as all three are individually promised to marry Mosby’s sister Susan).
Words are the only means these characters have of communicating, but their words are wind: blown away, forgotten, and meaningless. The body politic is similarly ineffective in a person ruled by the body natural.

**The Body Politic**

*Arden of Faversham* is clearly inverted; the inverted order is about to make itself known in *Othello*. This inversion is what allows Othello to be convinced of Desdemona’s adultery, and what convinces Alice that she is in the right to murder her husband for her love of Mosby. In each play, the wants of the body natural supersede the responsibilities of the body politic, but masquerade as duty to one’s united body. Othello and Alice believe their actions are required by duty, when in fact they are motivated by corporeal desires.

It is something of a surprise to discover that Othello and Desdemona have not yet consummated their marriage at the top of Act II, when Othello says, “The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue:/That profit’s yet to come ‘tween me and you” (II.iii.9-10). Desdemona is considered to be one of Shakespeare’s sexiest women; Ania Loomba’s rereading of Desdemona’s character argues “If Desdemona is the most explicitly erotic and sensual of Shakespeare’s heroines, it is precisely because her choice is seen as ‘unnatural,’ not only by Iago and Brabantio (and even, naggingly, by Othello himself), but also, most probably, by the audience” (179). Certainly there is a fixation on the relationship between Othello and Desdemona, and their proverbial wedding night is interrupted at least twice, preventing the full sexual union of their bodies natural. Two scenes and a journey to Cyprus have ensued since their marriage was revealed, including an hour Othello insisted be spent alone with Desdemona before he set sail. Each time they are left alone at night, they are
interrupted: by Roderigo and Iago, and now by the fight between Cassio and Montano. Othello and Desdemona have not yet attained full physical union, though they appear spiritually whole. If the marriage is consummated on the first night in Cyprus, it marks the beginning of the end of their spiritual union. The body natural is represented in their two corporeal bodies. With the marriage consummated in Cyprus, Othello and Desdemona have completely bound their bodies natural together; in doing so, they expose the body politic and become targets for Iago’s machinations. By delaying the sexual union, Shakespeare allows Desdemona and Othello to be perfectly united in soul; however, by attaining physical wholeness, they create the opportunity to be driven apart. The lovers are not allowed to be completely unified in both body and soul; the vices of the body natural, embodied in Iago, come between them.

Iago begins his work with the fight between Cassio and Montano. His description of the clash mirrors closely what will happen to Desdemona and Othello:

In quarter and in terms like bride and groom
Divesting them for bed; and then, but now.
As if some planet had unwitted men,
Swords out, and tilting one at other’s breasts
In opposition bloody. (II.iii.176-180)

Montano gets wounded, ignorant as to how this fight came about; once it’s over and the consequences become known, Cassio laments he has lost his reputation. Desdemona and Othello echo both in the play’s final scene. Iago immediately drives a wedge into the tiny crack he made, urging Cassio onwards:

Our general’s wife is now the general. I may say so in this respect, for that he hath devoted and given up himself to the contemplation, mark and denotement of her parts and graces. Confess yourself freely to her, importune

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7 Arthur Kirsch quite simply states: “There is no question, except for those critics who would prefer the play to be hiding a novel in it, that the marriage is consummated. Nor is there any suggestion in the behaviour of the two the morning after that the consummation has not been pleasurable” (730).
her help to put you in your place again. She is of so free, so kind, so apt, so blest a disposition that she holds it a vice in her goodness not to do more than she is requested. This broken joint between you and her husband entreat her to splinter – and my fortunes against any lay worth naming, this crack of your love shall grow stronger than it was before. (II.iii.309-320)

His language is particularly apropos, speaking of cracks, breaks, and splinters. He also describes Desdemona’s bodies natural and politic, that she is of such a pleasant disposition that she must do everything within the power of her body politic to help a friend. Moreover, Iago is the only one to point out that perhaps Othello has been compromised as general – that he has been making decisions based on desire for Desdemona (and so derived from his body natural), not on behalf of his army. In these statements, Iago begins to suggest a role reversal in Othello, that perhaps his body natural and body politic are inverted.

In fact, Iago corrupts the relationship between Othello and Desdemona in multiple ways. He manages to facilitate the disruption of their wedding night at least twice, and orchestrates the fight between Cassio and Montano, which leads to Othello’s disdain for Cassio and Desdemona’s pleading on Cassio’s behalf. Furthermore, as David Schalkwyk explains in his analysis of the master-servant relationship,

> In his relationship to Othello, Iago exemplifies perfectly the asymmetrical dialectic of dependence of master and servant upon each other: the master is finally more dependent upon the slave or servant because he is unaware that he is a master only through his relation to the servant, whereas the servant’s consciousness of that dependence gives him a relative independence which, in Iago’s case, he can put to devastating effect. (245)

Iago corrupts the ideas of servitude, seeming to despise service itself but remaining in Othello’s service out of need and a desire for revenge. “Under such circumstances the love that Iago would normally be expected to have for Othello – based on respect, gratitude, and traditional, hierarchical ties – is no longer owed the master” (Schalkwyk 248, original emphasis). This relationship, which Schalkwyk identifies as a form of love, can be seen to
have its own body natural and body politic – a dynamic that will be explored in the following chapter. In overturning the traditional master-slave relationship, Iago implicitly corrupts the other major relationship trope seen in the play: that of marriage. As Othello trusts an untrustworthy servant more, he begins to distrust his truthful wife; the two relationships are codependent within Othello.

Finally, Iago manages to manipulate Desdemona’s image, further corrupting Othello’s opinion of her and their relationship. Stephen Greenblatt highlights how Iago recognizes the power of story-telling in creating a person; Iago manipulates Desdemona’s story in order to re-create her, particularly controlling Othello’s dominion over her:

It is, of course, characteristic of early modern culture that male submission to narrative is conceived as active, entailing the fashioning of one’s own story (albeit within the prevailing conventions), and female submission as passive, entailing the entrance into marriage in which, to recall Tyndale’s definition, the ‘weak vessel’ is put ‘under the obedience of her husband, to rule her lusts and wanton appetites.’ (Self-Fashioning 239)

Desdemona assumes her story is written, complete in her marriage to Othello; she is content to listen as he writes their future. Iago finds ways to rewrite her story, and therefore Desdemona’s identity as Othello’s wife.

With a few words, several repeated questions, and one significant pause, Iago plants the idea in Othello’s mind that there is something untoward between Cassio and Desdemona. Ready to plead with Othello on Cassio’s behalf, Desdemona unknowingly plays into Iago’s plans. As Othello’s wife, she means well in trying to reassure him of Cassio’s virtues, and is looking out for her husband by trying to preserve his friend and good lieutenant. She pleads for Cassio by saying that he is penitent, that he’s a good man, paralleling this request with her asking Othello to put on his gloves: she is asking him to do the thing that is best for him. She straddles the line of propriety very finely, pleading with
Othello because she is his wife, but speaking of Cassio in very free terms. Desdemona’s requests originate in her wifely body politic, which attempts to care for Othello, but, due to Iago’s insinuations, Othello misconstrues these requests as originating in the body natural. Almost immediately Othello’s language changes; no longer does he use the absolutes with which he greeted Desdemona in Cyprus. Instead his language begins to demonstrate a separation of mind and body, of body politic and body natural, such as “Excellent wretch! perdition catch my soul/But I do love thee! and when I love thee not/Chaos is come again” (III.iii.90-92), and “O curse of marriage/That we can call these delicate creatures ours/And not their appetites” (III.iii.272-274). The division that has begun between Othello and Desdemona mirrors the unbalancing of the bodies natural and politic. Othello cannot yet stop himself loving Desdemona, but he is clearly compromised, worried about perdition and curses alongside his “delicate creature” whose absence creates chaos. Desdemona has no inkling of the divide that is opening.

Othello develops a headache from trying to reconcile the two sides of himself, which she tries to cure with her handkerchief. His response, “Your napkin is too little” (III.iii.291), and the inferred dropping of the handkerchief has been widely analyzed (see Boose, Neely, Newman, S. Smith); it certainly demonstrates a moment of chaos, of unfinished business. The handkerchief itself represents Desdemona, as well as virtue, love, sex, and purity. However, it is important to recognize that at this point in the play, the handkerchief has no purpose. Iago has not yet mentioned it to Othello; no one has said anything about it. Later, Othello will tell contradicting stories about the handkerchief’s origins, relating how it was once his mother’s and how she came by it. Eventually, Bianca will unwittingly display it to Cassio at the perfect moment for Othello to witness. The handkerchief becomes a symbol
for Othello and Desdemona’s marriage, a gift from him to her with embroidery evocative of their union and, therefore, symbolic of the body politic. The body politic is lost, manipulated, and abused for the rest of the play. But at the moment, the handkerchief is a mere accessory. Perhaps what Othello is feeling is too great to be bound by a handkerchief.

Desdemona cannot so easily take away his headache because she is partially the cause, though she does not know it. She behaves as a wife should towards an ill husband; Iago’s words later will cast doubt upon this simple act of wifely obedience. She leaves the napkin because her husband asks her to; her duty to her body politic overrules her body natural’s inclination to retrieve the handkerchief.

Othello and Desdemona leave together, but he returns alone to speak with Iago. His mind is clearly tormented by the simple suggestion of Desdemona with Cassio, and he fixates on his conflicting opinions of her,

By the world,
    I think my wife be honest, and think she is not,
    I think that thou art just, and think thou art not.
    I’ll have some proof. Her name, that was as fresh
    As Dian’s visage, is now begrimed and black
    As mine own face. (III.iii.386-391)

His husbandly body politic, which knows his wife, believes Desdemona to be honest, and would distrust Iago. But his body natural, subject to pangs of jealousy and irrationality which divide his body natural from hers, believes Iago just and remembers Desdemona’s deception of her father, and therefore she is not honest. The disjunction of his bodies natural and politic means that Othello is losing his perspective, his ability to see things clearly, and so he demands, “Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore/Be sure of it, give me the ocular proof” (III.iii.362-363). Now the handkerchief becomes enormously important. Iago offers this prospect of proof, suggesting that the handkerchief is not where it ought to be,
thereby manipulating the image of Desdemona as wife: Othello’s view of her body politic. He drives a wedge between Desdemona’s and Othello’s bodies natural, thus setting Othello’s body natural and body politic into conflict as well. His actions are enough for Othello to vow bloody thoughts. Iago’s response turns the moment into a parody of a marriage as they both kneel. Schalkwyk highlights the opposing representations of marriage in the play:

In contrast to the unseen, off-stage marriage ceremony through which we assume Othello and Desdemona are wed, this parody is presented centre stage – at the play’s core. Its performative force displaces the unseen vows of love and mutual service between husband and wife with a self-authorising declaration of complete dedication by servant to master. (253)

Up until now, the plot has shared similarities with Shakespeare’s comedies; now the situation changes: as Neely says, “the women’s wit is constrained, their power over men is lost, and the men are transformed downwards” (71). Othello’s connection to Iago (his body natural, ruled by jealousy) becomes stronger than his connection to Desdemona (his body politic, originating from his union with her and which still wants to believe her) through this act. Iago effectively corrupts Othello’s body politic by uniting with it, manipulating Othello’s body natural, and manipulating the appearance of Desdemona’s body natural. Therefore Desdemona’s body politic is functioning in a marriage that essentially no longer exists. From this point forward, everything Desdemona attempts to do as Othello’s wife brings her closer to her demise. Othello has lost sight of her wifely body politic, which for her is still characterized by utter faithfulness.

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Repeatedly throughout *Arden of Faversham*, Alice returns to her “role” as Arden’s wife. She manipulates the perception of her wifely body politic to her advantage, as much as possible. She first uses this tactic when Mosby scorns her in the first scene, taunting him:

‘Fore I was tangled with thy ‘ticing speech,
Arden to me was dearer than my soul –
And shall be still. Base peasant, get thee gone
And boast not of thy conquest over me,
Gotten by witchcraft and mere sorcery. (I.196-200)

As did Desdemona with Othello, Alice couches her marriage to Arden in terms of her soul, claiming that Arden is dearer to her than her own soul. The difference is that she’s only using this language as a means to taunt and retain Mosby, who quickly reaffirms his love.

Alice then commits the extremely unwifely act of poisoning Arden’s soup. When he asks if she made it, Alice relies on her identity as his wife to twist free once more, abusing her body politic doubly:

I did, and that’s the cause it likes not you.
There’s nothing that I do can please your taste.
You were best to say I would have poisoned you.
I cannot speak or cast aside my eye,
But he imagines I have stepped awry. (I.367-371)

She goes on the defensive, shirking his suspicion by pretending to be hurt that he could ever think she was less than perfect. So strategically does she use the suggestion of spousal abuse and play the scorned wife that Arden eventually apologizes to her for suspecting her of something that was, in fact, true:

| Arden: | Be patient, sweet love; I mistrust not thee. |
| Alice: | God will revenge it, Arden, if thou dost, For never woman loved her husband better Than I do thee. (I.390-393) |

The whole episode allows Alice to “prove” she is the best possible wife, while at the same time functioning as the worst possible wife. She disguises the actions of her body natural
(her desire for Mosby, which causes her to poison the soup so as to kill Arden) in the actions of her body politic (her duty in cooking supper for her husband, then questioning how Arden can doubt her loyalty and love as his wife), thus abusing the latter. The marriage is clearly not a healthy one, and therefore one wonders how strong the body politic can be in such a union.

Alice again plays up her position as Arden’s wife with Greene, confirming Arden’s bad management of the Abbey lands through his “bad management” of his wife, manipulating the parallel:

> When he is at home, then have I froward looks,  
> Hard words, and blows to mend the match withal.  
> And though I might content as good a man,  
> Yet doth he keep in every corner trulls;  
> And weary with his trugs at home,  
> Then rides he straight to London; there, forsooth,  
> He revels it among such filthy ones  
> As counsels him to make away his wife.  
> Thus live I daily in continual fear . . . (I.494-502)

Her words may be a lie regarding her relationship with Arden (at least, as the audience has seen it thus far), but they certainly apply to Arden’s interactions with Greene and Reede, to whom he is curt and unforgiving. Arden abandons his Abbey lands and their tenants in favor of life in London with Franklin, and therefore abuses his body politic as landowner.

Alice manipulates the similarities of land ownership and the wife’s position to her advantage. By positioning herself as the wronged wife, Alice creates a fellowship with Greene, convincing him to go to London and murder Arden for her while making him think it was his idea.

Arden, for his part, feels the conflict with Alice keenly within his own body:

> Her faults, methink, are painted in my face  
> For every searching eye to overread;
And Mosby’s name, a scandal unto mine,  
Is deeply trenched in my blushing brow. (IV.14-17)

Arden’s body natural reacts to Alice’s betrayal of her body politic; her actions affect him just as a queen’s actions must invariably affect her people. Franklin tries to get Arden to forget his troubles, convincing him that she’ll die, or that he can stay in London, but Arden’s connection to his wife runs deep: “At home or not at home, where’er I be,/Here, here it lies, ah, Franklin, here it lies/That will not out til wretched Arden dies” (IV.31-33). For all that Alice feigns her role as Arden’s wife, Arden appears to be genuine in feeling the effects of her actions upon himself, almost as Othello and Desdemona claimed they had but one soul between them. Alice is no longer committed to the marriage, but Arden doesn’t know that, he merely suspects it, and so retains hope of an ideal marriage. However, in his following scene Arden dreams that he is hunted like a deer, a clear example of the inverted order where the master is hunted and the husband stabbed.⑧ When he returns to Faversham, the situation devolves quickly.

Alice’s deep betrayal of Arden leads Mosby to question the reality and truth of their relationship. When alone he claims,

Yet Mistress Arden lives; but she’s myself:  
And holy church rites makes us two but one.  
But what for that I may not trust you, Alice?  
You have supplanted Arden for my sake,  
And will extirpen me to plant another.  
‘Tis fearful sleeping in a serpent’s bed,  
And I will cleanly rid my hands of her. (VIII.37-43)

⑧ It is also interesting to note the development of Arden’s relationship with Franklin, which in many ways parallels Othello’s relationship with Iago, though not as overt.
Alice has deceived so many people, made so many false promises, that even her “true love” Mosby\(^9\) begins to disbelieve her, and even accuses her of witchery. What’s more, her love union with Mosby and marital union with Arden have created a web of interconnected bodies natural and politic, such that anyone making a decision will affect everyone. Alice and Mosby are connected by their desiring bodies natural, which they believe have created a body politic (but which haven’t). Alice actually has a wifely body politic connected to Arden through their married bodies natural but she denies and abuses it. Arden’s husbandly body politic is also corrupted, as has been shown through his land ownership.

And yet, amidst that tangled knot, Alice believes herself independent and not tied to Mosby as he would be to her. He challenges her, “It is not love that loves to anger love” (VIII.57). Her response again places her as Arden’s love, not Mosby’s; “It is not love that loves to murder love” (VIII.58), and serves to cover any reticence or perceived conflict on her part. The double meaning in her words makes it difficult to know if she means that she does not love Arden and so can murder him, or that she does not enjoy murdering him which proves she loves him (though later in the play, it seems to be the latter). This kind of wordplay serves her well. She continues to tempt Mosby, saying she is changed, “Ay, to my former happy life again;/From title of an odious strumpet’s name/To honest Arden’s wife – not Arden’s honest wife” (VIII.70-73). Her lie from her body natural, manipulating the appearance of her body politic to make it seem she will return to Arden, forces Mosby to come running back to her, just as she knew it would. Alice believes she understands the body politic, and therefore can manipulate it to her will.

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\(^9\) Rebecca Ann Bach points out that the concept of “true love” did not exist until at least a century after the play was written, effectively silencing would-be defense attorneys of Alice on the grounds of her pure love for Mosby.
The essence of Alice’s arguments for her own actions, and the epitome of her mistaken understanding of her body politic, is put forth in her monologue in scene X:

Why should he thrust his sickle in our corn,
Or what hath he to do with thee, my love,
Or govern me that am to rule myself?
Forsooth, for credit sake I must leave thee!
Nay, he must leave to live that we may love,
May live, may love: for what is life but love?
And love shall last as long as life remains,
And life shall end before my love depart. (X.82-89)

Alice collapses the ideas of “life” and “love” into one concept, which ideally should be the perfect union of the bodies natural and politic. However, in her mind the body politic is subjugated to the body natural’s desire, or love. She cannot separate the two ideas, or the two bodies, and so believes that she will die without love, which is life. Unfortunately, the love she bears for Mosby within her body natural is eclipsed, in the end, by the love she did not know she bore for Arden in her body politic. As a result, she is destroyed after her husband’s death.

**DEMISE**

Othello and Iago begin Act IV discussing whether a woman is within her rights as a wife to give a gift away:

Iago: But if I give my wife a handkerchief –
Othello: What then?
Iago: Why, then ‘tis hers, my lord, and being hers
She may, I think, bestow’t on any man.
Othello: She is protectress of her honour too:
May she give that?
Iago: Her honour is an essence that’s not seen,
They have it very oft that have it not.
But for the handkerchief – (IV.i.10-18)
Desdemona is innocent; she has given away neither her honor nor her handkerchief. However the handkerchief, representative of Othello and Desdemona’s union, appears to have been given away as though it means nothing. In Iago’s hands, its loss is sufficient to persuade Othello that Desdemona has also lost her honor. Appearances are enough; Othello has begun to suffer petit seizures, presumably from the conflict arising between his jealous body natural and his husbandly body politic. To attempt to balance these parts of himself, Othello begins to force his husbandly body politic, abusing both it and Desdemona by giving in to the jealousy and suspicion of his body natural.

This also marks the point in the play where Desdemona seems to change, a problem in her character that most scholars find difficult to resolve, as articulated by Jane Adamson: “If anything disturbs us about her behaviour in the first half of the play, it is her unhesitating self-assurance and energy. But from IV, i onwards, it is the reverse, her peculiar passivity, that is most disturbing” (220, original emphasis). While Adamson seems to forget Desdemona’s deception of her father (a most disturbing act of filial disobedience), this change can be understood through the union of Othello’s and Desdemona’s bodies natural, and the resulting bodies politic. Desdemona’s wifely body politic attempts to effect change where it can no longer find purchase, even as her body natural still desires Othello; Othello no longer respects her body politic, or believes her body natural’s desire. Her body politic therefore does the only thing it can: attempt to reconcile with its other half, who has abandoned it. Iago, in manipulating Othello’s body natural, effects change in his body politic. Othello’s altered body politic then causes Desdemona to recalibrate her responsibilities and behavior as his wife. Desdemona’s wifely body politic assumes the ideal
wifely demeanor, but Othello’s body politic has been too far corrupted to believe the perfection.

News has arrived that Cassio is set to replace Othello, who is to return to Venice. Upon hearing this news, Desdemona is pleased – presumably because it means she can live peacefully in Venice with her husband, and Cassio – her friend – will do well. Othello takes her response to mean that she wishes to see Cassio advanced above him because she’s in love with Cassio. Othello begins to interrogate Desdemona, growing angry, and when she questions him “Why, sweet Othello?” he strikes her, calling her “Devil” (IV.i.238-239). From a most sincere inquiry as a concerned wife, Desdemona ends up confused and battered, responding “I have not deserved this” (IV.i.240). She knows she has done nothing wrong, that she has been a perfect wife to Othello. He, in response, sends her away a scorned woman, and when Lodovico entreats him to call her back (presumably to make things right), Othello beckons her, then taunts her,

Ay, you did wish that I would make her turn.
Sir, she can turn, and turn, and yet go on
And turn again. And she can weep, sir, weep.
And she’s obedient: as you say, obedient,
Very obedient. – Proceed you in your tears. – (IV.i.252-256)

Othello abuses his power over Desdemona, showing her off like a trick pony, commanding her in order to prove he can. He also seems to show Lodovico how she could be counterfeiting (as though he is saying “see how she weeps on command”), while proving he still has control over her, though he believes he has lost it. In other words, Othello uses his husbandly body politic to satisfy the insecurities of his body natural. Victoria E. Price, tracking the creation of whores in the play, writes that “The shock which Lodovico expresses in response to Othello’s actions registers the fact that, in striking Desdemona
publicly, Othello is denying her a wife’s dignity . . . the discourse of whoredom applied to Desdemona has the effect of reducing her person from the status of a wife to that of whore” (77). Othello devalues Desdemona’s position as his wife, commanding her to prove his power over her, believing that this power is empty since she’s been with Cassio and is therefore no longer a true and obedient wife. He lashes out at both her body natural by striking her and her body politic by humiliating her, leaving her clinging to an empty body politic gained through her marriage, the only identity she has.

Desdemona is ignorant of the cause of Othello’s changed nature. A.C. Bradley identifies her problem as the conflict between her “grace” and her ignorance:

[These graces and this deficiency appear to be inextricably intertwined . . . They, with her innocence, hinder her from understanding Othello’s state of mind, and lead her to the most unlucky acts and words; and unkindness or anger subdues her so completely that she becomes passive and seems to drift helplessly towards the cataract in front. (153)]

The grace refers to her wifely body politic, her purity that responds to Othello and attempts to rectify the relationship with her husband, almost willfully ignorant of how he has abandoned her. Her deficiency is the body natural that Othello distrusts, and which she doesn’t know appears unfaithful. The danger for anyone investigating Desdemona is to claim that she acts passively or, rather, does not act at all because she is so in love with Othello. But the theory of the king’s two bodies helps to clarify how, to an Elizabethan audience, Desdemona’s actions are those of an ideal wife whose body politic responds to her husband, not knowing that he believes her unfaithful. Jane Adamson understands how united Desdemona still believes she is with Othello, and the strength of the vow she made to him:

loving Othello as she does, Desdemona cannot separate or even distinguish her real self-interests from his. For her, to endure pain is less painful than
choosing to inflict it. It is not that she is too idealistic, romantic or feeble to know how to love herself; it is rather that her commitment to Othello makes it impossible to conceive any injury to him as a benefit to her. (239, original emphasis)

Desdemona cannot disobey the wifely body politic without doing damage to herself as well. Furthermore, Gayle Greene highlights the peril of Desdemona’s complete dedication to her body politic: “What has been lost in her ‘divided duty’ is duty to herself” (27). Desdemona acts increasingly as Othello’s ideal wife, neglecting the safety of her own body natural in favor of the perfect actions of her body politic. Her actions are irreproachable, but Othello has been so far corrupted that he cannot trust in their marital body politic anymore.

Othello further drives Desdemona down in the whorehouse scene where he equates Emilia (Desdemona’s lady-in-waiting) to a madam. Emilia proves herself quite astute early in this scene, “For if she be not honest, chaste, and true,/There’s no man happy; the purest of their wives/Is foul as slander” (IV.ii.17-19). Desdemona is the paragon of womanhood. She has proved herself repeatedly a good wife to Othello. Though the manner in which she left her father’s house was less than what a good daughter should have done, the worst she has done since was plead on Cassio’s behalf, which she did for a friend and for her husband’s benefit. Yet Iago has so shaped Othello’s thoughts that he cannot see her goodness; it is almost as though he cannot believe in a perfect woman. Though he truly did marry a woman wholly devoted to him, he now sees only her deceptions. He has set up a no-win situation for Desdemona in his head, commanding her to “Come, swear it, damn thyself” (IV.ii.36). Either she will swear she’s true to him and is lying, and therefore damned, or she must admit to the affair with Cassio and therefore is a whore. In either case, she betrays one of her two bodies. There is no possibility, in Othello’s mind, that she could
swear she is his “true and loyal wife” (IV.ii.35) and still be telling the truth. After Othello exits, Emilia asks:

Emilia: Good madam, what’s the matter with my lord?
Desdemona: With whom?
Emilia: Why, with my lord, madam.
Desdemona: Who is thy lord?
Emilia: He that is yours, sweet lady.
Desdemona: I have none. (IV.ii.100-104)

Desdemona’s response invites interpretations of “lord” as both husband and savior, that she has lost her husband and also lost her religion. Her husband no longer acts as he should towards her; it is not a coincidence that she bids Emilia put her wedding sheets on her bed, as though she is attempting a second marriage, if not with Othello, then with Christ. It is as though her body natural’s belief in religion and her body politic’s belief in her husband have both failed her in the same moment. If her marriage to Othello is over or corrupted beyond redemption, then Desdemona seems to think she can prepare her body natural for a new union, and therefore recreate a new body politic.

Alas, even a second marriage cannot save her. Early in the final scene comes the play’s most famous line,

Othello: Have you prayed tonight, Desdemon?  
Desdemona: Ay, my lord. (V.ii.25)

The shared line indicates a continued cohabiting of the same emotional space by the two of them. Most of Othello and Desdemona’s dialogue in this scene is comprised of stichomythia; this particular example is interesting in that he uses the shortened version of her name (which he does several times in the play), but she finishes it with her first syllable. Desdemona continues to try to function as Othello’s other half, his soul, and the part of her he cannot kill:
Othello: No, heaven forfend, I would not kill thy soul.
Desdemona: Then, heaven, Have mercy on me!
Othello: Amen, with all my heart. (V.ii.32-34)

Othello responds to Desdemona’s prayer from her soul with his heart, body natural responding to body politic, each of them functioning as halves of the marital whole. But the situation has gone too far, and this play operates within an inversion, so that when Othello asks her to “Think on thy sins” she responds, “They are the loves I bear to you” (V.ii.40). Her body natural’s love for Othello has caused blindness in her wifely body politic. If love is a sin, then the soul is no longer the perfecting, unerring body the justices identified and Plowden chronicled; the body politic has become sinful and unnatural, the very opposite of itself. As Desdemona says, “That death’s unnatural that kills for loving” (V.ii.42), suggesting that the body natural has also become its opposite, unnatural. The death of her body natural is an unnatural choice for the marital body politic to enact on its lover. The bodies natural and politic are no longer united in marital bliss anymore; each action brings the two bodies closer to demise.

As Othello smothers Desdemona, her cries of “O Lord” mingle with Emilia’s “My lord” as she attempts to get into the room; the juxtaposition draws a parallel between God and Othello as the head of the house who has enacted justice as he understands the situation, comparing the husbandly body politic to the spiritual body from which the original, kingly body politic originated. But Othello’s body politic has been corrupted by Iago, and so is not infallible. As soon as the deed is done, he seems to realize the unnaturalness of his actions:

My wife, my wife! what wife? I have no wife.
O insupportable, O heavy hour!
Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse
Of sun and moon, and that th’affrighted globe  
Should yawn at alteration. (V.ii.96-100)

Othello wants the natural world to reflect his world, upside-down and inside out. His divided bodies natural and politic led to his body natural jealously overpowering his body politic. His body natural then destroyed the body natural of his perfect wife, ending their marriage and her wifely body politic by ending her life.

Desdemona attempts, one last time, to reconcile her two bodies. She wakes just long enough to speak with Emilia:

Desdemona: A guiltless death I die.  
Emilia: O, who hath done  
This deed?  
Commend me to my kind lord – O, farewell!

She dies. (V.ii.121-123)

If Desdemona still believes herself Othello’s true wife (the opposite of what Othello believes), then to her they are two become one. “I myself” is the part of her shared with Othello, an expression of her wifely body politic. In this moment, Jane Adamson argues,

[F]or [Desdemona] . . . it is not a ‘lie’ or an indulgence. Her love fully ‘credits’ it – makes it a truth. And voiced so undemonstratively, so unprotestingly as this, her sense of what has happened surely matters too much for us to brush it aside as false or merely sentimental. (262, original emphasis)

Holmer similarly says, “She deceived her father in order to marry Othello, and now she deceives the world in order to love Othello ideally” (143). Their two-bodies-in-one allows her to die guiltlessly. She is the perfect wife to him, even unto the last, her body politic fulfilling its promise.

A quick interjection must be made at this point for Emilia. As A.C. Bradley claims, “Few of Shakespeare’s minor characters are more distinct than Emilia, and towards few do our feelings change so much within the course of a play” (178-179). Many scholars have
pointed out the parallels and juxtapositions that exist between Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca, and how the three represent the span of female identity (see Neely, Holmer, Callaghan, J. Adamson). Emilia, in particular, seems to be on the other side of the coin from Desdemona. Her marriage to Iago juxtaposes with Desdemona’s to Othello. Moreover, Iago claims jealousy in response to the rumor that Othello has “done his duty” with Emilia. David Schalkwyk points out that “Emilia . . . is forced to live three forms of competing service: as Iago’s wife, as Desdemona’s lady-in-waiting, and, finally, as servant to the head of her household, Othello” (258). She slowly moves from being Iago’s faithful wife (stealing the handkerchief and giving it to him, actions of her wifely body politic) to being Desdemona’s faithful friend and lady-in-waiting. John Draper points out that “Emilia acts as eyes and hands and telephone [sic] and general adviser and sympathetic listener to Desdemona; and she alone is able at the end to declare her mistress’ virtue and to unveil Iago’s plots” (81). Emilia is crucial; she reveals the truth after she has discovered Iago’s villainy and after he has threatened to stab her.

Emilia’s actions raise a question: is duty owed to an evil husband? If a man beats his wife, does she still have to obey him? Politically and socially speaking, in Elizabethan England the wife had little recourse but to do so, though history does offer a few instances of women leaving their husbands and communities tolerating the separation for the good of all. Desdemona obeyed Othello after he struck her. She still believed that he was good and an equal participant in their marriage. Emilia has no such feelings towards Iago. David Schalkwyk highlights her altered feelings:

In her simple statement of defiant disobedience – ‘I will ne’er go home’ – Emilia is not only foretelling her own death but also declaring her independence from the sway of her domestic condition, as wife and servant to her husband, whose place is in the home. Her qualification of her duty of
obedience before a crowd of figures of patriarchal authority declares a newly recognised obligation both to truth and to her mistress that is all the more telling for not being made from a position of unconditional devotion. (260, original emphasis)

Emilia, in abandoning her wifely body politic, sees Iago clearly in a way Desdemona never could with Othello. Once Emilia reveals the truth, she knows Iago will kill her, and so she goes to her grave choosing her fate, pronouncing the truth, “Moor, she was chaste, she loved thee, cruel Moor,/So come my soul to bliss as I speak true!/So speaking as I think, alas, I die” (V.ii.247-249). She has also saved her soul in her final action by purging the lie. Emilia’s wifely body politic vanishes in the duty and love she owes to her mistress, and in this instance, she is redeemed by it. Her servile body politic ultimately outweighs her wifely body politic. The relationship between the servant and mistress will be explored more fully in the next chapter, but Emilia’s case as both servant and wife proves interesting enough on its own.

Killing Desdemona, Othello loses his marriage partner, though he has not recognized her as such in quite some time. He had thought, as Bradley suggests, “[t]he deed he is bound to do is no murder, but a sacrifice. He is to save Desdemona from herself, not in hate but in honour; in honour, and also in love” (147). Othello believed he had to kill Desdemona’s body natural in order to redeem her body politic, actions required of him by his husbandly body politic. But when Emilia disobeys Iago, “Good gentlemen, let me have leave to speak./'Tis proper I obey him – but not now./Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home” (V.ii.192-194), Othello falls on the bed crying “O.” Her disobedience represents a break from her identity as Iago’s wife; this action seems to crack into Othello’s madness, and he begins to see the truth as he couldn’t while his body politic was undermined by his connection to Iago. Emilia’s revelations finally set Othello’s two bodies back in order. He
began the scene telling Desdemona, “Be thus when thou art dead and I will kill thee/And love thee after” (V.ii.18-19), indicating that he cannot love her corrupted body natural but will eternally love her soul, her idealized body politic. He now ends with, “I kissed thee ere I killed thee: no way but this,/Killing myself, to die upon a kiss” (V.ii.356-357). In the end he reunites himself with her, bodies natural dead together on the bed, bodies politic married in heaven.

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Perhaps Alice’s most wifely act in the entire play is handing money to Black Will and Shakebag to make sure they get a warm fire and some food after they've been wandering around in a dense fog. This is the act of a woman of the house caring for those under her authority, offering welcome, safety, and homely comforts. Unfortunately, she only does it to ensure their help with the plan to murder Arden. Even in attempting to be a good lady of the house, she fails.

Arden’s return to Faversham signals a rapid decline in the marital state of affairs. Alice’s lying increases tenfold, starting with her greeting of Arden arm in arm with Mosby, which triggers Arden to attack Mosby. Alice once again accuses Arden of maltreatment,

Henceforth I’ll be thy slave, no more thy wife;
For with that name I never shall content thee.
If I be merry, thou straightways thinks me light;
If sad, thou sayest the sullens trouble me;
If well attired, thou thinks I will be gadding;
If homely, I seem sluttish in thine eye.
Thus am I still, and shall be while I die,
Poor wench abused by thy misgovernment. (XIII.106-113)

Here again is the charge that he is somehow not a competent lord of land or wife. Because of her position as his wife, Alice is able to pretend that he has negated her wifely body politic unjustly and reduced her to an imperfect body natural. In reality, she has corrupted
her own body politic and abused it with these words. Once more, however, Arden seems to reconcile with Alice and they return home. Unlike Desdemona, who was the perfect woman but appeared otherwise, Alice appears to be the perfect woman (at least to Arden) but is actually a terrible wife. Arden doesn’t realize how right he is when he says, “For in thy discontent I find a death,/A death tormenting more than death itself” (XIII.120-121).

Alice finally succeeds in murdering Arden when she gets each separate component of the previous murder plots (Greene, Shakebag, Black Will, Mosby, Michael, Susan, and herself) working in synchronicity. For some reason, in this last attempt, Alice must bolster herself with thoughts of Mosby as though she knows this time they will succeed. Perhaps it is the qualms of her true wifely body politic sinking through her body natural’s desire which prompts her to reassert her connection to Mosby, “But Mosby will be there, whose very, looks/Will add unwonted courage to my thought,/And make me the first that shall adventure on him” (XIV.134-136). This statement seems to indicate genuine emotion for her lover, and she even goes on to compare herself to a goddess. Alice still lives in the willful misbelief that her love for Mosby houses her body politic, and the sincerity of this belief is the only defense she has against her body natural, which just wants to kill her husband in cold blood so she can be with her lover.

The lead-up to the murder is rife with double-meanings; for example, when Mosby accuses Alice in front of Arden, “But for yourself you speak not from your heart,” she responds, “And if I do not, sir, think I have cause” (XIV.187-188). It is as though bodies natural and bodies politic are so jumbled together that audience and characters alike cannot completely understand what is true anymore, what is right or wrong, public or private, body or soul. At long last, after an entire play with countless attempts on Arden’s life, the murder
is executed. Alice wields the final blow: “What, groans thou? Nay then, give me the weapon./Take this for hind’ring Mosby’s love and mine” (XIV.234-235). Together they manage to slay Arden as none could individually, in the name of love and righteousness.

Almost immediately, things start to go wrong. Sullivan, Jr. explains how “the play makes plain that while Arden’s negligence is reprehensible, the usurpation of the place of the ‘king of the family’ by his wife’s lover is far worse. What we witness after the murder is a complete breakdown of order and of hierarchy” (Sullivan, Jr., “Early Modern Household” 79). Alice’s demise is quick and direct after Arden’s death. As soon as the body is hidden, Blackwill and Shakebag take off with their money, and Susan enters announcing guests at the door. Arden’s blood stains the floor and can’t be washed away, which Alice believes is “Because I blush not at my husband’s death” (XIV.256). His wronged body politic speaks out through the remains of his body natural. Soon it becomes clear how deeply the murder affected Alice: “Ah, but I cannot. Was he not slain by me?/My husband’s death torments me at the heart” (XIV.265-266). Alice seems not to have realized until this moment how fundamentally connected she, as a wife, was to her husband, whether she saw it, believed it, or not. Now, with his death, she feels his loss more keenly than she had imagined. Her body natural physically responds to the loss of the body politic that she repeatedly ignored and abused. As the rest of the town enters and toasts to Arden, she inadvertently cries out “My husband!” (XIV.297) which she must cover up by pretending to know something is unwell with Arden. Coincidentally, this is precisely the knowledge her body politic as a wife would have given her. The outburst demonstrates some unexpected feeling bursting free from where Alice had locked it away, her wifely body politic crying out at last because it has been
so wronged from denying her position as Arden’s wife even as she manipulated the appearance that she was.

As the murderers hover on the cusp of discovery, Mosby ever so briefly and superficially inhabits the role of Alice’s husband. After she cries that Arden’s death “torments me at the heart” (XIV.266), Mosby replies, “It shall not long torment thee, gentle Alice,/I am thy husband; think no more on him” (XIV.267-268). Alice continues to refer to Arden as her husband, though she seats Mosby in the dead man’s place. On looking on Arden’s corpse, she says “Sweet Arden, smeared in blood and filthy gore” (XIV.326). When Mosby enters, she calls to him with “Sweet Mosby, art thou come? Then weep that will,/I have my wish in that I joy thy sight” (XIV.331-332). The mirrored language demonstrates how, in killing Arden, Alice has exposed the weaknesses of her long-abused body politic. She attempts to stick with her original belief in her love for Mosby as her body politic, but her infallible wifely body politic is now asserting itself.

When Alice sees Arden’s body, his wounds begin to bleed afresh, confirming her role as his murderer. She laments, “The more I sound his name the more he bleeds./This blood condemns me, and in gushing forth/Speaks as it falls and asks me why I did it” (XVI.4-6). The spontaneous bleeding of a corpse was commonly believed to be a sign that the guilty party was present, the body reacting to the presence of its murderer. In this, as with the previous instance of the bloodstains and Alice’s outburst of “My husband,” the outraged marital body politic speaks through the body natural, condemning Alice for her actions where Desdemona absolved Othello. As was seen with Lady Macbeth, it is perfectly believable that Alice had not realized the full repercussions of her actions; seeing the corpse
instigates a permanent change in Alice. It causes her to repent, “In heaven I love thee though on earth I did not” (XVI.11).

With the revelation of Arden’s murder, Alice finally accepts the presence of the wifely body politic. It has been suggested that Alice’s “change of heart” is too little, too late, and is likely a show to prevent her traitor’s death (see Tassi, LaPerle). However, in everything she says from this point forward, she never returns to her love for Mosby, and never demonstrates a sense of duty to her former lover. Instead, her full concern is for Arden and for her soul. As soon as Franklin has discovered the truth, Alice says, “Ah, Master Franklin, God and heaven can tell/I loved him more than all the world beside./But bring me to him; let me see his body” (XIV.405-407). She has little to gain from lying at this point. As she and Mosby stand next to each other, condemned by the mayor, they turn on one another, bodies natural at war:

Mosby: Convey me from the presence of that strumpet.
Alice: Ah, but for thee I had never been strumpet.
What cannot oaths and protestations do
When men have opportunity to woo?
I was too young to sound thy villainies,
But now I find it, and repent too late. (XVIII.13-18)

This bickering exchange demonstrates what the audience has known all along: that theirs was a superficial attraction, not the complete union of bodies natural resulting in a marital body politic. Alice’s invocation of the false oaths they made to one another proves that her body natural and body politic have been put back into their proper order. She recognizes that her actions with Mosby corrupted her body politic and she repents. At long last, she embraces her identity as Arden’s wife and therefore her wifely body politic.

Historically, because Alice murdered her husband, she received the death of a traitor and was burned at the stake. Her actions constituted a betrayal of the body politic, and the
punishment was the same for both the broader social context and the more personal marital context. Julie R. Schutzman, examining the public and private spheres within the play, explains why theatrically her execution could not be shown: “Ultimately, Alice Arden’s demise remains unrepresentable precisely because her crime insistently represents a challenge to order that can be discovered and punished but never satisfactorily erased” (311). Instead she is shown en route to her death continuing to repent, perhaps like Othello hoping for some union in death that she was denied in life, bodies natural and politic in balance once more.

**CONCLUSION**

*Othello* and *Arden of Faversham* both operate in worlds where the natural order is reversed: one husband distrusts his perfect wife, the other’s apparently perfect wife is the exact opposite. Appearances are utterly deceiving. In Chapter 1, Plowden detailed that the body politic takes the body natural to itself, making it greater than it was before. In these plays, the body natural has usurped the body politic, becoming greater than the body politic and so making the body politic lesser than it was before. The duty-bound body politic is subjugated to the body natural’s desires. Only tragedy can result from such inversion.

Desdemona is often seen as one-sided, an innocent virgin who cannot defend herself from or condemn a brutal husband. However, Marvin Rosenberg believes it is dangerous to rob Desdemona of her human frailty as it is to steal her essential goodness from her . . . But we care intensely for this young, passionate woman who ran away secretly from her father’s house to the arms of her lover, who has a healthy desire to be with her husband on her wedding night, who cries when she is struck, and who fears death terribly. (qtd. in Holmer 156)
Desdemona and Othello demonstrate many of the aspects of the two bodies theory already explored. Desdemona is more than just a battered woman. She works on behalf of her husband, trying to help him become more than what he is alone, drawing strength from her faith in the union of their marital bodies politic. Othello speaks of them as two beings incorporated into one, two halves of a whole; the separation that Iago creates between the two of them leads definitively towards their demise. But what corrupts their bodies natural and politic is derived from the inversion of the harmonic order: Othello believes Desdemona’s body natural has usurped her wifely body politic. It is the result of his allowing his own husbandly body politic to be usurped by his body natural, poisoned by Iago, and Desdemona’s own usurpation of the filial body politic.

Arden speaks of Alice as though she is his other half; she works hard to appear that way without actually being so. In fact, if Alice had acted as a good wife and dedicated the time and energy that she spent plotting Arden’s murder instead to helping him be a better landowner, perhaps they would have succeeded as partners. But her conviction that her body natural is actually her body politic, her certainty that she is not truly Arden’s wife but Mosby’s, deceives her into removing that title from herself permanently. Schutzman considers that “Alice Arden manipulates existing social structures in order to evade and redirect both a censorious public gaze and the constraining surveillance of her outraged husband . . . these actions constitute a female autonomy that subverts small-town social order and patriarchal authority from within, by challenging it on its own terms” (289). Her wifely body politic and its duty is usurped by her body natural and its desire, resulting in Arden’s death and her own demise when the usurpation proves untenable and she finally feels the effects of her outraged and abused wifely body politic.
Both women die in the end, unable to live in a world so overturned. Karen Newman, connecting the feminine with the monstrous in *Othello*, states that

The case of Desdemona is more complex because the fate she suffers is the conventional fate assigned to the desiring woman. Nevertheless, Shakespeare’s representation of her as at once virtuous and desiring, and of her choice in love as heroic rather than demonic, dislocates the conventional ideology of gender the play also enacts. (139)

Desdemona has done nothing wrong, yet she receives Othello’s punishment. In some ways, her revival and last words to Emilia are her punishment to herself: that even in her last moments she will not see or admit the truth of Othello’s transgression. She lives fully in her duty to Othello as his wife, while Alice lives in her desire for Mosby. Alice is punished publicly and by society when she is burnt at the stake. Her repentance is the necessary last act in a dramatic retelling of a true story. Ultimately, these two women demonstrate how the king’s two bodies theory can also begin to reflect a desire vs. duty dualism which will prove central in the next chapter.

Arden and Desdemona both seem to speak from beyond the grave; Othello and Alice both realize the depth of the damage they have done with these murders. Not only have they committed spousal murder, they have injured themselves, damaging their own bodies politic so permanently that death is the only way out. When the body natural dies, the body politic must have someplace to go. It might have traveled to a new wife and a second marriage, except that the depth of the abuse to the body politic has rendered it permanently damaged. The only solution in the end is for the corresponding body natural to die, thus hoping for a reunion of bodies politic in the afterlife. The bodies natural and politic can only exist in harmony; when the body natural attempts to subvert the body politic to its own
wants and uses, the body politic will eventually make itself known, even if death is the only way to do so.
CHAPTER SIX

SERVING WOMEN

Thus far, the characters examined have been in some position of authority, or in marital relationships with a somewhat equal power structure. In this final chapter, the focus will be on characters representing the lower class, specifically women in the role of domestic servant. While most female characters in the Elizabethan and Jacobean canon are from the aristocratic classes, there are examples of lower class women found in the tragedies and histories such as Mistress Quickly, Emilia, and Bianca. In order to fully examine the ramifications of the king’s two bodies theory on female characters, it is crucial to include this final analysis. A woman could be maid, widow, or wife, but these possible roles were true of all women across social structures. The ability to become queen, or the necessity to become a servant, was a product of social standing; each role embodies elements of the dual nature seen in the king’s two bodies theory and the responsibilities that characterize the body politic.

The previous chapter offered two examples of the master-servant relationship: Othello-Iago and Desdemona-Emilia. Both Iago and Emilia were shown to have a duty to their masters that conflicted with their personal lives. Iago specifically works to corrupt his role as servant in driving Othello and Desdemona apart. Emilia, in the end, is forced to choose between the duty owed to her husband and the duty owed to her mistress, finally choosing the latter given Iago’s villainy. Emilia and Iago are particularly interesting since the two of them are married to each other; the marriage union alters a person’s identity. The two female characters examined in this chapter are not so definitively connected to another person, though they also exemplify the body natural/body politic dualism demonstrated in
every other character so far. Raymond Powell identifies parallels between Desdemona and Emilia, Juliet and the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, and Annabella and Putana in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*: “There is a similar contrasting pattern in all three: between, on the one hand, a high-minded, self-authenticating romantic idealism that defies both worldly prudence and the constraints of family and social position, and, on the other hand, the voice of a coarser-grained, pragmatic realism in varying degrees sympathetic, skeptical, and compromised” (583). It is that latter voice, stemming from the serving person, which will be examined now.

Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* is the infamous tale of two star-crossed lovers in the feuding streets of Verona. Romeo pines after Rosalind until he attends a party at the Capulets’ house where he meets and instantly falls in love with Juliet, who is also being wooed by Paris. After the party, he clambers into her garden and they avow their love to one another. The next day Juliet sends her Nurse to Romeo, who has elicited Friar Laurence’s help, and the two lovers are married. Shortly thereafter, Romeo gets caught in a brawl between Tybalt (Juliet’s cousin) and Mercutio; Mercutio dies, then Romeo kills Tybalt and is banished. Romeo and Juliet spend one night together and then he flees to Mantua. Meanwhile Juliet’s parents have decided to marry her to Paris to stop her supposed grief over Tybalt’s death. In her desperation, Juliet agrees to Friar Laurence’s plan to fake her death. But Romeo hears of her death, and the Friar’s letter containing the truth never reaches him. He returns to Verona and kills himself in her tomb. When Juliet awakens and sees her dead husband, she then stabs herself as well. The two families appear to reconcile, each promising to raise statues of the other’s child as a token of what the feud has cost them.

John Ford’s *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* opens with Giovanni and Friar Bonaventura arguing philosophically over love, specifically Giovanni’s love for his sister. In Parma,
suitors war over the fair Annabella’s hand; her bawdy tutoress Putana weighs the merits of the soldier, the lover, and the fool. But when Annabella spies her brother Giovanni returned from the university, the two fall in love and begin a physical relationship. Annabella eventually gets pregnant and the Friar convinces her to wed Soranzo to cover her sins. Soranzo’s loyal servant, Vasquez, discovers the truth from Putana, whose eyes he has put out. When Soranzo discovers the pregnancy, he is enraged and vows revenge. Giovanni goes to see Annabella and stabs her, wanting to be the only one who can possess her. He then enters Soranzo’s party with her heart on a dagger, whereupon Vasquez unleashes a group of banditti to kill him. The play ends with the Church claiming all the material goods of those who have died (who also include Soranzo and Annabella and Giovanni’s father).

*Romeo and Juliet* and *‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore* provide good examples of the domestic servant female character: the Nurse and Putana\(^\text{10}\) respectively. Both characters are the female companions to the daughters of powerful households: Juliet of the house of Capulet, and Annabella whose father is a wealthy merchant. The Nurse was Juliet’s wet-nurse, now retained long past the date of initial employment as her companion. Putana is Annabella’s tutoress and similarly accompanies her young “charge.” In both cases, Juliet and Annabella are unattached young girls on the cusp of womanhood; the plots of both plays revolve around them falling in love and getting married, despite the factors (a feud and incest) working against them. As Juliet and Annabella gain the wifely body politic explored in Chapter 5, the roles of the Nurse and Putana are put in jeopardy. The servants’ actions in response to this change ultimately contribute to the demise of their mistress’ wifely body politic, which in turn causes the demise of the servile body politic.

\(^{10}\) While the Arden edition corrects the spelling of her name to the contemporary Italian word for whore, “Puttana,” I have chosen to maintain the original spelling from the early quarto publications.
Romeo and Juliet was written around 1596. It is one of the most popular plays from the Elizabethan period and is frequently produced today. Based mostly on a popular poem from 1562 titled “The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet” by Arthur Brooke, the story of two lovers kept apart by warring families was found in many short stories and sources from the 16th century. Carla Freccero’s queer analysis of the play argues that “Modernity’s reading of this play also stages the political in order, precisely, to oppose love to it and thereby mystify love as beyond and elsewhere than politics” (302-303). Romeo and Juliet’s juxtaposition of love and politics creates an opportunity to apply the king’s two bodies theory within a new context. Though the play was written and takes place in a patriarchal society, it is now usually regarded as being Juliet’s story. The audience learns more about her past, her life, and her family than they do about Romeo’s. As René Weis points out,

The fact is that, the play’s double title notwithstanding, its focus rests squarely on Juliet. Its final couplet, with a strategically placed possessive pronoun, says as much [“For never was there a story of more woe/Than this of Juliet and her Romeo” (V.v.309-310)]. . . The play may have started as ‘Romeo and Juliet’ but it ends as ‘Juliet and Romeo,” a hierarchy more truly reflective of the essence of the drama. (Weis 7)

Juliet’s relationship with the Nurse is very important to the development of the drama. Juliet shares more stage time with the Nurse than with Romeo; in nearly every scene between Juliet and Romeo, the Nurse is in the background, and there are more scenes without him entirely. The Nurse’s choices and actions concerning Juliet aid in moving the plot forward, facilitating Romeo and Juliet’s marriage and concealing it from her family. Juliet’s relationship with the Nurse is crucial to her decisions and therefore to the action of the play.

Ford’s ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore was written sometime in the early 1620s, though not published until 1633 (Massai 66). It is widely agreed that Ford based his play on Romeo and
Juliet, but used the taboo against incest, rather than a family feud, to separate the lovers.

Raymond Powell writes a direct comparison of the two plays, but believes that “What sets [Ford] apart from his contemporary dramatists is an interest in genres and their potential for transformation . . . In ‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore Ford . . . appears to be rethinking the Shakespearean tragedy of love ” (589). R.L. Smallwood proposes that Ford is “exploring some of the same situations and patterns as Shakespeare, but doing so more darkly, more gloomily, presenting an adaptation of Shakespeare’s play that pushes it to an extreme” (55). The incest is more shocking than the Montague/Capulet feud, and the final scene creates a grisly tableau nothing like the image of Romeo and Juliet commemorated in statues. Even the patriarchy is more oppressive in ‘Tis Pity, where Annabella is surrounded by men (her father, her brother, her multiple potential suitors) who all attempt to possess her body.

Molly Smith writes that “‘Tis Pity simultaneously desacralizes the institution of patriarchy which had for so long maintained associations with the divine even as it sacralizes the act of sibling incest, which by its very nature constitutes a defiance of patriarchy” (103). Smith’s assertion that the incest is “sacralized” may be over-stating Ford’s portrayal, but Annabella and Giovanni certainly operate within their own morality, one which defies the strictures of society. Although defiant, Annabella is given less agency than Juliet, as R.L. Smallwood articulates in his exploration of Romeo and Juliet as the source material for ‘Tis Pity: “Ford shows no interest in the psychological characteristics of the incestuous relationship between Giovanni and Annabella. It exists solely to provide a situation of total hopelessness” (50). Ford creates a macabre Parmesan world in which a mere feud would hardly keep lovers apart; he must separate them with something more macabre in order to recreate the same tragically fated situation.
As with Juliet and the Nurse, Annabella is rarely seen without Putana. The tutoress offers opinions on Annabella’s many suitors, advises her on her relationship with her brother, and is the first to recognize Annabella’s pregnancy. Indeed, Annabella is seen more with Putana than with her own father. Putana even accompanies Annabella once she has married Soranzo, her suitor, and moves into his house. The close relationship between tutoress and charge creates the opportunity for discovery in the end; Putana reveals to Vasquez Annabella’s relationship with Giovanni, sealing all of their fates with her confession. As in Othello, the relationship between master and servant becomes crucial to the play’s outcome.

The theory of the king’s two bodies was designed specifically with the monarch in mind; two servant characters in dramas written 30 years apart are a far cry from Queen Elizabeth’s court. Even so, the theory can be applied in these cases and proves illuminating. The Nurse and Putana certainly have bodies natural; in fact, they are nearly the embodiment of the pure body natural. Both women are bawdy and speak frankly about the body in a way higher-class characters cannot. Their bodies natural are connected to the bodies natural of the young girls. For Juliet and the Nurse, this connection is very literal as the Nurse was Juliet’s wet-nurse and literally fed Juliet from her own body. Putana’s connection to Annabella is not quite so literal though their bodies natural are connected through a similar frankness about women’s bodies. Therefore, the Nurse’s and Putana’s bodies natural can be seen in their affection for their charges and in their sexual desires.

The bodies politic of these serving women stem from their positions in the household, their responsibilities over Juliet and Annabella. The Nurse is responsible for Juliet’s upbringing, taking charge over her actions and person so as to protect her for the
future. Putana is similarly responsible for Annabella’s education, and accompanies her in public, only leaving her alone with Giovanni because he is her brother and, therefore, is supposedly trustworthy. This relationship mimics the responsibility a queen bears over her people, ensuring their safety and survival. Just as the queen becomes more – both woman and man, husband and wife – through the presence of the body politic, the Nurse and Putana become surrogate mothers to these girls, thereby expanding their identities; they are more than just lower class serving women. Their identities in the plays are reliant on the functional union with their mistresses. But, are they capable of more through the union and presence of the body politic, as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth were? Or are they two halves of a whole, as seen with Desdemona and Othello? Do their actions and decisions affect the other characters? These are the questions that arise when attempting to define the body politic held by those in the servant role, what will be termed the “servile body politic.”

This chapter is the only one to focus on the relationship between two female characters. The Nurse and Putana are not married to their counterparts, their masters or mistresses, nor are they romantically involved with anyone at all. But as the household represents a microcosm of the universe, it can be argued that the contract between master and servant is like that of God and king, or king and nobles. In 1623, William Gouge wrote, “[The husband] is the highest in the family, and hath both authority over all and the charge of all is committed to his charge; he is as a king in his own house” (qtd. in Wrightson 90). Everyone in the Great Chain of Being was subject to another’s authority, except God, and so everyone bore a duty that may or may not have conflicted with his or her desire. Capulet and Florio are kings of miniature kingdoms, with bodies politic analogous to Elizabeth’s. Their bodies natural are connected to the Nurse and Putana through the contract of
servitude. It is not as binding or restrictive a stricture as that of marriage, but in its simplest form the marriage contract can be seen as a contract uniting two people for the mutual benefit of each. So too is the implied contract of servitude. The difference lies in the power structure; whereas the marriages shown thus far have required balance in order to function, there is an inherent imbalance of power in the master-servant relationship. Susan Dwyer Amussen explains how

Servants were frequently propositioned, harassed, and ultimately raped by their masters or their masters’ sons. With the sons there might be a vague promise of marriage, but such promises were not generally possible for masters. While occasionally these relationships might reflect romance, they were more often coercive: the woman involved had little power and few resources against their masters. (96)

Historically, servants were in a very vulnerable position. Additionally, the relationship portrayed is not one of love or sexual desire but one of need, out of which may grow affection. The servant needs the master more than the master needs the servant. The servant owes fealty to the master, and must fulfill her obligations (which comprises the substance of the servile body politic) in order for the household to function. The master’s presence and approval makes the servant greater than she is alone, altering her identity and place in society. The servant’s role is thus made greater through association with the master, and the things done in the name of the master can be categorized as conforming to a body politic.

This relationship is complicated by the servant’s relationship with the daughter of the house. While the same fealty is owed to the daughter (as a relation to the master), there also grows a bond of love not dissimilar from a mother’s love for a daughter. That bond of love is analogous to the desire felt between a husband and wife; it is a strong emotional reaction originating in the body natural. Catherine Belsey, a feminist Shakespearean scholar, explicates the challenge desire presents: “But in practice desire deconstructs the opposition
between mind and body. Desire undoes the dualism common sense seems so often to take for granted” (“The Name of the Rose” 64). Desire has become a crucial force in the body natural/body politic dualism. For the Nurse and Putana, the emotional tie has developed as a result of investing themselves in and dedicating themselves to Juliet and Annabella just as a mother does a child. The two bodies function best when working together, but when desires conflict, when the servile body politic comes into conflict with the motherly body natural, or with contradictory bodies politic from multiple masters, the body politic can be severed from the body natural.

The body politic, at this more fundamental level, gets more tangled and confused with the body natural, making it much more difficult to identify which actions are “right” or “wrong,” or even which body the actions belong to. With multiple masters, the body politic is pulled in too many directions – it cannot be a perfect, unerring body when its actions are right for one person and wrong for another, both of whom are responsible for its state. The bodies politic of the Nurse and Putana are owed to a family yet one member of the family also has their love and affection. Does that relationship then enhance or corrupt their servile body politic? A monarch who rules the kingdom without love often becomes a tyrant, or a puppet. Elizabeth was recognized as loving her people and owing a duty to them as much as to her heritage. The bodies politic arising out of marriage seen thus far benefit from the union of love and duty. Perhaps, then, it will be seen that the Nurse's and Putana’s actions are most perfect when they operate out of both love and duty; when one or the other reigns, or when they are put into conflict, then the body politic ceases to function. But as the patriarch is the indisputable head of the household and therefore not to be contradicted, will the plays be seen to caution against disobeying one’s master?
Ultimately, the Nurse's and Putana's demises arise through the demise of Juliet's and Annabella's wifely bodies politic respectively. The Nurse betrays her relationship with Juliet when she urges Juliet to marry Paris; Putana betrays Annabella by telling Vasquez about the incestuous relationship with Giovanni. As punishment, the Nurse loses Juliet permanently. Putana’s punishment is much more horrific: she has her eyes put out, then is kept in captivity until the Cardinal decrees she will be burnt to death outside the city. The demise of their young charges leads to their own demise, the destruction of the relationship between servant and young lady. In Putana’s case, she has obviously also lost her employment. Whether the Nurse will maintain her relationship with the Capulets is unknown, though it is hard to imagine they would retain her when they have lost their daughter, and especially after Friar Laurence reveals her part in the secret marriage. Both women betray the household body politic, and therefore lose the relationship that had given them a duty and a purpose to begin with.

THE BODY NATURAL

The Nurse and Putana are the most fundamental depictions of the body natural yet explored, embodying the imperfections, old age, and corporeal desires characterized in Plowden. They are bawdy, silly characters, not necessarily in positions of power but certainly in central positions, connected to multiple other characters and embedded in the action of the plot. Their bodies natural are the foundation of their identities.

The Nurse first appears in I.iii. of Romeo and Juliet, with Lady Capulet, looking for Juliet:

L. Capulet: Nurse, where’s my daughter? Call her forth to me.
Nurse: Now by my maidenhead at twelve year old.
I bade her come. (I.iii.1-3)

Immediately it is established that the Nurse is subservient to Lady Capulet, and by association Lord Capulet. Brenda Bruce, examining the Nurse, claims that “She holds a very important position with an important family in Verona” (187). Jamie F. Wheeler goes further, arguing that the Capulets’ faith in the Nurse is evidence of a “major failing,” and possibly an example of child neglect that they have left their daughter in the care of a wet-nurse for so long. But the Nurse clearly knows more about Juliet’s whereabouts than Juliet’s mother. It would seem that Juliet has not grown up in a household where her mother coddled her, looked after her, and cultivated a strong mother-daughter relationship. This suspicion is confirmed a few lines later when Lady Capulet bids, “Nurse, give leave awhile,/We must talk in secret. Nurse, come back again./I have remembered me, thou’s hear our counsel” (I.iii.8-10). Within the same line, Lady Capulet sends the Nurse away and calls her back again, as though she has immediately panicked at the prospect of being alone with her daughter, or the Nurse’s physical reaction to being sent away is so strong that Lady Capulet immediately changes her mind. In either case, the swift turn-around suggests a strong relationship between the Nurse and Juliet, stronger than that between Lady Capulet and Juliet. Sasha Roberts identifies the source of this relationship, saying “The intimacy between the Nurse and Juliet is indicated in their affectionate addresses to each other . . . Juliet displaces her filial affection from her natural mother to her Nurse. Indeed, the Nurse gains Juliet’s confidence to become a rival mother to Lady Capulet – wielding more influence, and so power, over Juliet than Lady Capulet” (28). The Nurse’s relationship with and ability to influence Juliet is not surprising when early modern parent-child relations are considered, as Keith Wrightson points out: “As children grew, great distance was
maintained between parent and child and there was a lack of strong emotional bonding. Emphasis was firmly placed on the rights of the parent over the child (which was regarded as a species of property) rather than upon the duty of the parent to the child” (106). This aspect of the parental-child relationship is especially seen with Capulet, who eventually commands Juliet to marry Paris, “An you be mine, I’ll give you to my friend;/An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets,/For, by my soul, I’ll ne’er acknowledge thee” (III.v.192-194). Juliet’s relationship to her parents is presented as a social bond, not a bond of affection or filial affinity.

The Nurse’s status as a surrogate mother for Juliet is confirmed when she launches into one of her defining speeches, recounting how old Juliet is by remembering when she was weaned. This speech invokes numerous examples of the Nurse’s body natural. Stanley Wells identifies “The Nurse’s ramblings . . . [as giving] us a sense of the past; and they do so in a particularly poignant context. The stage situation shows us a girl poised on the brink of womanhood” (208). The Nurse recalls her own daughter, Susan, who would have been the same age as Juliet had she not died young. She then remembers the earthquake (an event which would likely leave an impression on the body natural), and gives a vivid description of weaning Juliet,

For I had then laid wormwood to my dug,
    Sitting in the sun under the dovehouse wall
                                    
When it did taste the wormwood on the nipple
Of my dug and felt it bitter, pretty fool,
    To see it tetchy and fall out with the dug! (I.iii.27-33)

The frankness with which the Nurse discusses a vulgar topic in front of the lady of the house and her mistress demonstrates a full inhabiting of her body natural. Coppélia Kahn, in analyzing the Nurse through her relationship to childhood and growing up, states that “[The
Nurse] embodies the female self molded devotedly to the female’s family role. The only history she knows is that of birth, suckling, weaning, and marriage” (“Coming of Age” 348). There is little that raises the Nurse above her station. It is also worth mentioning, however, that the Nurse’s job as wet-nurse created a direct link between her and Juliet, as Jamie F. Wheeler relates, “[Elizabethans] believed that personality traits were passed on through the person who nurses the child” (163). The Nurse’s employment demonstrates the enormous trust that the Capulets placed in her to raise Juliet well, molding her into an ideal daughter.

Throughout the rest of the scene, the Nurse and Lady Capulet drive towards the same goal but through different means. Lady Capulet intends to set Juliet up with Paris, encouraging her to think about marrying him through a poetic, romanticized discourse. The Nurse, once she knows of Paris’ courtship, is similarly encouraging, but with a lot more sexual innuendo.

Lady Capulet offers the intellectual and social reasons for marrying: increasing one’s status, gaining wealth, being happy, all elements of the wifely body politic. She portrays Paris heroically, as the paragon of a potential husband. The Nurse echoes Lady Capulet from the bawdy perspective, particularly responding to Lady Capulet’s “By having him, making yourself no less,” with “No less? Nay, bigger – women grow by men” (I.iii.95-96). The Nurse depicts Juliet’s future marriage again through the terms of the body natural. Brenda Bruce sees her as having been “responsible for Juliet’s upbringing. She is in fact the Mother, the person in whom Juliet lays her trust and confides her secret love. She sees Paris as the
perfect answer to all her hopes for her ‘baby’, Juliet – love, marriage, children – simply the woman’s lot, which can be pleasurable” (187). In the end, Juliet answers Lady Capulet with a noncommittal riddle while the Nurse, once Lady Capulet has exited, urges Juliet, “Go, girl, seek happy nights to happy days” (I.iii.106). For the rest of the play, Juliet remains wary or outright negative towards Paris, while seeking happiness with Romeo with the Nurse’s approval.

At this point, the Nurse’s hopes and desires for Juliet are the same as Lady Capulet’s; Juliet herself has no inkling that she may want something other than an appropriate and approved marriage in the near future. The Nurse has also shown herself to be loquacious, imperfect in her inability to stop talking about inappropriate subjects. Even her quality of bawdiness can be seen as a pun on her bodiness, her full inhabiting of her body. Sasha Roberts, in attempting to rectify misreadings of the play, argues that

The Nurse’s bawdy functions on several levels: it calls attention to distinctions between men and women’s use of bawdy . . . it raises differences in the use of sexual innuendo by low-status and high-status women . . . it counters the romantic idealization of Juliet – instead the Nurse emphasizes her sexuality and the physicality of her desire – and consequently it challenges, even undermines, the idealization of romantic love in the play. (90)

Essentially the Nurse allows Juliet to inhabit her body natural by promoting the body natural as a positive force. She has no need yet to invoke the servile body politic because her body natural at this point desires the same thing as her employers: a happy future for Juliet.

The Nurse accompanies Juliet to the Capulets’ party and is the only character to talk to her there, aside from Romeo. While Shakespeare does not write what happens in the background of the party, many directors use this scene to demonstrate the familial relationships on stage. While Juliet perhaps dances with Paris, the Nurse may converse with Tybalt, whom she loves, or Peter, her manservant. Following the love sonnet and Romeo
and Juliet’s first kiss, the Nurse is the first entrant, breaking their bubble of happiness, “Madam, your mother craves a word with you” (I.v.110). Whether the Nurse has seen Juliet kissing a strange boy is unclear; regardless, she is serving her body politic derived from the house of Capulet, particularly exemplified in the use of “Madam.” Romeo asks after Juliet’s mother, to which the Nurse replies, “Her mother is the lady of the house,/And a good lady, and a wise and virtuous./I nursed her daughter that you talked withal” (I.v.112-114), invoking the body natural’s function of nursing. When Romeo leaves and Juliet returns, the Nurse again acts as intercessor between them, finding out his name for her, “His name is Romeo, and a Montague,/The only son of your great enemy” (I.v.135-136). Romeo and Juliet know of each other through the infamous feud but it is the Nurse who allows them to specifically and intimately know each other. Bruce explains the Nurse’s relationship to the lovers: “Her infant dead, her husband dead, she dedicates her life to Juliet. If Juliet really loves Romeo, then Nurse will do everything in her power to see them married. There is nothing to indicate that she has any qualms with regard to the Capulet/Montague feud” (192). The Nurse has begun to function as go-between for Romeo and Juliet, attempting to bring them together but more often than not demonstrating how far apart they are. If the Nurse’s body politic is derived from her employment with the Capulets, then her body natural is seen in her motherly affection for Juliet and her function as intermediary between Romeo and Juliet, symbolically standing for those caught in the midst of the feud, the commoners of Verona.

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Putana is first seen discussing marriage prospects with her young charge, Annabella, very similarly to the Nurse and Juliet. They enter after Vasquez has defeated Grimaldi in a
quarrel over Grimaldi’s and Soranzo’s suits to Annabella. Putana speaks first, “How like
you this, child? Here's threatening, challenging, quarrelling and fighting on every side, and
all is for your sake” (I.ii.67-69). Putana seems to enjoy the battle for Annabella’s love and,
as does the Nurse, situates her dialogue in the body natural, urging Annabella to “look to
yourself, charge; you’ll be stolen away sleeping else shortly” (I.ii.69-71). Putana embraces
the same bawdiness/bodiness demonstrated by the Nurse in this line and in the ensuing
descriptions of each of Annabella’s suitors.

Annabella does not seem nearly as interested in the suitors as Putana,

Annabella: Would you would leave me.
Putana: Leave you? No marvel else. Leave me no leaving, charge, this
is love outright! Indeed I blame you not; you have choice fit for
the best lady in Italy. (I.ii.74-77)

This moment shows the delicate position of the servile body politic, not yet apparent in
Romeo and Juliet but already clear in ‘Tis Pity. Annabella, as Florio’s daughter, is technically
Putana’s mistress. When she asks Putana to leave, Putana should obey the order, in theory.
In actuality, Putana responds from a place of familiarity with Annabella, disobeying the
order because she knows what’s best for Annabella and loves her. Her obedience to the
family is compromised by her position as Annabella’s tutoress, literally in charge of the
young girl’s body natural. In this situation, her body natural’s affection is put in conflict
with her body politic’s duty. Putana continues to straddle this line for the rest of the play.

Throughout this scene, Putana offers her opinion of Annabella’s suitors very freely,
and in sexually explicit terms, such as “There’s Grimaldi, the soldier, a very well-timbered11
fellow” (I.ii.79-80). She is so overly praising of Soranzo that one begins to suspect he's been
bribing her to talk him up to Annabella, as indeed she is later shown taking a bribe from

11 strongly made or growing strong
Donado to praise Bergetto. Denis Gauer condemns Putana, saying that “As Annabella’s duenna . . . she has taken the place of Annabella’s dead mother . . . she will act as her ward’s bad angel, as it were” (48). This comment is particularly intriguing; in theory, a real mother would have a motherly body politic evolving from the relationship between herself and her child. Putana is not Annabella’s mother; her advice comes from the place of the body natural, driven by the physical desires of money and sex. As long as Annabella does not show a particular preference, and all the suitors are faulty at best, Putana’s philosophy seems to be to make what money she can out of the situation until it is clear which option will make Annabella happy.

That option presents itself in the form of Giovanni, Annabella’s brother. With his entrance, the dialogue between tutoress and student changes. Where previously Putana had monologued about each of the men, heedless of Annabella’s sparse reactions, now Annabella takes an active hand in the conversation:

Annabella: But see, Putana, see – what blessed shape Of some celestial creature now appears? What man is he that with such sad aspect Walks careless of himself? Putana: Where? Annabella: Look below. Putana: Oh, ‘tis your brother, sweet – Annabella: Ha! Putana: ‘Tis your brother. (I.ii.140-144)

The stichomythia resembles the lines shared between Othello and Desdemona, though this time it is hard to believe that Annabella and Putana are sharing the same mindset. Annabella does not recognize her brother’s outward form, but her heart recognizes his internal beauty and sadness; Putana recognizes the outward form, but not the longing and love between the siblings. Putana’s repetition of the phrase “‘tis your brother” may indicate
that Putana has picked up on Annabella’s mindset and needs to reinforce his identity as her brother. Though they do not share the same mindset, they do operate as two halves of a whole, between the two of them recognizing Giovanni fully.

Whereas the Nurse was the first to interrupt Romeo and Juliet, Putana is the first to leave Giovanni and Annabella alone.

Giovanni: Let me entreat you, leave us a while, Putana. Sister, I would be private with you.

Annabella: Withdraw, Putana.

Putana: I will. [aside] If this were any other company for her, I should think my absence an office of some credit. But I will leave them together. Exit. (I.ii.179-184)

The fact that Giovanni is Annabella’s brother means that Putana has no reason to suspect anything untoward will happen between the two; it was considered perfectly respectable to leave a young woman alone with her brother. Bruce Thomas Boehrer, in attempting to situate the jury in Ford’s drama, suggests that

Giovanni and Annabella exist in a moral vacuum, surrounded by fools and knaves, for all practical ends abandoned by God and the church, and not even subject to any sort of regular surveillance (it is generally assumed that since they are brother and sister they wouldn’t think of doing anything together that might be worth watching). (123)

From an outside perspective, Putana is the only line of defense against the incest. But Putana indicates that if Giovanni were not Annabella’s brother, she would have left them alone only if he had bribed her, demonstrating that perhaps she is not the most faithful line of defense. Putana’s fondness for Annabella, depicted in the desire to see Annabella happy, is the product of an unruly and overly affectionate body natural, which forces her body politic to fail in its duty to protect Annabella in all situations. Her absence allows the courtship of Giovanni and Annabella to proceed, culminating in a de praesenti marriage and
exchange of vows. In Putana’s case, the body natural’s desire and affection is so strong that it undermines the body politic from the beginning, clearing the path for the play’s course.

**THE BODY POLITIC**

The affection that the Nurse and Putana feel for their young mistresses is derived from the body natural, the imperfect desiring body. Where in the past the desiring body has been shown in a romantic relationship, bound in marriage, in these cases desire manifests as the love developed through a surrogate mother-daughter relationship. However, the servile body politic is pulled in several directions in each female character, since the bond is derived not merely from one person or one union, but from a variety of relationships and power structures. Ultimately the servile body politic is diluted, and becomes not strong enough, nor focused enough, to overcome the body natural’s emotional attachment.

After Capulet’s ball, the Nurse’s role is reduced mostly to Juliet’s companion; she will not interact with the rest of the Capulet household until after Juliet’s marriage. She continues to function as the mediator between Juliet and the rest of the world, as seen in the balcony scene where the Nurse’s offstage presence is explained as Juliet’s bedfellow (a role confirmed on Juliet’s apparent wedding night when she sends the Nurse away). The Nurse’s interruptions are particularly well-timed, calling to Juliet just after she has affirmed her love to Romeo, then again after she has promised to marry him, and one last time after the mention of the prospect that the lovers may not end up wedded:

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Juliet: My bounty is as boundless as the sea,
       My love as deep; the more I give to thee
       The more I have, for both are infinite.
       I hear some noise within. Dear love, adieu.

Juliet: Three words, dear Romeo, and good night indeed.
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If that thy bent of love be honourable,  
Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow  
By one that I’ll procure to come to thee,  
Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite,  
And all my fortunes at thy foot I’ll lay,  
And follow thee my lord throughout the world.

Nurse: Madam!  
Juliet: I come, anon! – But if thou meanest not well,  
I do beseech thee –

Nurse: Madam!  
Juliet: By and by, I come! –

To cease thy strife and leave me to my grief.

(II.ii.133-152)

The Nurse’s interruptions seem timed to highlight the lovers’ fate: in love, wedded, and struck by tragedy. Her cries of “Madam” heighten the stakes in the scene, but they also pull the lovers apart, calling Juliet into the Capulets’ house while sending Romeo into the streets of Verona. They are the cries of the Nurse’s body politic, doing her duty to her masters, separating the lovers just as Verona itself is divided between Capulet and Montague.

The juxtaposition of the Nurse’s two bodies allows her to function as the intermediary between Juliet and Romeo, dividing them even as she provides the means to bring them together. What is more, the Nurse’s position places her between Juliet and the rest of Verona. Juliet does not leave the Capulet household except to marry Romeo, to confess to Friar Laurence, and then to be carried to her vault (a situation which quite literally depicts a woman’s movement from her father’s house to her husband’s, and finally into death, with the only acceptable alternative being the Church. Thomas Moisan, tracking the influence of the patriarchy through the play, believes that “in pursuing the fulfillment of their love Romeo and Juliet seek a sexual oneness that would obliterate the particularities of their birth, the particularities of family and gender that are the components of identity in Verona” (129).). Immediately following the balcony scene, Juliet sends the Nurse to meet
with Romeo to find out his plans for marriage; at the end of their exchange, he offers to pay her for her service as go-between. Romeo then bids her prepare a rope ladder to aid him in ascending to Juliet’s window. Quite literally, the Nurse is the means by which Romeo and Juliet are brought together. In fact, Sasha Roberts suggests, “by making arrangements for Juliet’s marriage the Nurse effectively usurps the parents’ privilege of supervising their child’s marriage, weakening Capulet’s patriarchal authority” (71).

The Nurse’s actions are ostensibly the actions of her servile body politic as Juliet’s companion, in charge of Juliet’s welfare. She is employed by the Capulets and serves them as they need, carrying messages, facilitating transactions, and even performing introductions at a party. However, the reason behind the Nurse’s actions, especially once she knows Romeo’s identity, has been shown to stem from her body natural. Had she operated on behalf of her servile body politic, she would have kept Romeo and Juliet apart as the feud dictates, and ensured Juliet’s marriage according to her parents’ approval. But the Nurse has developed an affection for Juliet beyond the bonds of employment; that affection desires to see Juliet happy, and Romeo makes Juliet happy. Therefore the Nurse masks the choices made by her body natural in the actions of her body politic, allowing the former to overrule the latter.

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Just as the Nurse interrupts Juliet and Romeo, Putana is the first to see Annabella after she and Giovanni enter “as from their chamber” (II.i.sd). Putana is clearly Annabella’s confidante as she already knows what has transpired between brother and sister; either Annabella confided everything in the time between I.ii. and II.i., or Putana inferred it.

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12 Ford corrupts this exchange by having Putana take money from Annabella’s multiple suitors; the Nurse only does so from Romeo.
Putana is as bawdy about Annabella’s virginity lost to incest as she can be: “Nay, what a paradise of joy have you passed under! Why, now I commend thee, charge! Fear nothing, sweetheart. What though he be your brother? Your brother’s a man, I hope. And I say still, if a young wench feel the fit upon her, let her take anybody, father or brother; all is one” (II.i.41-46). Putana’s reaction arises fully from her body natural, which takes delight in sex, no matter the sexual partner. Denis Gauer, identifying the female characters within the play as sexual objects, reflects on this moment:

Such an attitude no longer means questioning, or defying, the rules of wedlock but, by vindicating Desire in its crudest instance and sexuality in its most animalistic form (for the fit is no thing but instinct and compulsion), Putana negates Culture itself in its reality as well as its basic principle . . . it is the discourse of almighty Nature, without any reins or landmarks: the statement all is one, in Putana’s mouth, refers to the ‘unity’ of chaos, of an indifferent, unstructured world. (48-49)

There is no invocation of the body politic, no sense of right or duty imposed by a perfecting body or completing relationship; her reaction comes from chaos, from the body, from desire. The body natural’s reaction to the inappropriate relationship is stronger than that of the body politic.

Putana demonstrates a modicum of decorum when Annabella suddenly worries about others finding out:

Annabella: I would not have it known for all the world.
Putana: Nor I, indeed, for the speech of the people; else ‘twere nothing.
(II.i.47-49)

But even here, Putana does not see what is wrong with an incestuous relationship; she only worries about what others will say about it. Putana seems to have a low opinion of the general public; she makes fun of Annabella’s suitors, takes bribes from them under false
pretenses, and now derides them as gossip-mongers who cannot understand a true and pure sexual love between brother and sister.

However, like the Nurse, Putana creates a metaphorical bridge between her mistress and the outside world. In II.i., after Putana has bawdily teased Annabella regarding her night with Giovanni, Florio follows quickly upon Putana’s heels. Putana aids Annabella in creating the impression that she has been doing needlework all this time; in this way she protects Annabella’s private life. Through her following two scenes, as Soranzo and Bergetto continue their amorous pursuits, Putana is never far away. She does not say much nor does she take an active hand in the courtship, but being present with these suitors prevents them from getting too close to Annabella. In this, Putana serves her body politic well. From an outside perspective, she is attending to the will of the household, ensuring propriety and protecting her young charge. In truth, however, she has already betrayed her body politic by allowing Annabella and Giovanni to be alone together.

Putana’s servile body politic derives from her position in Florio’s household. It is her duty to raise and educate Annabella. Her employment is based on Florio’s desires and so she must work to fulfill his interests. Her close relationship with Annabella also means that Putana must use her position with discretion; she knows that Annabella is likely to value her opinion as a trusted advisor, loyal to the family. However, Putana has developed the same over-fondness for her charge that the Nurse has; she would rather see Annabella happy than fulfill her duties as tutoress. Thus Putana uses her position, her body politic, to mask the actions of her body natural, encouraging and concealing the illicit relationship between brother and sister.
It is clear that neither the Nurse nor Putana have achieved the correct balance of the bodies natural and politic. Both are so fully vested in their bodies natural that the body politic cannot be the “perfecting body” as Plowden documented it. Both servants are connected to their young mistresses through the bodies politic owed to the households and the bodies natural’s affections arising from years spent together. The demise of the servile bodies politic held by the Nurse and Putana is directly related to the marriages of Juliet and Annabella, respectively, as Emily C. Bartels points out.

The fact that brother and sister have carried on their affair over an extended period helps us see, retrospectively, what the pressure and breaking point really is here, in 'Tis Pity, in Romeo and Juliet, and, we might postulate, in early modern society: not unruly desires that erupt before marriage but desires that are not adequately ruled within it. For it is the wife, not the daughter, who comes under the most intense scrutiny across these plays, her wifely body able to sign a breach of chastity, of due obedience to her husband, and of her husband’s domination over her. And it is as wife, not daughter, that Annabella and Juliet face their tragic ends. (“Intertextuality” 257, original emphasis)

Juliet develops a wifely body politic through her marriage to Romeo, kept secret with the Friar’s and the Nurse’s help, and eventually compromised because of the secrecy. Annabella’s wifely body politic should technically belong to Soranzo, but she has already undergone a de praesenti marriage (including exchanging of rings, just like the Duchess’ and Antonio’s marriage) with Giovanni. Her wifely body politic is corrupted before it is ever allowed to exist. In both plays the revelation of the secret wifely body politic leads to the demise of the servile body politic. In turn, the servile body politic’s betrayal of its mistress leads to the dissolution of the marriage union and the destruction of bodies politic – servile and wifely – in death.
The first indication that the Nurse is no longer of the same mind as Juliet comes in III.ii. with the announcement of Tybalt’s death. The Nurse enters with a rope ladder, wringing her hands. Once again she is both the means of bringing Romeo and Juliet together and of tearing them apart. She gives Juliet news of Romeo’s banishment and Tybalt’s death even as she prepares the way for the lovers to spend their wedding night together. The Nurse is distraught at the news of Tybalt’s death and, as a result, muddles its announcement:

Juliet: Now, Nurse, what news? What hast thou there, the cords
That Romeo bid thee fetch?
Nurse: Ay, ay, the cords.
Juliet: Ay me, what news? Why dost thou wring thy hands?
Nurse: Ah weraday, he’s dead, he’s dead, he’s dead!

(III.ii.34-37)

Now the Nurse’s loyalty to the rest of the family begins to countermand her affection for Juliet. She mourns for Tybalt and curses Romeo, weeping with her body natural and denouncing with her body politic. The Nurse’s two bodies have finally arrived in proper alignment but it sets her at odds with Juliet. While the two have not been in agreement before, their differences have been characterized by fond teasing, light-hearted and fleeting. Now their differences take on a different tone:

Nurse: Will you speak well of him that killed your cousin?
Juliet: Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband? (III.ii.96-97)

Juliet now has a wifely body politic, which connects her first and foremost to Romeo. René Weis highlights how the tragedy stems from this new connection: “The extent of [Juliet’s] containment by family and father is evident from the clash . . . the timing of which is crucial because by then she is Romeo’s wife, owing her primary loyalty to her husband and no longer to her father” (4). The Nurse tries to redirect Juliet to her family, saying that they are
“Weeping and wailing over Tybalt's corse./Will you go to them? I will bring you thither” (III.ii.128-129), but her efforts prove in vain. Juliet thinks only of Romeo; she cannot deny her wifely body politic:

**Juliet:** Come, cords, come, Nurse, I'll to my wedding bed
And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead.

**Nurse:** Hie to your chamber. I'll find Romeo
To comfort you. I wot well where he is.
Hark ye, your Romeo will be here at night.
I'll to him; he is hid at Laurence' cell. (III.ii.136-141)

The Nurse’s response suggests that their relationship is not yet totally destroyed; she still holds enough affection in her body natural that she promises once more to bring the lovers together. Had she not, it seems that the cords she provided for their union would have been used in Juliet’s suicide instead; perhaps her body politic is also somewhat active, protecting the younger woman one more time even though it cannot return her fully to the Capulets.

The Nurse finds Romeo at Friar Laurence’s cell and chastises him in order to better him, to make him worthy of Juliet once again:

**Nurse:** O, he is even in my mistress' case,
Just in her case. O woeful sympathy,
Piteous predicament! Even so lies she,
Blubbering and weeping, weeping and blubbering.
Stand up, stand up, stand an you be a man.
For Juliet's sake, for her sake, rise and stand!

(III.iii.84-89)

If Juliet has made her choice, then the Nurse will do her best for her mistress’ happiness. She helps Friar Laurence bully Romeo back into his role as husband, responding to him physically as Laurence responds to him logically. The first Quarto stage direction reads, “[Romeo] offers to stab himself, and Nurse snatches the dagger away” (qtd. in Roberts 8); Roberts suggests that this stage direction “hints that despite the Friar’s maxims of wisdom,
he is not adept in practical emergencies; the Nurse is quicker-thinking” (ibid). She forestalls Romeo's panicked reaction, then offers one final tangible connection between he and Juliet:

*Nurse offers to go in and turns again.*

Nurse: Here, sir, a ring she bid me give you, sir.  
Hie you, make haste, for it grows very late.  
Romeo: How well my comfort is revived by this. (III.iii.162-164)

The ring symbolizes Romeo and Juliet’s union in marriage, facilitated once more by the Nurse’s body natural. The decisions of the Nurse’s body natural, though they do not have the repercussions of a queenly body politic, have certainly affected the plot’s outcome. Moreover, they have been enacted through her role as servant, facilitated by the presence of her body politic.

Act III scene v illustrates the final break between Juliet and the Nurse, and the end of the two bodies’ imbalance within the Nurse. Capulet and Lady Capulet have decided that Juliet will marry Paris within a few days’ time as a way to forestall her grief, which they suppose to be inspired by Tybalt's death. They believe she is suffering from greensickness, a common Elizabethan malady affecting virgins which it was believed resulted from a need for sex; the cure was finding a husband. Ursula Potter, in her contextualization of the play with greensickness, argues that “For Juliet to die of greensickness, or to lose her virginity outside marriage, or for her never to marry, would be a disaster for the House of Capulet” (273). When Juliet refuses the proposed marriage to Paris, Capulet quickly grows angry. The Nurse attempts to stand up for Juliet, with disastrous consequences:

Capulet: And that we have a curse in having her.  
Out on her, hilding!  
Nurse: God in heaven bless her!  
You are to blame, my lord, to rate her so.  
Capulet: And why, my Lady Wisdom? Hold your tongue,  
Good Prudence, smatter with your gossips, go.  
Nurse: I speak no treason.
Capulet: O, Godgigoden!
Nurse: May not one speak?
Capulet: Peace, you mumbling fool!
Utter your gravity o’er a gossip’s bowl,
For here we need it not. (III.v.167-175)

Though it has always been known that the Nurse was employed by the Capulets, now it becomes clear that she is their servant first and foremost; her relationship with Juliet does not extend to the rest of the family. Capulet exercises his control over her, treating her with contempt and derogation. Though the Nurse has given free reign to her body natural, now the dangers of having done so become vividly apparent. Her master insults and negates her; she does not speak again until the Capulets have left. Lady Capulet washes her hands completely of the situation. Her wifely body politic clearly outweighs any sense of motherly affection: “Talk not to me, for I’ll not speak a word./Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee. Exit.” These actions prompt Juliet to turn to the most motherly figure she has, begging “O God! O Nurse, how shall this be prevented?” (III.v.203-205).

The Nurse’s body politic is now in control; she no longer acquiesces to her body natural’s affection for Juliet. Instead, when Juliet asks for help, the Nurse does what she ostensibly should have done all along: she encourages the marriage with Paris.

Juliet: Some comfort, Nurse.
Nurse: Faith, here it is.
Romeo is banished, and all the world to nothing
That he dares ne’er come back to challenge you;
Or if he do, it needs must be by stealth.
Then, since the case so stands as now it doth,
I think it best you married with the County.
O, he’s a lovely gentleman!
Romeo’s a dishclout to him. An eagle, madam
Hath not so green, so quick, so fair an eye
As Paris hath. Beshrew my very heart,
I think you are happy in this second match,
For it excels your first; or if it did not,
Your first is dead, or ‘twere as good he were
As living here and you no use of him.

Juliet: Speak’st thou from thy heart?
Nurse: And from my soul too, else beshrew them both.
Juliet: Amen.
Nurse: What?
Juliet: Well, thou hast comforted me marvelous much.
Go in, and tell my lady I am gone,
Having displeased my father, to Laurence’ cell,
To make confession and to be absolved.

Nurse: Marry, I will, and this is wisely done. Exit.

Juliet looks after Nurse.

Juliet: Ancient damnation! O most wicked fiend!

(III.v.213-236)

The Nurse’s language here resembles Lady Capulet’s earlier description of Paris; it is more poetic and romantic, less bawdy. The Nurse also invokes both of her bodies, swearing upon her heart (body natural) and soul (body politic) that she thinks this is best. The two bodies are in agreement.

But this exchange also encapsulates the irreparable break between Juliet and the Nurse. Juliet now has a wifely body politic. She cannot simply ignore it and return to her father’s house, for her identity has been permanently altered by being Romeo’s wife. Jamie F. Wheeler points out that “Juliet has essentially no adult to turn to for sound advice in the play. Her father has already proven himself rash, her mother distant, and her nurse loving but incompetent” (165). She no longer has need of the Nurse nor does she trust the Nurse as she once did. The Nurse’s body politic is no longer divided between members of a household with conflicting desires. Instead, the Nurse owes her loyalty first and foremost to Capulet and Lady Capulet. From this vantage point, she can’t tell that Juliet has lied to her or, perhaps, she hopes so fervently that Juliet will be a good daughter that she underestimates the power of the wifely body politic. Regardless, the Nurse’s body natural is now aligned with the will of her body politic.
While Juliet goes to Friar Laurence, desperate for an escape from the impending marriage with Paris, the Nurse is now more strongly allied with the Capulets. She enters with Capulet in IV.ii. and speaks to him, not Juliet. After Juliet has asked for her father’s forgiveness and assented to the marriage with Paris, she turns to the Nurse:

Juliet: Nurse, will you go with me into my closet, To help me sort such needful ornaments As you think fit to furnish me tomorrow? 
L. Capulet: No, not till Thursday; there is time enough. 
Capulet: Go, Nurse, go with her; we’ll to church tomorrow. 

(IV.ii.33-37)

The Nurse becomes a pawn in the charade; her former connection with Juliet allows Juliet to deceive her family for the benefit of her wifely body politic. The two do not interact more than superficially as Juliet prepares for bed. Juliet now relates to the Nurse in a similar manner as she does to her mother, sending both older women out of the room together. Brenda Bruce believes that, at this point, the Nurse knows what is wrong with Juliet but Shakespeare does not give voice to her concerns. However, it is also possible that the Nurse has no clue what Juliet is planning. Though something may seem wrong, it can easily be identified as grief over Tybalt’s death, and grief from Juliet’s knowing that her marriage to Romeo is over. Although their relationship is broken, Juliet appears penitent and seems to have accepted the Nurse’s proposal to marry Paris. No one understands the power of the wifely body politic over Juliet; they are all too happy to believe that Juliet is subdued once more, a good, obedient daughter. Furthermore, the Nurse’s body natural is no longer connected to Juliet’s as it once was; therefore, her body politic has lost its connection to Juliet’s body natural as well.

Juliet calls out for the Nurse briefly, frightened by the prospect of taking the Friar’s concoction and faking her own death. It is a moment of weakness; it is also the first time
that Juliet has had to do something completely alone. Fear originates in the body natural and, of course, the Nurse raised Juliet’s body natural. The Nurse is the logical person for Juliet to want – she had so often acted as the means to unite the lovers that it would be logical to aid Juliet in this most desperate plan. But the wifely body politic wins over the former body natural’s connection to the Nurse, and Juliet enacts her fate alone.

Meanwhile, the Nurse stays up late into the night with Capulet, helping him to prepare the wedding feast. Capulet calls her “good Angelica” (IV.iv.5), showing a familiarity with her (and revealing her name) for the first time. She responds, “Go, you cotquean, go,/Get you to bed. Faith, you’ll be sick tomorrow/For this night’s watching” (IV.iv.6-8). The affectionate banter she once shared with Juliet has now been transferred to Capulet. Her body natural’s affection for Juliet has been superseded by the body politic, and by the absence of Juliet. This exchange also demonstrates how the Nurse’s governing body politic is derived from a less-than-perfect household, as Potter articulates, “Capulet’s characterization as a ‘cot-quean,’ i.e. as usurping the role of his wife in running the household, is a contributory factor to the domestic nature of the tragedy. Not only does he run ‘every thing in extremity’ (I.iii.102), meaning in a disorganised and ad hoc fashion, but he deprives his wife and daughter of their natural domestic roles” (279). Now that the Nurse’s body politic is controlling her decisions, it is revealed that the relationship through which she possesses that body politic is corrupted. If the governing body politic is proven to be imperfect, then how can any relationship derived from it be conceived of as perfect? Capulet’s command over the household is both complete and operates outside of his traditional role, whereas Juliet’s wifely body politic has been shown to be perfect in her devotion to Romeo.
When the Nurse goes to wake Juliet in the morning, she is as bawdy as she was in the first scene, as though nothing has changed:

Why, love, I say! Madam! Sweetheart! Why, bride!
What, not a word? You take your pennyworths now.
Sleep for a week, for the next night, I warrant,
The County Paris hath set up his rest
That you shall rest but little. (IV.v.3-7)

Her demeanor changes drastically once she discovers Juliet dead. She weeps and wails just as she did for Tybalt; once the rest of the family has entered, she and Lady Capulet mirror each other in their lamentations:

Nurse: She’s dead, deceased, she’s dead, alack the day!
L. Capulet: Alack the day, she’s dead, she’s dead, she’s dead.

Nurse: O lamentable day!
L. Capulet: O woeful time! (IV.v.23-30)

The lines mix and mingle, blurring the identities of mother and wet-nurse verbally as has already been done characteristically. Lamentation is always the province of the body natural; no body politic has yet been seen that is strong enough to overcome the grief of death. Even Capulet contributes to the mourning, “O child, O child, my soul and not my child!” (IV.v.62). It is curious to note when an emotion is so powerful that it affects both bodies natural and politic. The entire household goes into mourning for a funeral just as the entire household celebrates a wedding. Love and death are the two emotions potent enough that the body politic must agree with and acknowledge what the body natural feels.

The Nurse is not seen again for the rest of the play; many directors choose to include her in the crowd onstage once the deaths are revealed but she is not specifically listed in the stage directions. Belsey describes the final scene as a moment when “[f]inally, the whole community crowds in, the community which is ultimately responsible for the arbitrary and
pointless ancestral quarrel, and which is powerless to reverse the effects of a violence carried on in the names of Montague and Capulet, and enacted on the bodies of the new generation” (“The Name of the Rose” 78). The bodies politic and natural of Romeo and Juliet have become collateral damage in the feud and the Nurse has faded into the background crowd, forgotten. She only receives one more mention, from Friar Laurence:

All this I know, and to the marriage
Her nurse is privy; and if aught in this
Miscarried by my fault, let my old life
Be sacrificed some hour before his time
Unto the rigour of severest law. (V.iii.265-269)

Friar Laurence and the Nurse serve parallel functions in the play; she is Juliet's confidante as he is Romeo’s and both labor to bring the lovers together. The Friar is pardoned for his part in the proceedings, so perhaps the Nurse is as well. However, the reason for her employment was Juliet. With Juliet gone, lost to the house of Capulet by both a death and a marriage that the Nurse had a hand in bringing about, would the Capulets keep her employed? Bruce argues that “Juliet is Nurse’s life. In fact after Juliet’s apparent death, Nurse fades out of the play. When Juliet is dead, there is no Nurse” (191, original emphasis). She has proven herself an untrustworthy servant, one who lived so fully in the capacity of her body natural that she failed in the duties of her body politic. With Juliet’s death, the Nurse also has lost her claim to the servile body politic – she has undergone her own demise.

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Putana’s demise begins with Annabella’s pregnancy. As with the Duchess of Malfi, pregnancy is a state of the body natural that the body politic cannot completely conceal or control. When Annabella sickens (which coincidentally happens just after she has promised
Soranzo that if she is forced to marry, she will marry him), Putana recognizes the symptoms. Giovanni, worried for his sister/lover and fearing the worst, asks Putana for news, to which she replies, “Dead? No, she is quick; ‘tis worse, she is with child! You know what you have done, heaven forgive ‘ee! ‘Tis too late to repent now, heaven help us!” (III.iii.8-10). Putana recognizes the gravity of the situation, and though she still puns bawdily on “quick,” she also reprimands Giovanni. Putana understands the desires, and therefore the repercussions, of the body natural with clarity and ease.

Giovanni then puts Putana in an even more precarious position:

Giovanni: Commend me to her, bid her take no care. Let not the doctor visit her, I charge you; Make some excuse till I return. Oh me, I have a world of business in my head! Do not discomfort her. How do this news perplex me! If my father Come to her, tell him she’s recovered well. Say ‘twas but some ill diet. D’ee hear, woman? Look you to’t.

Putana: I will, sir. (III.iv.22-31)

Giovanni commands Putana to lie to his father, weakening her body politic by giving it contradictory commands. She ought to obey Florio as her employer but Giovanni is a member of the household as well, and his command serves both himself and Annabella, two-thirds of the household that Putana serves. Her body natural happens to agree with Giovanni, wanting to protect Annabella out of fear that they will be “undone” (III.ii.18), and so she does. But though her action is meant to protect Annabella, Putana’s power weakens her body politic and she is relatively ineffectual for the rest of the play.
Florio sends for the Friar to minister to Annabella; Giovanni hopes that the Friar, as his friend and confidante,\textsuperscript{13} will help solve the conundrum. Unfortunately, the Friar threatens Annabella with the torments of hell and coerces her into marrying Soranzo in accordance with her father’s wishes. Putana is nowhere to be seen during this exchange; unlike Friar Laurence and the Nurse, Putana and the Friar do not work collectively to bring the lovers together. In this case, the lovers are separated by incest, a sin in the eyes of the Church. It is not possible for the Friar to condone their union. Instead, he attempts to cover up the sin by marrying Annabella to Soranzo, a false marriage given her earlier exchange of vows with Giovanni. The marriage begins with a feast at which Hippolyta, Soranzo’s former scorned lover, attempts to poison Soranzo but instead is tricked into drinking the poison herself, a prophetic beginning to a cursed and dishonest marriage.

Putana travels with her mistress to Soranzo’s house where Annabella’s growing belly eventually gives her away. When Soranzo discovers Annabella’s condition, he grows violently angry, “Enter SORANZO unbraced [with his sword drawn], and Annabella dragged in” (IV.iii.sd). Soranzo threatens Annabella,

\begin{verbatim}
I'll rip up thy heart  
---------------------------------
And with my teeth  
Tear the prodigious lecher joint by joint  
---------------------------------
I'll hew thy flesh to shreds  
---------------------------------
Thus will I pull thy hair, and thus I'll drag  
Thy lust-belepered body through the dust. (IV.iii.53-61)
\end{verbatim}

Amidst the physical violence, Annabella laughs and sings. Her wifely body politic connected to Giovanni, incestuous as it is, allows her to resist Soranzo’s torture of her body

\textsuperscript{13} Ford uses the same parallel Shakespeare creates in \textit{Romeo and Juliet}; Giovanni relies on the Friar just as Annabella relies on Putana.
natural. She defies him: “I dare thee to the worst; strike, and strike home./I leave revenge
behind, and thou shalt feel’t” (IV.iii.70-71). Vasquez prevents Soranzo from murdering
Annabella outright, then persuades him that there may be another way of discovering the
truth and exacting revenge. Vasquez promises to discover the truth and sends Soranzo off to
make false amends with Annabella.
Putana now enters weeping and Vasquez greets her, “What, crying, old mistress?
Alas, alas, I cannot blame ‘ee: we have a lord, heaven help us, is so mad as the devil
himself, the more shame for him” (IV.iii.180-182). Presumably Soranzo has punished
Putana, though whether verbally or physically is unclear. Vasquez’ words indicate that
Putana is now part of Soranzo’s household and so derives her body politic from him, not
Florio. She still maintains her affection for Annabella (they have not broken as Juliet and
the Nurse did), but Annabella’s state cannot be concealed as Juliet’s could. Putana’s two
bodies are also in a different sort of conflict; she still holds affection for Annabella and
works towards her happiness, with very little apart from social propriety prompting her to
obey Soranzo. Clearly Putana still places her body natural above her body politic. She still
approves Annabella’s choices, finally revealing the truth to Vasquez who she believes will
understand and protect her:
Vasquez:
Putana:
Vasquez:
Putana:
Vasquez:
Putana:

Fear not to name him; my life between you and danger. Faith, I
think ‘twas no base fellow.
Thou wilt stand between me and harm?
Ud’s pity, what else? You shall be rewarded too, trust me.
‘Twas even no worse than her own brother.
Her brother Giovanni, I warrant ‘ee?
Even he, Vasquez. As brave a gentleman as ever kissed fair
lady. Oh, they love most perpetually.
(IV.iii.221-227)

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Even now, Putana does not see what is so wrong about their love; she admires Giovanni and speaks of their love almost romantically. But in revealing the truth, Putana condemns them all. She swears that what she says is the truth, “Believe me! . . . No, Vasquez, I have known their dealings too long to belie them now” (IV.iii.235-237). Her avowal prompts her demise as Vasquez calls, “Where are you? There within, sirs!” (IV.iii.238). In the ignorance of her body natural, Putana thought she had found a kindred spirit in Vasquez, a fellow servant who understood desire more than duty. Her punishment for this folly is to be gagged and have her eyes poked out, a fitting corporeal punishment: apparently having one’s eyes put out was a common punishment for those who knew incest, as in Oedipus Rex (Ford 213 footnote). Bartels reads this as Ford’s suggestion “that even passive complicity on the part of knowing adults might be as indefensible as the offence it hides” (“Intertextuality” 254).

Annabella misses Putana but does not know what has happened to her. Like Putana, Annabella’s body natural is now completely controlled by Soranzo; she is essentially a prisoner. She asks the Friar to talk to Giovanni for her:

Tell him that I, imprisoned in my chamber
Barred of all company, even of my guardian
Who gives me cause of much suspect, have time
To blush at what hath passed. (V.i.48-51)

For Annabella, the loss of Putana represents a quickening of her demise; the audience knows what has happened to Putana and that her confession will undoubtedly bring about Annabella’s demise. The loss of Putana’s influence also means that Annabella now regrets the incestuous relationship. While Soranzo waits to punish her at a feast, Giovanni stabs her as he kisses her, “To save thy fame and kill thee in a kiss./Thus die, and die by me and my hand./Revenge is mine; honour doth love command” (V.v.85-86). Giovanni believes he is doing what needs to be done in his husbandly body politic, saving his sister/lover from a
sinful and violent marriage. He then announces her death gruesomely at the feast, holding up his dagger with her heart impaled upon it, whereupon he is surrounded by the banditti and killed as well. In murdering his sister, Giovanni literally murders the body natural, carrying the image of her body politic (her love for him) onstage: Terri Clerico’s cultural materialist analysis of the play identifies how “the heart has served so capably as the central referent in a struggle intended to remind us of the ineffable and mysterious contiguity of body and speech – of nature and culture – and of our equally mysterious desire to force the two apart” (433-434). Vasquez then reveals the truth behind the grisly scene to the Cardinal, who presides over the play’s final moments:

Vasquez: Yes, an old woman, sometimes guardian to this murdered lady . . . Within this room she is, whose eyes after her confession I caused to be put out; but kept alive, to confirm what from Giovanni’s own mouth you have heard. Now, my lord, what I have done you may judge of, and let your own wisdom be a judge in your own reason.

Cardinal: Peace! First this woman, chief in these effects:
My sentence is that forthwith she be ta’en
Out of the city, for example’s sake
There to be burnt to ashes. (V.v.127-139)

Putana’s final act will be to confirm the illicit desiring between Annabella and Giovanni; it is an act required of her body politic and her body natural has been so beaten into submission that her compliance is assumed. Her punishment then is to be burnt to death. Gauer points out that “everyone in the Fordian community is bound to cheat at one moment or another. Everyone that is except perhaps Putana: yet her stance is properly unacceptable, and this is why she must die and even utterly vanish – she is to be burnt alive outside the city” (54, original emphasis). Whether she does not cheat or simply is honest about her cheating is a matter of opinion; in either case, it is her body natural that Gauer describes, not her body politic. Additionally, Catherine Silverstone argues that the vows that
Annabella and Giovanni made to each other in the beginning of the play “set up desire and death as mutually exclusive, antithetical possibilities; as the play progresses we see that these terms are inextricably bound together and admit the possibility that to love is also to kill” (87). Putana’s affection for Annabella reduces her to collateral damage in the desire-death dialectic created by the siblings. As with the Nurse, Putana has little purpose once her mistress is dead but Ford is not content merely to draw parallels – he heightens and distorts Shakespeare’s original play. ‘Tis Pity relates Putana’s demise in gruesome detail. She is condemned for her contributions to Annabella and Giovanni’s love and given a macabre punishment and death, bodies natural and politic destroyed.

**Conclusion**

The idea of the servile body politic offers an opportunity to explore the limits of the potential applications of the king’s two bodies theory in a literary and dramatic context. Where the theory began as a clear division between the King and the king, the monarch and the man, it has now grown into a messy division that more closely resembles the division between love and duty. The Nurse and Putana act most often out of love, betraying their duty to their masters.

*Romeo and Juliet* operates at the intersection of family and politics, one of the most ubiquitous sites of the love vs. duty trope. In the early modern period, a family’s position in society often came into conflict with the individual family members’ personal desires. Roberts sees this intersection as

Shakespeare effectively invit[ing] the audience to consider adolescent passion and parent-child relations as the stuff of serious drama. Furthermore, the play allows for considerable complexity in the depiction of marital, patriarchal,
matriarchal, and filial relations, and engages with contemporary concerns about the nature of power and its abuse within the family. (12)

Roberts goes on to suggest, “[t]he play dramatizes a daughter effectively undermining her father’s power. In so doing the play engages with current debates about the due obedience of children and the limits of patriarchal power” (22). While Roberts acknowledges many of the relationships driving the play, he fails to recognize the relationship between master and servant, or between nurse and child.

‘Tis Pity She’s a Whore exists at a similar intersection, though in this case the crossroads is formed by the collapse and corruption of society. Jephson and Boehrer, examining the play’s portrayal of the middle class, believe that Ford’s play imagines a world in which dependable distinctions between upper and lower social ranks have collapsed . . . The result is a work that combines sensational tragedy with horrific comedy, that presents the emergent middle class as both an incestuous monstrosity and a carnivalesque joke . . . placing itself in the position of indisputable royal authority, the play kills off as many of its low characters as possible, subjecting them – and the play’s world in general – to the ‘juridico-political’ dynamics of Renaissance absolutist discipline. (7-8)

The play is a Jacobean revenge tragedy variation of Romeo and Juliet, with the love story perverted, the religion corrupted, and the deaths more disturbing. The play’s final couplet, “Of one so young, so rich in nature’s store,/Who could not say, ‘Tis pity she’s a whore?’” (V.v.162-163), condemns any woman whose actions could be perceived as whorish, as Bartels explains:

[T]he text does not dictate who ‘this’ spectacularly punished ‘woman’ is: Putana, who has just been outed, or Annabella, whom Giovanni has just killed. It could be performed either way, or neither, leaving the ambiguity here in place. The effect of this indeterminacy is to put Putana’s offence provocatively on a par with Annabella’s, rendering the cover-up as questionable and serious an issue as the crime, at least within the Cardinal’s court. (“Intertextuality” 254)
Putana’s demise is as horrific as Annabella’s; the two are connected through their mutually kept secret of Annabella’s incestuous relationship with her brother.

Stanley Wells suggests that “The Nurse’s inconsequentiality arises from the fact that her mental processes are too feeble to create an adequate syntactical structure; or – to look at it from her creator’s point of view – in the Nurse Shakespeare employs broken syntax and inconsequentiality to suggest a mind that is naturally lacking in intellectual control” (211). While Wells points out a useful tidbit distinguishing Shakespeare’s writing of the Nurse from his writing of higher class characters, he dismisses the Nurse as completely inconsequential; by contrast, it has been shown here how important her actions and decisions are to the play. However, his classification of what distinguishes the lower-class characters helps delineate why the Nurse is incapable of fully embodying the body politic.

Roberts categorizes the use of language:

Elite characters use elevated diction, sophisticated dialogue, complex imagery, learned references . . . rhetorical devices, fashionable literary styles (notably Petrarchism), and a characteristic feature of Renaissance lyric poetry, the *conceit* – an apt and ingenious comparison that invokes the reader’s or audience’s appreciation of linguistic virtuosity and inventiveness. By contrast, the servants’ use of language in the play tends to be colloquial, direct, and simply constructed. (82, original emphasis)

The use of language mirrors the embodiment of the two bodies explored; where the higher class characters discuss love and poetry, the Nurse and Putana discuss the life of the body natural and, especially, sex. For both servants, the affections of their bodies natural override the servile body politic and decide their courses of action.

In the hands of the Nurse and Putana, the body natural becomes more potent than the body politic. Both female characters are bawdy and bodied. They reference bodily functions such as nursing and sex freely, enjoying sexual innuendo in a way that no
monarch on the stage has. Their language stems from their own corporeal bodies; their actions derive from that body’s affection for its mistress. Having known their charges since childhood, the Nurse and Putana have developed mother-like feelings for Juliet and Annabella, sentiments arising from the relationship between bodies natural. These affections may not be romantic or sexual in nature, as has been seen in the analysis of the other female characters, but they are equally powerful. A mother-like bond, developed over years, can be just as influential as the bond between lovers or marriage partners.

The body politic is much more difficult to identify, partially due to the Nurse’s and Putana’s lower-class status, but largely due to their situations. The relationship that alters their identities, makes them greater than they are on their own, is the relationship with their employers. However, the “employers” are the entire family, headed by a patriarch. The servile body politic is connected to many other people, allowing for the possibility that its power will be diluted by contradicting commands. Should the Nurse obey Juliet in her desire to be with Romeo, or Capulet in his wish for Juliet to marry Paris? Should Putana give in to Annabella and Giovanni’s desire to be together, or follow Florio in his desire to see Annabella married? Though both patriarchs initially say that they will not force their daughters to marry, the situations change and Juliet and Annabella are pressed into matrimony; both proposed weddings lead to death. Capulet and Florio, despite their positions as the head of the household, are not perfect; Capulet in particular is shown to have corrupted the traditional role of the master of the house. Their bodies politic do not ensure perfect decisions, as Plowden’s record suggested. If the master’s body politic is not a perfect body, then how can the servant’s body politic be so? Is the servant made greater in this situation? Or is the servant merely placed in an impossible position, in which the
decision between love and duty will determine the fates and happiness of everyone involved?

Ultimately, the theory of the king’s two bodies gets very messy when applied to servants. The servile body politic does not have much weight behind it and servants are most often dramatized in plays as being very much of the earth, of the body. They dismiss the higher qualities of poetry, reason, and beauty that characterize the upper class. Their relationship with the upper class certainly enhances their identity, making them more than they were alone, but the upper class is in turn subservient to the ruling class which is in turn subservient to God. There are too many orders of removal between the original body politic, legitimizing the monarch’s right to rule, and the servile body politic, which is weakened through too many masters and too many desires. The servant’s duty to her master will never quite be able to overcome her body’s desires and affections.

And yet it has been illuminating to examine the Nurse and Putana through the lens of the king’s two bodies theory. It becomes clearer which of the servants’ actions an Elizabethan or Jacobean audience might have praised or condemned, as Wheeler relates: “most contemporary audience members would have seen the flaws in the macrocosm that corrupted the microcosm of Romeo and Juliet’s world” (155). The body politic of the nation as a whole cannot function fully or efficiently in the microcosmic household. In particular, it is interesting to see how Ford’s reinterpretation of the Romeo and Juliet story clearly condemns Putana, whereas Shakespeare’s Nurse merely fades into the background. The Nurse and Putana allow the motherly feelings of their bodies natural for their charges to overrule their sense of duty to the family in their bodies politic; they assist Juliet and Annabella in their secret love affairs. Their aid enables the secret unions which, when
revealed, bring about the demise of the wifely body politic, which in turn terminates the servile body politic.
CONCLUSION

The theory of the king’s two bodies began as a way to define and clarify the prerogatives and responsibilities of the monarch but its effects clearly extended beyond the monarchy. Though the common man did not necessarily understand the jargon of the king’s two bodies, the theory usefully delineates the intersection of desire and duty, particularly when those often contradictory imperatives mold the marriage union. The prevalence of the theory’s language and applicability to tragic and historical dramas of the day suggest its far-reaching effects. The king’s two bodies theory illuminates motivations, faults, and dualities in female characters throughout the Elizabethan/Jacobean canon.

Margaret and Isabella demonstrate the full and literal capacities of the queenly body politic. When the body politic does not have an adequate body natural to house it, or when its power is abused and bent to the desires of the body natural, these characters are able to take control of it and effect change on behalf of their husbands and sons. They proved stronger and better queens than their husbands were kings through their embrace of the body politic. However, the strength of the body natural’s connection to their lovers, Suffolk and Mortimer, as well as Margaret’s love for her son and Isabella’s underestimation of her son, causes a weakness in the body natural, leading to each character’s demise. With that demise, the body politic passes on to the next inheriting body natural: Margaret’s to Edward IV and Isabella’s to Edward III. As monarchs depicted on stage, these characters demonstrate the most literal dramatic portrayal and interpretation of the king’s two bodies theory; whereas some critics see these characters as seizing power without right, this theory offers legitimacy to their actions.
Lady Macbeth and the Duchess of Malfi are still in positions of political power, though they are not of the monarchy. Their connections to their husbands highlight the body politic’s need for a strong body natural to inhabit; their marriage unions depict the union of body and soul and therefore of body natural and body politic. When the two bodies work in concert, the partners are virtually unstoppable; they are capable together of much more than each would have been alone. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth together gain a kingly body politic while the Duchess of Malfi and Antonio together acquire a family. However, Lady Macbeth cannot endure the acts she undertook in order to gain the queenly body politic; as her mind breaks down, her relationship with Macbeth also falls apart. As the couple drifts further apart, the body politic loses the whole body natural which housed it, and so it undergoes a demise. The Duchess of Malfi’s body natural similarly betrays her, this time with pregnancy; she and Antonio are then forced apart, and the body politic is similarly lost. Again, the body politic passes on to the next worthy body natural: Malcolm, and the Duchess’ and Antonio’s son. These two noblewomen demonstrate that it is not only queens who must balance the rights and responsibilities of a ruling woman and suffer the consequences when they don’t.

The household can be understood as a microcosm of the kingdom: the husband is the head of the house as the king is the head of the nation. Therefore a wife has many of the same qualities as a queen but on a smaller scale; she, too, has a body politic. The wifely body politic is derived from the union of husband and wife, just as Queen Elizabeth claimed that she was married to the land. As Desdemona and Alice demonstrate, the wifely body politic can be just as commanding and destructive as the queenly body politic. Though they are not noblewomen and so do not bear a responsibility to a larger population, their
marriage vows have created a mutual responsibility between themselves and their husbands. The body natural’s desires must support and align with the wifely body politic’s responsibilities. Iago and Alice both manipulate the appearance of the wifely body politic, and Othello and Alice both give in to the desires of their bodies natural. As a result, the marital body politic is subverted and loses its power. The effects of this inversion can only be remedied in death.

Finally, the Nurse and Putana demonstrate a body politic arising from a non-romantic relationship and in a lower class. Their bodies politic are developed from their relationships with their employers, however, when the employer is an entire family, the power of the body politic is put into conflict with itself. The commands of the father (the head of the household) contradict the commands of the daughter to whom each servant also bears a connection in the body natural, the affection springing from a surrogate mother-daughter bond. Invariably, the father’s wish to see the daughter married instigates a chain of events leading to the daughter’s death and the demise of the servile body politic. In this last scenario, it becomes clear how the body politic is no longer a perfecting element nor does it pass on between bodies natural. The body natural is driven by desire and the body politic is driven by duty – the one chance these characters had for happiness was in not betraying the body politic. Even at its most fundamental level, the theory demonstrates how in the tragedies and histories, the misalignment of bodies natural and politic leads to death.

The given role of an Elizabethan woman was a narrow one: she was expected to live in her father’s house learning music and dancing until she married and moved to her husband’s house where she would run the daily household business. If she became a widow, she was expected to live out her days peacefully. None of the female characters explored
have conformed to that ideal, mythical Elizabethan woman. Upon Margaret's widowhood, she turns witch and curses the remaining players in the Wars of the Roses. The Duchess is a widow at the outset, and immediately marries, enjoying a long union with Antonio before they are discovered. Margaret and Isabella both run countries in the stead of weak kings; Lady Macbeth and the Duchess both push beyond their original capacities through their marriages. Alice is a terrible wife to Arden; Desdemona is a perfect wife but a faulty daughter, such that Othello can't believe her. The Nurse and Putana both send their charges off with young men and hide the relationships from the patriarchs, helping the young girls seek romantic happiness at the expense of their filial duty. The popular drama of the day rarely portrays what was supposedly the ideal, though, of course, people behaving as expected hardly makes for fascinating theater. The dramatists did not portray the ideal; instead, they were drawn to the contradictions, tensions, and inconstancies inherent in both real-life and the dual bodies theory.

In the end, some of the women are presented as villains, but only Alice receives a traitor’s death. Though Margaret is painted as a witch and Isabella as a heart-sick lover, both are pitiable in their descent into obsolescence. Lady Macbeth is condemned by Malcolm, but mourned by Macbeth, just as the Duchess’ demise is mourned by Antonio yet she is condemned by her brother. Desdemona is exonerated from her perceived infidelity. The Nurse fades away after Juliet’s first apparent death. Putana’s death is at least as gruesome as Alice’s but it was not technically the death of a traitor; rather, it was the death of one who had witnessed incest. It is curious that Alice, the character based on historical events from only fifty years previously, received the most condemning end, punishing her abuse of the body politic as though it were the crown’s body politic. It is also interesting to
note that the Shakespearean characters often have a hand in their punishments while the non-Shakespearean characters’ punishments are delivered by society. Margaret remains in England, watching as her kingdom is ruled and her family destroyed by others, whereas Isabella is sent to the Tower by her son. Lady Macbeth drives herself mad; the Duchess’ brother attempts to drive her crazy, then strangles her. Desdemona wakes from death just long enough to pardon Othello, while Alice is led to her execution. Finally, the Nurse discovers Juliet’s apparently dead body and mourns her, knowing that she herself had a hand in Juliet’s death, while Putana is tortured, blinded, and burnt. Even with the copious similarities between each pair examined, this particular pattern emerges and makes one wonder about Shakespeare’s interpretation of the “demise.”

The theory of the king’s two bodies does not explain every single character in every play from the period. Characters lacking in a fundamental duality will not benefit from an examination through the lens of the king’s two bodies theory. Mistress Quickly, for example, from *Henry IV parts 1 and 2*, lacks the distinct contradiction between desire and duty that the other characters have demonstrated. It could be argued that she desires Falstaff and that her primary duty is to her business, of which Falstaff is a prime customer. Her weakness in allowing him to drink such an intolerable amount of sack on credit is at odds with her need to keep her business running. But this example does not highlight a fundamental duality, as has been seen with the characters examined in this study. Nor does it in any way serve as the main conflict of the play; the dualities in the other characters that I have examined have all been at the heart of each work. Additionally, nothing functions to perfect Mistress Quickly’s actions, and in fact, she symbolizes all that is natural and bodied:
she represents the body natural in the play as a whole. In the end, Mistress Quickly is not fundamentally at odds with herself.

The theory is also limited by powerful emotion. The entire nation stops with the death of the monarch; the body politic must pass on to the next receiving body natural. Similarly, when Margaret hears of Suffolk’s death and witnesses her son’s death; when Alice realizes Arden is dead; when the Nurse believes Juliet to be dead, the body politic cannot contain and control the emotion of the body natural as it so often does. There are times when the body natural’s capacity for feeling is so strong that it overwhelms the body politic, forcing it to acknowledge the pain of loss. Invariably, these powerful emotions signify a permanent change in the balance of the two bodies. For Margaret, it is the beginning of her demise; for Alice, it marks her acceptance at last of the wifely body politic. It appears that an emotion powerful enough to be felt by the body politic fundamentally alters the body natural. It is not clear how this aspect of the theory when used as a dramatic lens relates to its use as a political theory in Elizabeth’s reign, but it must be noted that Mary and Elizabeth did not function on their own. Lords and advisors surrounded them and, perhaps, tempered their expressions of grief and other powerful emotions. The female characters examined here rarely have anyone with whom to share their grief, intensifying the emotion to such an extent that it overwhelms them. While this fact can be seen as a caution against letting emotion overwhelm a ruler, there is something fundamentally human about the idea as well – no matter how big, strong, powerful, or perfect a person or character is, the pain associated with death is too great to control.

Delineating the theory’s applications to multiple dramatic texts and female characters has proved fascinating. The theory helps to explain what the expectations were of
a monarch in 16th century England, when the monarch was thought to be succeeding or failing. Examining the ramifications of the king’s two bodies theory on these female characters has allowed an exploration of their motivations, failings, and responsibilities which ultimately provides a nuanced view of them. They are full characters, whether queened, wived, noble, or servant; each grows and changes over the course of the play. While many directors prefer to find a single, motivational through-line for dramatic characters, directors like Deborah Warner love finding the “what-ifs,” “unpicking the knots” in Carol Chillington Rutter’s words (479). The approach I have developed finds, even emphasizes, the knots; moreover, it offers ways to untangle them. Whereas, in the view of some critics, the characters I have examined are so divided as to be deemed inconsistent, this theory shows them to be motivated by a need to balance the desires of the body natural with the duties of the body politic. The theory both allows the characters to grow and change and offers a single through line. The theory of the king’s two bodies legitimizes the desire/duty duality and contextualizes it within Elizabethan culture, encouraging new readings of the plays and female characters.

The king’s two bodies theory’s dramatic applications are in no way limited to the female characters explored here. It has, of course, previously been used in analyses of Richard II and Henry V, among other male characters. While the theory could be applied to male characters in a similar manner to the method employed here, such a move would collapse some of the theory’s gendered implication, namely, the union of masculine body politic and feminine body natural. Repeatedly, it has been shown that male and female characters often function as two halves of a whole. While many male characters demonstrate a conflict between desire and duty, fewer of them are shown in relationships
with female characters in which they operate as two halves of a whole. Additionally, the
Elizabethan view of female and male gender roles may not require male characters to be
connected to female characters as female characters are so often connected to male ones.
However, it would be interesting to look at some non-royal male characters, such as
Antonio from *Measure for Measure*, to see what illumination the theory can offer.

This analysis focused on tragedy and history plays; comedy provides a different
realm to explore. Most scholars agree that the rules are different in a comedy; it appears
that, under these rules, the theory of the king’s two bodies is more difficult to track. Given
that comedies end happily, the demise of the body politic does not occur. The bodies natural
and politic may be in conflict throughout the play but, in the end, they are brought back into
harmony. Comedic characters such as Beatrice and Hero from *Much Ado About Nothing* or
Speed and Launce from *Two Gentlemen of Verona* would provide fascinating subjects for
analysis. There are also the numerous cross-dressing characters such as Viola in *Twelfth
Night* whose body natural and body politic are tangled, disguised, multiplied, and altered;
another example is Isabella from *Measure for Measure* whose desire to become a nun (and the
associated sartorial covering of the body natural) creates a new sort of body politic which, in
the end, is overthrown by her proposed marriage to Duke Vincentio. However, it is also
interesting to note that royalty is rarely portrayed in comedy – perhaps Prince Hal is the
only comedic royal character, and his comedy is located primarily at the tavern. His only
other comedic scene comes at the end of *Henry V* as he attempts to woo Katherine, a scene
that certainly shows juxtaposition of the two bodies. The royalty found in *Love’s Labours Lost*
are portrayed outside the royal court; their return to the court signifies an ambiguous ending
though, again, the theory may shed some light on their desires and duties and, therefore, on
their motivations. Many of the comedies begin and end with an imposition by the state, as in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which again provides opportunities for analysis. If the king’s two bodies theory has offered any illumination on the female characters in the histories and tragedies, then perhaps it can do the same for other female characters across the genre spectrum.

Though this study has focused on analysis of dramatic texts, the theory of the king’s two bodies clearly has potential applications in performance. Reading the female characters through their dual bodies suggests new ways in which to explore and embody relationships onstage. A character that is driven by the body natural may affect a different manner, mode of address, or even attitude towards others than a character driven by the body politic. The king’s two bodies theory provides an ability to understand the characters through an early modern context, a new and exciting vision derived from the historical and social context in which they were composed. The insights discovered here could certainly have an effect on a production and an actress’s interpretation of her character.

As Hamlet so eloquently says, the theater’s main purpose “was and is, to hold, as ‘twere, the mirror up to nature” (III.ii.23-24). The theater has the capacity to describe the way things are, an interpretation reflecting nature, often as accurately (or inaccurately) as those pamphlets which reflected the way the authors wanted things to be. In the introduction to his study of gender and subordination in the early modern period, Anthony Fletcher states, “Drama can thus properly be used as historical evidence, not of realities but of the imaginative and ideological constructions of the period, of its mentality” (Fletcher xx). The theater can also highlight, criticize, and satirize problems within society, even something as embedded as gender politics, as West-Pavlov suggests: “The early modern
drama frequently articulated a critique of the masculist notions of the feminine which supplemented the internal structural flaws of patriarchal ideology itself” (160). The theater is literally located on the fringes of society, outside the city walls, beyond the jurisdiction of city officials. It can get away with portraying an alternate way of being. Susan Zimmerman, in her article on “Disruptive Desire in Jacobean Comedy,” goes further and suggests that theatre “served as a medium for the release of transgressive erotic impulses” (92). Not only was the stage a place to express the inexpressible, often that inexpressible was rooted in sexuality and gender.

William B. Worthen, in his treatise on the role of the actor, articulates the actor’s paradox: “He is present as an actor, strutting his stagey stuff; but he is also absent, negated by the dramatic illusion he creates. In performance, the actor is engaged in two performances, a ‘double effort’ that reveals him as an actor while it conceals him within his dramatic role” (3). In the Elizabethan era, this doubleness is displayed and even manipulated on the stage, as can be seen through the use of costuming which visually turns a male body into a female one. The resulting situations and jokes in plays such as Twelfth Night suggest that the audience was aware of the dual bodies being presented before them. Worthen goes on to describe how acting essentially undermines the social order, promotes emotion over reason, and confuses the sexes (Worthen 25). This means that the stage creates a forum wherein a woman could become something different, something more than the expected ideal. It must be noted that this happens when a man plays a woman. Perhaps it is because the words are a man’s, both the playwright’s and the actor’s, that these women are allowed to act so “unwomanly.” But what a beautiful and intricate duality it creates to watch an outward-seeming woman enact Lady Macbeth’s lines, “Come you spirits/That
tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,” and know that the body speaking the words was male. Stephen Greenblatt believes that “Shakespeare express[es] in literary works more powerful than any produced by [his] contemporaries the historical pressure of an unresolved and continuing conflict” (Self-Fashioning 8). Worthen seems to anticipate Greenblatt when he says,

A theater fixes on an aspect of the actor’s doubleness that resonates most evocatively with its presiding sense of meaningful actions, its sense of what is a significant act. The actor becomes a metaphor for the ambiguity of all our actions. His feigned performance enacts the problematic relation that we discover daily between the self and the deeds that should reflect or reveal it, but that sometimes seem to deny it, to transform the self into an uncomfortable fiction. (9)

Even in the physical expression onstage, the duality of the king’s two bodies theory finds manifestation. It displays the harmony and dissension of masculine and feminine elements that allow the characters to become both fully embodied and fully realized.

Richard II again underscores the duality in the deposition scene after he has called for a mirror and, gazing into it, says,

Richard: A brittle glory shineth in this face -
As brittle as the glory is the face! [Shatters glass.]
For there it is, cracked in an hundred shivers.
Mark, silent King, the moral of this sport,
How soon my sorrow hath destroyed my face.

Bolingbroke: The shadow of your sorrow hath destroyed
The shadow of your face.

Richard: Say that again!
The shadow of my sorrow? Ha, let’s see.
‘Tis very true, my grief lies all within;
And these external manners of laments
Are merely shadows to the unseen grief
That swells with silence in the tortured soul. (IV.i.287-298)

The act of shattering the mirror symbolizes Richard’s own destruction but Bolingbroke reminds us that it is but a shadow. Bolingbroke forces Richard to acknowledge the artifice,
the façade, which Richard does, turning his attention instead to his internal griefs. Richard assures Bolingbroke of his tortured soul even as the actor assures the audience that the external gives voice to the internal life.

The theory of the king’s two bodies is not an all-encompassing explanation for characters in the Elizabethan/Jacobean dramatic canon. As has been shown, the further from the monarchy a character is located, the more difficult it becomes to separate body natural from body politic. The body politic began as a perfecting body that distinguished the true leader of a nation from the nominal head who was incapable of making decisions on behalf of the people. In the servant characters, the body politic has become a metaphor for the responsibilities and duties owed to the master of the house. The body natural, in the queens, was easily suppressed to the needs of the body politic until overwhelming emotion broke through. But the Nurse and Putana were ruled primarily by their bodies natural which were made more powerful because the body politic was diluted through multiple master-servant relationships, none of them perfect. The clarity and power of the two bodies theory fades as analysis moves further away from royalty, though parallels remain. Ultimately, the theory of the king’s two bodies has provided a contextual lens contemporary with the plays examined. It is a means to understand female characters derived from the political and social system in which they were created; it allows readers, performers, and audience members to see them beyond the limits of “maid, widow, or wife,” inhabiting a single but complicated, full but divided, identity.
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