

2013

Shakespeare and the Body Politic

Bernard J. Dobski

Assumption College, bdobski@assumption.edu

Dustin Gish

University of Oklahoma

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.assumption.edu/political-science-faculty>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Political Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dobski, Bernard J. and Dustin Gish. "Shakespeare and the Body Politic." *Shakespeare and the Body Politic*. Edited by Bernard J. Dobski and Dustin Gish. Lexington Books, 2013, pp. 1-27.

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the Political Science Department at Digital Commons @ Assumption University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Political Science Department Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Assumption University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@assumption.edu.

Chapter One

Shakespeare and the Body Politic

Bernard J. Dobski and Dustin Gish

The plays and poetry of William Shakespeare afford the careful reader an education in political wisdom. Four decades after the initial publication of and resistance to two interpretative essays on Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear* in the *American Political Science Review*,¹ this is no longer a controversial claim. Scholars open to the arguments made in these essays from the perspective of political philosophy about Shakespeare and the political wisdom embedded in his plays have assembled ever since then an impressive body of work—an effort which continues to bear fruit still today.² Shakespeare's political wisdom contributes to the *timeless* character of his works; it also infuses them with a *timeliness* that informs our understanding of the pressing political issues not only of Elizabethan and Jacobean England, but our own time as well. We argue for the relevance of a contemporary return to Shakespeare because his work prompts thinking about the Body Politic, perhaps the most vivid and enduring image in speech describing political community ever proposed. Through his works, Shakespeare helps us to think about both parts and wholes in a political context, and about the proper relationship between the parts and the whole. Indeed, there may be no greater account or anatomy of the Body Politic in the English language than what one discovers in Shakespeare's plays and poetry.³

THE POLITICAL CRISIS OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

To speak of "the body politic" today tends to evoke in the minds of readers a particularly disquieting image of a unified community in which individual parts are fully incorporated and rendered utterly subordinate to the interest of a whole. It thus recalls the brutal authoritarian regimes of the last century

whose appeals to nationalism derived from a view of the nation as an organic entity, one whose parts served and were understood solely in terms of the end assigned by the whole. The lingering legacy of their injustices in the present, combined with the utopian hope that such injustices can be overcome once and for all, has brought the political form known as the nation-state under incessant attack. This form of politics has been associated with political, social, and moral success as well as with the catastrophic failures of Western nation-states. The very notion that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, that a comprehensive good beyond the mere aggregation of individual needs and interests animates the whole, runs against the grain of democratic revolution and democratization which since the late 1970s has characterized much of contemporary foreign affairs.⁴ So much so, it seems, is the concept of "the body politic" out of joint with the times that it conjures up an image of a barbaric age oppressed by anti-democratic structures, on one hand, and torn apart by violent nationalism, on the other. The contemporary assault on the body politic and therewith on the nation-state by the proponents of radical democracy has set its sights on the attachments of citizens to particular national communities, and it has done so in an effort to elevate a universal notion of humanity.

One practical consequence of this theoretical perspective is manifest in the argument favoring the indefinite extension of the European Union, the creation and expansion of which has marched openly and confidently under the banners of liberal democracy and rational progress. The steady growth of the European Union from the 1950s to the present appears to have been more consistent with the philosophy of liberalism than Americans are otherwise willing to admit, although more recently it has bogged down in disputes over the cultural and religious patrimony of Europe as well as the prospect for unified economic and political success. For those Americans who think of their nation-state as providing solid, if somewhat low, ground for liberal democracy to take root and thrive, the claim that the principles of liberal democracy are actually at odds with national politics may seem strange. But national political communities almost always depend on the existence and preservation of arbitrary or conventional boundaries, most of which have been determined by accident or force of arms, and not by reasonable deliberation or democratic consent. The legitimacy of the liberal democratic principle (to say nothing of its allure) rests instead on its claim to speak to and for human beings *as human beings* rather than *as citizens* of any particular political community or nation-state. From the lofty perspective of liberal humanitarianism, national bodies politic which insist upon drawing and defending borders that separate and distinguish one people from another inevitably represent an unacceptable affront to human dignity. Enlightened friends of liberal democracy, it would seem, must deny the legitimacy of political distinctions founded upon the nation-state and oppose such distinctions as

derivative and unjust. The only form of government consonant with the universal ends of liberalism would be a radical global democracy that seeks to rise above boundaries and encompass all human beings in an ecumenical community that effectively obviates (often by simply failing to observe) all relevant political categories.

The inherent danger that the indefinite extension of the liberal democratic principle poses to sovereignty, citizenship, and political life itself have been diagnosed by contemporary political theorists—most notably, Pierre Manent, Marc Plattner and Daniel Mahoney.⁵ They argue that both the preservation and the extension of liberal democratic rights in fact require sovereignty to be clearly defined, and that this cannot be done without also knowing who contributes to that sovereignty (whose voices count and whose do not) and what constitutes the common good that the sovereign power is charged with securing. But to define and thus limit sovereignty or to think about a vision of the good for a political order, a good that is genuinely common to its members, requires that we take seriously again the possibility of particular goods for a particular people. This observation leads us back to acknowledging the importance which national political bodies have to the preconditions and the principles of liberal democracy itself. As Aristotle argues in his treatise on *Politics*, the fully flourishing human life is only accomplished beyond the familial and economic realm associated with the household (*oikos*). Such a life is cultivated in political community, the ancient city-state (*polis*) or the modern nation-state, where human beings as citizens—the inherent parts of the body politic—know true freedom, exercise virtue, pursue excellence, and so fulfill their nature.

The contemporary defense of liberal democracy is thus, at its core, paradoxical: an assault on national political bodies has been launched for the sake of liberating the will of individual human beings to choose to act—especially with regard to their bodies—as they alone deem necessary or appropriate, independently of any consideration of the political context which secures rights and invests them with political meaning. National sovereignty is sacrificed on the altar of individual sovereignty. The universalism of liberal democracy thus requires the limitless extension of the political sphere to incorporate all human beings indiscriminately even as it also elevates the individual person—and the concepts of self-determinism and consent—to the point where one is no longer capable of thinking meaningfully about anyone or anything else without mediating such relations through the sovereign will of the self. Recognition of and respect for the integrity of bonds, natural or conventional, that bind the self to others are forgotten. This radical notion of liberty ultimately alienates each from the other, in effect causing the dismemberment of the body politic and giving rise to the “extraordinary phenomenon” of disincorporation. It thereby estranges individuals from the family and the shared life of an intimate community whose horizon of *mores* other-

wise generates a natural sense of shame and genuine expressions of partisanship in exchange for a vague and distant concept of a "global" community. Caught between these two extremes of a radical, isolated individualism and an indiscriminate, lifeless whole, the space of *political community* seems to vanish. The emptiness of the public sphere is at once "exhilarating and harrowing" for mortal beings who must now define themselves as self-determined 'wholes' in the midst of lingering and deeply disturbing evidence to the contrary of their incompleteness and lack of self-sufficiency.⁶

Once the political has lost its hold on us, we no longer have recourse to that realm which mediated our private passions even as it gave them direction and coherence, a realm which engaged and refined passions in light of the good of the whole, even while acknowledging their rootedness in particular bodies. No longer able to take national political life seriously and incapable of identifying with an ever-expanding global community, human beings inevitably turn inward to find meaning and dignity. Intoxicated by the thought of self-sovereignty and of consent as the supreme locus of all political, social, and moral legitimacy, individual human beings—believing themselves to be whole already—resist becoming a part of anything else. Manifested this way, the contemporary doctrine of individual rights does not allow a proper recovery of political bodies. Why not? When the modern individual turns inward, towards what Manent calls the world of the "spirit," a turn reflected in the abstract language of "human rights," his inward gaze converts what otherwise appears to be an age of unrivaled materialism into a post-modern age that is purely spiritual. In other words, the celebration of individual will and cult of the body which seem to define so much of contemporary culture where democratization and material prosperity are (or are becoming) ascendant in fact reflect the unavoidable consequences of the elevation of the insubstantial principle of individual choice above all else—above the divine, which would authorize our moral duties; above the political community, which would govern us; even above nature, which would limit our desires and what we do with our bodies. It is not a crass hedonism that most characterizes contemporary Europe or, broadly speaking, Western nations, but an absolute belief, almost religious in nature, in individual consent as a foundational principle and an ideological certainty that its extension constitutes the political and moral fulfillment of human beings. What is rejected is the thought that we fulfill our most profound human aspirations by living within, and in accordance with, the limits of a higher law, an encompassing order that does not simply emanate from us or from our choices, but encloses and in a certain sense perfects us—or at least ennobles us.⁷

The post-modern community exhibits inconsistent, if not contradictory, ends: to let each be free to do as he or she wills without limits, while still all living together in peaceful harmony. Faith in the primacy of individual consent as a fundamental natural right threatens to undermine the very condi-

tions required to secure the place of consent as a political right. The limits of this position are perhaps seen most clearly in the European Union,⁸ with the influx of immigrant communities and entire national bodies politic which carry with them cultural and religious traditions that then exist uneasily alongside those principles that have traditionally defined political life in Europe and the West. Especially, paradoxically, in the context of the European Union and its expansion, the success of liberal democracy demands that the influence of certain communities dedicated to illiberal or anti-liberal and anti-democratic views not be tolerated.⁹ If the liberal principle of individual will and democratic consent is to remain politically viable, then its practical scope must be limited. Such limits, to be rightful, must be consistent with our nature and guaranteed by a political form committed to preserving them. Liberal democracy, rightly understood, requires that we recover a significant appreciation for the integrity and dignity of the body politic as the "indispensable framework" for protecting rights.¹⁰

But the very concept of the body politic has fallen into disrepute—when it is not simply being openly denounced—among progressively minded humanitarians and enlightened citizens of the world eager to transcend the destructive politics of our recent past and blindly hopeful that the restrictive bonds of society and political community can be escaped altogether. We must revive an appreciation of the political community *as a body* worth preserving. This idea of the body politic as a whole is not, however, identical to the whole which is an organism or an organic body to which each constituent part is entirely subordinate and instrumental (*organon*), and from which each part mechanically derives its function and purpose; rather, the body politic must be grasped as a whole whose constituent members are heterogeneous parts inextricably linked to and animated by the life and weal of the community to which they collectively belong, and from which each derives benefit and meaning through incorporation, without thereby losing the dignity that resides in particularity.¹¹

We turn to Shakespeare then as a source of education as well as entertainment, so that we may learn from his works about the nature and quality of our passions, our hopes and desires, our darker inclinations and elevating mind, indeed all of the manifold aspects of our human soul, writ large and embodied in his memorable characters. In his lines we recognize ourselves and we study what it means to be human. But we also propose a return to Shakespeare as one means to recover the importance of the idea of the body politic through the study of his representation in dramatic form and action of the virtues as well as the limits of government, of the necessity and inherent difficulties with reconciling individuals and their bodies with the good of a community, and of the place of bodies politic in the ambitious calculus of statesmen as well as the longing of human beings and citizens for completion and happiness. A close reading of Shakespeare as a source of political wis-

dom can help guide us in our reconsideration of contemporary attacks on the nation-state and our attempt to reflect on the body politic as an essential means for bringing into being the preconditions and framework required for healthy political life, including liberal democracy, to flourish.

THE BODY POLITIC IN THE CLASSICAL AND CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS

The history of political philosophy and political theory thrives on metaphor, as much as on discursive reasoning.¹² Within that history, a venerable tradition reaching back to the ancient past and Christian worlds surrounds the image or figure in speech of "the body politic." Contemporary efforts to uncover that tradition or Shakespeare's place in it must acknowledge the considerable debt owed to Ernst Kantorowicz's classic account of the meaning of this image in medieval political theology.¹³ Without entering into the scholarly debate over the merits of his thesis, it is sufficient for our purposes here to remark that Kantorowicz took hold of the thread in the middle, at a time when Christian kingship was central to European political development. But the origins of the body politic as a political metaphor can be traced to Greek and Roman political philosophers contemplating the unity of the ancient city-state with respect to its heterogeneous body of citizens. While later it is used as an image of social as well as political structures by drawing an analogy with the balance of natural elements or humors in a human body, the image of the body politic initially focused on the city-state as a corporate entity, and on the proper relationship of its parts to each other and to the whole, both structurally (or functionally) and in terms of health. Isocrates, in *Areopagiticus*, draws an analogy between the relationship of the body and soul, on one hand, and that of the city (*polis*) and its regime or way of life (*politeia*), on the other. The citizens are the members of the body politic, its constituent parts and their well-being depends upon the health of the whole, which in turn is judged according to the regime or constitution of the *polis* which animates the lives of the citizens.¹⁴ Plato, too, in his *Republic* (*Politeia*), not only spoke of the three distinct classes of citizens in the Just City as aspects of the soul (in the famous city-soul analogy), but also assigned them roles and virtues—based on the principle of specialization—corresponding to distinct parts of the body: the mind or head (philosopher-kings), the chest or heart (guardians), and the belly and limbs (craftsmen). Justice, the paramount political virtue, derives from the proper function of the parts working in harmony (*homonoia*) with each other for the good of the whole. Injustice arises when the parts of the body fail to perform their individual functions well or become disordered, introducing sickness or disease into an otherwise healthy and flourishing body politic.¹⁵

With the demise of the Greek *polis* after the conquests of Alexander, the idea of the body politic ceased having significant meaning. But it revived under the Roman Republic. Cicero, in his treatise *On Duties* (III.5), argued that each member of the body politic must be ruled by the laws which serve the good of the whole, for nature does not allow that a part of the body (that is, any citizen) gain genuine advantage or benefit individually either by weakening or despoiling the other parts (fellow citizens) or enfeebling the body politic as a whole. This, according to Cicero, is a law of nature and of nations, and the preservation of bodies natural and politic depends on it. Apart from this Roman republican version, the concept of the body politic found new life in the early Christian tradition, perhaps through the influence of the Stoics. Saint Paul explicitly described the baptized faithful as members of the Church gathered together severally and as one in the body of Christ, an organic vision of the whole unified by love (*1 Corinthians* 12:12-26; see *Romans* 12:1-5 and *Ephesians* 5:23). In the Pauline interpretation of the corporate body, as for Cicero, the members or parts should take care for one another and avoid all strife, lest even one member's suffering disturb the well-tempered order of the whole, leading to the harm of all. Saint Augustine, in *The City of God*, also stressed the Church as the body of Christ, the perfect whole in whom all the members or parts share in perfection, both individually and collectively (XXII.18). Both the city of God and the city of man are understood as bodies—one, spiritual and eternal; the other, temporal and politic (III.1). Medieval thinkers, such as Saint Thomas Aquinas, would later appropriate the image of the corporate body in discussing the relation of parts to each other and to the whole within both the body of Christ (*corpus Christi*) and the mystical body of the Church (*corpus Ecclesiae mysticum*), with Christ as the divine head.¹⁶

The restoration of the Ciceronian idea of the body politic occurred in the theoretical and practical treatments of the secular state by political thinkers like John of Salisbury (*Policraticus*, or *Book of the Statesman*, 1159), Marsilius of Padua (*Defensor Pacis*, or *Defender of the Peace*, 1324), Christine de Pizan (*Livre du corps de policie*, or *Book of the Body Politic*, written ca. 1405), and John Fortescue (*De Laudibus Legum Anglie*, or *A Learned Commendation of the Politique Lawes of England*, written ca. 1470, translated in 1567).¹⁷ John of Salisbury presents the commonwealth (*res publica*) as a hierarchically ordered body politic, wherein the king or prince is the head, subject only to God (*vicarius Dei*), that rules over subordinate groups within the citizen-body: the heart (senate), hands (tax collectors, soldiers), stomach (financial officers), and feet (farmers, laborers bound to the soil) of the realm. While subjects owe their lives and allegiance to the king, the head of the body politic aspires to be worthy of their true affection and support since he knows that the good of the whole cannot be achieved without the physical and spiritual unity of the members, who must be willing to expose them-

selves at times to danger in defense of the body—and especially the head.¹⁸ Pizan borrowed the metaphor directly from John, and followed his lead in assigning similar roles to the parts of the body politic.¹⁹ With one exception: whereas John made the clergy the “soul” of the state, Pizan secularized the state by demoting the clergy to the lower “limbs” of the body politic, with the commons who supplied necessities for the realm.²⁰ Fortescue, relying on a passage from Augustine, defined a kingdom as a body politic (*corpus politicum*) in which people collectively are united as a mystical body (*corpus mysticum*), with one person governing the whole as a head through laws that radiated out to the discrete parts, like nerves in a natural physical body.²¹ For Marsilius, however, who preferred to follow Aristotle’s newly discovered works of natural philosophy and physiology, the essential part of the natural body was the heart, not the head, a shift of emphasis that paralleled his elevation of secular over ecclesiastical authority.²² Whatever the differences in the details of the analogy, these writers agreed that the health of the body politic depended upon the mutual cooperation of the diverse parts within the whole. The question of form—city, nation, empire—is subordinated to an examination of inner relations and structure. Discord or “disease” among the several parts brings dissension, rebellion, and civil war. In working together for the good of the whole, the orderly and harmonious activity of the parts in accordance with their specific virtues constitutes justice, and consensus preserves the body politic whole.

Such theories of the body politic proliferated in Shakespeare’s own times, in the treatises of English commonwealthmen, like Thomas Starkey and Thomas Smith, and in the rhetoric of monarchs and their ministers. The trend later inspired Thomas Hobbes, who adopted the rhetoric of the “body politic” in his writings but approached his study of politics with a concern less for drawing out anatomical analogies with the body than for conducting a scientific autopsy of the material composition of our senses and faculties, and the impact of natural laws on establishing an “artificial Man” or State—although the visual image of the body politic strikingly persists in his memorable frontispiece for *Leviathan*.²³ But in the political writings of the sixteenth century, the analogy of the body politic was ubiquitous; indeed, it was arguably “the most frequently used metaphor for the state in early modern political discourse.”²⁴

Thomas Smith, in his *De Republica Anglorum* (written in 1565, published in four editions between 1583 and 1594), defended the prince or king as the life, the head, the authority, and the governor of the body politic. He further argued that only the phenomenon of prince-in-parliament represented “the whole head and bodie of the realme,” and that, in this incorporate state, the head best governed the other members of “the common wealth of the politique bodie of England” (II.1, 3-4). Citing Aristotle, “the prince of all philosophers,” Smith remarks that people become fully human only as “parts” of a

whole body politic, for while "a man doth shew him selfe most politique, yet can he not well live without the societie and fellowsip civill" (I.11). From this perspective, moreover, a significant portion of the prince's "subjects" could be rightly defined as "citizens" of the commonwealth.²⁵ In *A Dialogue between Pole and Lupset* (ca. 1530), the fullest expression of the republican view of a balanced constitution and limited monarchy, Starkey described the best form of government as one with its constituent parts so well arranged as to be able to remedy the diseases and decay to which every body, natural or politic, is prone.²⁶ Like Smith, Starkey saw government as a mixture or blend of political elements that, when properly ordered, resisted corruption and preserved the health of the body politic. His vision of the body politic emphasizes both the necessity for co-operation between the parts or members of the state and their mutual dependence.²⁷

Edward Forset, an apologist for divine monarchy and absolute state sovereignty, also discussed the analogy at great length in his *A Comparative Discourse of the Bodies Natural and Politique* (1606).²⁸ He likened the king in this work to both the head and the heart, as well as the soul, of the body politic, but nonetheless also stressed that consensus and concerted action of all members of the commonwealth preserved the health of the whole. As the primary physician of the realm, it was the sovereign who had to administer the laws and remedy any "maladies" that arose, even to the extent of severing or amputating a diseased limb, if necessary.²⁹ Yet even King Henry VIII himself (not to mention the prudent and less powerful Elizabeth or James) referred explicitly to his place within the whole in a way that implied certain limits on his prerogative as well as the participation of the incorporated parts in affairs of state: "We at no time stand so highly in our estate royal as in the time of parliament, wherein we as head and you [the Lords and the Commons] as members are conjoined and knit together in one body politic."³⁰

The age of Shakespeare, therefore, was ripe with discussion of the body politic as one of the most significant political metaphors for describing England's constitution and dissecting the constituent parts of the political community, both to diagnose its illnesses and to celebrate its corporate health as justice. The contribution of citizens, especially members of parliament and counselors to the crown, to the inner workings of a healthy body politic complicates the common portrait of Henrician and Elizabethan England as an absolute monarchy demanding strict order, the rule of law, and the utter subservience of subjects. In reality, this brief survey of its uses should suffice to show that political thought in Shakespeare's time had recourse to the image of the body politic as a means to explore republican principles and mixed government as well as to sustain or even re-conceive royal authority.³¹ Ministers and propagandists of monarchy and dissident reformers alike could, and did, call upon the metaphor of the body politic to bring their arguments to life before their readers. Their diverse formulations of the body

politic image in their writings were not merely rhetorical or literary devices, but real efforts to think through and study the nature of politics and political life, rationally and scientifically. As a playwright for the royal court as well as a popular dramatist, Shakespeare could hardly have been unaware of the political rhetoric and public significance of this pervasive figure of speech.

SHAKESPEARE'S ROME: A REPUBLICAN BODY POLITIC

Shakespeare preceded the emergence of the modern nation-state, but he nonetheless lived and wrote in an age when crumbling Christian feudalism and contesting empires had begun to radically unsettle traditional concepts of order and authority. Once regnant political, social, and religious jurisdictions could no longer stand unchallenged; emboldened by the promise of reason, natural science, and technology, new forms of government could be imagined. Modernity was on the horizon. Shakespeare's audiences, however, had not been fully exposed to the Enlightenment critiques that would lead to a rejection of classical antiquity as an adequate guide to the present. In the wake of the Italian Renaissance, and its recovery of ancient history, art, literature, and philosophy, Shakespeare could consider anew the political alternatives articulated by classical Greek and Roman authors, independently of the distorting lens of Christianity or the critical perspective of early modernity and Enlightenment science. In his plays and poetry, Shakespeare revived and brought on stage the ancient world, providing his audience and readers the chance to rediscover and reflect upon a classical understanding of politics. Among many themes that stand out in this regard, the idea and image of the body politic—a metaphor that resonated throughout the thought of his contemporaries—permeates and suffuses Shakespeare's works.

One particular expression of the image of the body politic occurs in the fable of the belly, the earliest form of which is attributable to Aesop, although it takes on fuller elaboration in the Roman historians, Livy and Dionysus of Halicarnassus, as well as Plutarch—all of which were available to Shakespeare.³² Forset's elaborate comparison of the natural human body and the body politic in his *Comparative Discourse* (1606) notably began with an exegesis of the fable of the belly as told in Plutarch's "Life of Coriolanus."³³ The image of the body politic and the fable both appear prominently in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (first performed between 1607 and 1609). Indeed, the language of the play is rife with references to parts of the human body, and more than a third of the speeches that refer to the body politic belong to Coriolanus himself.³⁴

Shakespeare's play about a man of outstanding martial valor, whose greatness threatens to destroy the very political community that made him great, opens with Rome on the cusp of civil war. Starved for food, political

influence, and honor, the hungry plebeians of Rome, on their march to the Capitol, pause to debate the merits of their decision to assault the Senate. Into this debate steps the patrician Menenius Agrippa, a senator friendly to the people, who is determined to soothe the passions of the citizens and pre-empt an uprising by persuading them their actions would bring harm to the commonwealth as a whole, and therewith to themselves. To this end, Menenius relates the fable of the belly, an analogy which relies explicitly upon the image of the body politic (*Coriolanus* I.i.95-103, 129-133, 147-153):³⁵

There was a time when all the body's members
 Rebelled against the belly; thus accused it:
 That only like a gulf it did remain
 I' th' midst o'th' body, idle and unactive,
 Still cupboarding the viand, never bearing
 Like labor with the rest, where th'other instruments
 Did see and hear, devise, instruct, walk, feel,
 And, mutually participate, did minister
 Unto the appetite and affection common
 Of the whole body. The belly answered—
 [...]

'True is it, my incorporate friends,' quoth he,
 'That I received the general food at first,
 Which you do live upon; and fit it is,
 Because I am the store-house and the shop
 Of the whole body.'
 [...]

The senators of Rome are this good belly,
 And you the mutinous members: for examine
 Their counsels and their cares, digest things rightly
 Touching the weal o'th'common, you shall find
 No public benefit which you receive
 But it proceeds or comes from them to you,
 And no way from yourselves.

For the citizens to take up arms against the Senate, in other words, is to wage war against that part of Rome that provides sustenance to the entire body politic. What is most striking about this speech of Menenius is the fact that, contrary to its sudden and successful effect in the narrative of Plutarch's "Life of Coriolanus" from which it is literally derived, it is so poorly received by the articulate citizens of Shakespeare's Roman Republic. Such a speech might be expected to gain traction with the citizens, if indeed Rome was perceived by them as a unified political body. But in Shakespeare's account, Rome is not such a community. The people have no voice of their own in the city, and they resist the appeal to unity that Menenius meant to inspire with his rhetorical reference to the body politic analogy.³⁶ The entry of Coriolanus only exacerbates tensions. Civil war is averted not by Menenius's attempt to

reconcile the parts of Rome with his reference to the body politic (as it does in Plutarch), but in spite of it. Conceding to the demands of the citizens to be formally incorporated into the body politic, the Senate allows the creation of a new institution and organ in the Roman Republic, the Tribunate, an office of strictly popular representation—the “mouth” of the people (III.i.35-38, see I.i.204-223). This innovation does nothing to unify the body politic of Rome, however; it only serves to entrench tumultuous conflict between patricians and plebeians more deeply in rival political institutions: the Consulate, supported by the Senate, and the Tribunate.

As a newly founded Republic, Rome is a body politic without a king. With the expulsion of the Tarquins, Rome lacks a single authoritative “head” to govern it. Even Menenius’s version of the fable leaves Rome with no sovereign head, contending instead that the body’s members rebelled against the belly. It is the First Citizen who mockingly interrupts Menenius to anticipate the belly’s “answer” to “the mutinous parts,” introducing a “kingly-crowned head,” vigilant eye, and trumpeting tongue as stock elements from the monarchical version of the body politic image (I.i.104-117). Menenius, trying to regain control of the figure in speech, allows for a “heart” and “brain” but insists that they, along with the rest of “the whole body,” receive nourishment from the “most grave,” “deliberate,” and “good” belly, that is, the Senate (I.i.118-128, 134-146).³⁷ Menenius’s image even ignores the role of the Consul in the play as leader, or head, of the Roman army on the battlefield.

Enter Coriolanus, who fills the void in Menenius’s body politic by acting, as if by natural right, as the *de facto* head of the army and of the Senate, and he contends vociferously with the newly instituted Tribunes of the People for this authority—thus dragging Rome back to the brink of civil war and destruction, either from within or at the hands of the foreign enemies gathered around Roman walls. We soon discover the connection between the deteriorating health of both the material and the political body of Rome (starvation and civil strife), with which the tragedy opens, and the particular Roman who is its subject, when we consider the fact that Rome cannot maintain that equilibrium and harmony of parts necessary to preserve the rule of law, order, and peace of the whole, unless the citizens exile Coriolanus, that “part” of Rome most akin to a royal head and so hostile to the Tribunate. Turning a deaf ear to Menenius’s dire warning that he not be sacrificed but healed—“Oh, he’s a limb that has but a Disease: / Mortal, to cut it off; to cure it, easier” (III.i.291-306)—the Tribunes whip up the ire of the people against their erstwhile hero, driving him from Rome. While most citizens know well that they owe him gratitude for the wounds that he acquired in their defense, they cannot stomach his proud virtue; when they do honor him, he refuses to play the one “part” in the Republic they have to offer (II.ii.143-147; see II.iii.117-131; cf. I.ix.36-40 and III.ii.101-125):

MENENIUS: Pray you, go fit you to the custom and
Take to you, as your predecessors have,
Your honour with your form.

CORIOLANUS: It is a part
That I shall blush in acting, and might well
Be taken from the people.

Thus, the "parts" of Rome remain at war and the whole body politic lacks consensus (*homonoia*), as long as Coriolanus still resides inside the walls.³⁸

Deprived of his outstanding martial virtue, the Roman Republic loses its great "arm" and "sword," and otherwise lacking a sovereign reason to command it, Rome must turn to the stern virtue and "brain" of Volumnia, Coriolanus's mother, in the grip of necessity—the assault upon Rome by the Volscians, led by Coriolanus himself. Fear quells the rancorous disputes between the parts of the body politic (Consul, Tribunes, Senate, Citizens) long enough for Volumnia, with her combination of "honor and policy," to win over her son, sparing Rome the destruction that he wished to inflict on his native city. In her moving speech before Coriolanus, Volumnia presents a variation on the body politic metaphor which brings him to his knees and sets a limit against his assertion of individual will. Aligning her spirited attachment to hearth and home with the defense of Rome itself, she denies that Coriolanus could be her son: no offspring of hers, she declares, would dare strike that body from which it was born and raised.³⁹

As Coriolanus owes filial piety to his mother because she gave birth to and raised him, both Volumnia and Coriolanus owe allegiance to Rome, which has created and formed them as citizens. Although Coriolanus confesses that, being "a dull actor," he has "forgot [his] part," Volumnia, like every true Roman, male or female, knows herself as "part" of Rome; she performs "the duty to which a mother's part belongs" in defending Rome as her own (V.iii.33-42, 94-168). Thus, while there is evident diversity in its parts, the Roman Republic is but one body politic: *Senatus Populusque Romanus*. By forcing Coriolanus to submit his virtue to filial duty and political limits, Volumnia seems to make it possible for the young Republic to mature, always faithful to its origins in the self-sacrifice of Lucrece.⁴⁰ Even the greatest part of Rome must acknowledge that there is an even greater whole that incorporates and binds it—that political community which not only defines us as citizens but also makes us distinctively human, and thus not beasts or gods.⁴¹

THE END OF SHAKESPEARE'S ROMAN BODY POLITIC

The women of Rome thus prove just as important to civic virtue and the preservation of the Republic as its men. But republicanism does not obscure the distinctions between the sexes. On the contrary, the failure to honor the natural differences between human beings constitutes the greatest sign of the Roman Republic's decay. This decay or corruption is perhaps clearest in *Antony and Cleopatra*. As the last vestiges of the Republic give way to a new empire, those boundaries that divided warring nations melt into insignificance.⁴² Long forgotten is Cleopatra's Greek heritage as are the foreign origins of Roman soldiers; there are only "Romans" and "Egyptians" now. And as the realm of Rome extends indefinitely in all directions, the distinctions that once supplied the classical world with order and meaning begin to dissolve: men don the habits of women, as women take up the arms of men; Romans become sensual Egyptians as Egyptians revive Roman nobility; the cause of republicanism gets sacrificed to the desire for individual revenge; and all ranks get leveled as children and adults become equal. What once supplied order and fixity gives way to a world that, like the Nile, is in constant flux. And as stars begin to fall on the classical world, the cosmic disorder forces human beings to search for a "new heaven and new earth" (*Antony and Cleopatra* I.i.10-17). Then again, Rome may always have been susceptible to decay. We recall that the body of Caesar, the man who would be Rome's "constant" northern star (*Julius Caesar* III.i.58-73)—the source of her "reviving blood" (II.ii.88) and the very heart of the world (III.i.208)—was itself plagued by a deteriorating constitution (I.ii.100-131, 12-24), known chiefly for its "falling sickness" (I.ii.54).

As rot begins to set into this body politic and disorder spreads, Rome as a "public thing" disappears from view; when Shakespeare does show us Rome in *Antony and Cleopatra* he does so in purely private settings. To the extent that Rome exists as a regime in this play, it is as a city defeated by its own success. Because the armies of the Republic piled up ever greater victories, Roman generals had to stay longer in the field to preserve their conquests, requiring them to fill out their ranks with foreigners loyal only to their generals, not the Eternal City. As the borders of the Empire grew, the Roman capacity for civic virtue dissipated. Instead of eliciting the devotion and energies of its citizens, Rome became the object of contestation over which its most powerful generals and their armies fought. Without any boundary on the pursuit of self-interest, it becomes impossible to distinguish Roman soldiers from pirates or friends from enemies. Public devotion fades as private loves and pleasures draw men out of an increasingly empty public square. Instead of pursuing deathless fame through glory or perpetuating themselves through children, pursuits inevitably mediated by a political community, the lovers Antony and Cleopatra envision personal immortality in an afterlife

where souls recline on flowers. At the dawn of an age of "universal peace," a world beyond politics beckons, tempting lovers to turn inward for the eternity that once had been "in [their] lips and eyes." While Shakespeare gives this turn from the public to the private, from the earthly to the spiritual, a distinctly Christian cast, it is difficult not to see *Antony and Cleopatra* as a play that anticipates difficulties raised by our own, often unacknowledged, political religions. The retreat from political life, the elevation of the individual and of individual desires, the spiritualization of our political concerns—all things that appear to characterize contemporary life in Europe and the West—we find dramatically displayed here. *Antony and Cleopatra* vividly portrays the political psychology at work in the pressing cultural, economic, and demographic challenges of our own times.

If Shakespeare's Rome can help us understand contemporary challenges to the European Union, then friends of liberal democracy everywhere may find reason to pause in the observation that the destruction of this body politic is completed in *Titus Andronicus*. There, the grisly fate of the Empire, now as much Gothic as Roman, comes to mirror the dismembered Lavinia whose Latin tongue has been seized by barbarians. For without her tongue, Lavinia cannot speak, crippling her ability to pursue justice against her violators and the means by which she can make her will known. Her loss of voice is thus emblematic of her rape: both diminish her sovereignty as an individual. To preserve the integrity of individual sovereignty and the possibility of self-rule one must preserve the distinctness of one's particular voice.

Lavinia's sad fate, however, is prepared by the refusal of her father, Titus Andronicus, to heed the voice of the people and accept their nomination for emperor. When his brother and Tribune, Marcus, announces to Titus ("gracious triumpher in the eyes of Rome") that "the people of Rome . . . name thee in election for the empire with these our late-deceased emperor's sons," Titus declines: "A better head her glorious body fits than his that shakes for age and feebleness," he proclaims, requesting instead "a staff of honour for mine age, but not a sceptre to control the world" (*Titus Andronicus* I.i.169-199). But Titus does "help to set a head on a headless Rome" by endorsing for rule the former emperor's son, Saturninus. Unfortunately for Titus and Lavinia, Saturninus is himself "won" and "ruled" by his new foreign bride, Tamora, queen of the Goths, herself now "incorporate in Rome" (I.i.433-466), and her Moorish lover. By failing to heed the voice of the people, Titus deprives his body politic of the Roman head it lacks and the domestic sovereignty it urgently needs.⁴³ Shakespeare's Roman works thus illustrate the dangers of failing to invest at least one part of the body politic with sovereignty; one needs to give a part of the community a voice that can speak for the whole and, in doing so, define, order, and preserve it.

Of course, at the end of the play, Rome does get the head it needs in the rule of Lucius Andronicus, the last living son of Titus. But to recover Rome

from the foreign influences that have sickened it, Lucius must march against the city at the head of an army of Goths loyal only to him. The final slaughter devised and executed by Titus purges the Roman body politic of its foreign diseases and releases the veiled (head-less) Lavinia from her "shame." On the advice of Marcus, tribune of the people, who teaches the Romans "how to knit again" Rome's "broken limbs again into one body," Lucius tells the sad tale that gave "our Rome" its "civil wound" and thereafter is acclaimed emperor by all (V.iii.26-146). But his ascent into the empty throne of Rome comes at a price—the sacrifice of a body politic no longer Roman, and thus not alive. It is fitting, and perhaps not unexpected, that a Republic born from the corpse of Lucrece, and then transformed into a corrupt empire of merely incorporate parts, should perish on a stage littered with dismembered and mutilated bodies. "To heal Rome's harms" by a "gracious governor," as Lucius desires, is as likely as to revive the lifeless corpse of a father or sister with a "cold" kiss. Lacking any integrity as a whole, Rome has performed a "shameful execution on herself."

SHAKESPEARE'S CHRISTIAN CITIES: PURGING THE BODY POLITIC

While the argument between Menenius and the First Citizen in *Coriolanus* may be "the most famous political confrontation in Shakespeare's works," other no less memorable scenes in many of the plays foreground devastating conflicts in politics—especially in Shakespeare's plays about Christian cities. Venice, Verona, and Vienna stand out as political communities filled with the promise of republican virtue and the rule of law, but ultimately plagued by political conflicts which threaten to corrupt and kill the body politic.

In the Venetian Republic, as it is depicted in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, the Duke rules with only limited sovereignty over a city whose economic health aims to incorporate "all nations." For the Duke to deny the law would be to "much impeach the justice of the state," since the established sanctity of contracts in Venice permits citizens and non-citizens, Christians and non-Christians, to prosper in trading with one another (III.iv.24-31). Liberalism's dream of human equality and religious toleration seems to be alive and well in Venice. Yet, as the Jewish money-lender, Shylock, makes clear in his angry speeches about Christian Venetians, there are limits to the unity implied in the metaphor of the body politic. On the one hand, we are all human beings who possess the same flesh, the same kinds of bodies and desires ("I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? . . . And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that"

[III.i.54-69]); on the other hand, as distinct "nations" or tribes, we have ways of life that cannot simply be reconciled ("I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you, walk with you, and so following, but I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you" [I.iii.33-35]). The play, in the end, reveals that even in the Republic of Venice, if not also in the enlightened monarchy of Belmont, citizenship in the body politic ultimately depends upon a unified vision of the good of the soul that governs the whole (see IV.i.344-398) while preserving the integrity of individual political bodies, thereby preventing our taking "a pound of flesh" from each other.

Even where citizens can agree upon such a good, as in Christian Verona, passions rooted in our physical nature resist and rebel against the strict rule of reason. Where the parts of the body politic have a will of their own and the authority of the head is in doubt—and the Prince in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is anything but "Sovereign" (V.iii.195)—harmony cannot exist. Here, unexamined attachments created by the pursuit of both honor and love breed insurrection and corruption in the citizens of the body politic (Prologue 1-4): "Two households, both alike in dignity, / In fair Verona, where we lay our scene, / From ancient grudge break to new mutiny, / Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean." When passion dominates, the whole inevitably collapses into warring parts, torn apart by *stasis*, or civil war, the most destructive of the diseases that can ravage a body politic (see Thucydides III.80-85, IV.46-48; cf. II.47-54).

Shakespeare, in *Measure for Measure*, seems to point the way towards an unintended side effect generated by an attempt to quell at least the illness of the body politic generated by an excessive love of honor. By the Duke's consent, it seems, the harsh laws in Vienna governing the passions have been set aside and the citizens therein (with the exception of a rare few, like Isabella and Angelo) have given themselves over entirely to decadent pursuits, rather than quarrel over matters of honor. License runs amok, and all seem content—or at least physically satisfied. But the "Duke of dark corners" sees the imperative to restore the rule of law and thus moves to restrain the parts from unrestrained indulgence of their passions. Whether the restoration of law and the Christian marriages he prescribes at the end of the play will finally be sufficient to remedy the citizen-body of its diseases, purging the body politic and restoring it to civic health, Shakespeare leaves an open question. Even if so, the continued presence of Lucio in their midst—and the fact that there may be no "physic" sufficient to remedy tyranny and pride, though Angelo and Isabella have been chastened—would suggest that the Duke, as the head and principal physician of the body politic, must remain vigilant in preserving the city. Justice cannot be measured out in due proportions to citizens without a judge with eyes to see and ears to hear where such treatments are needed, and when to temper the rule of law with mercy.

These particular Christian city-states of course do not exhaust Shakespeare's reflections on the prospects for the rule of law and republicanism as a viable political form, especially over against the claims of monarchy. But what we do see here is that, even in political communities where law rules or Christianity unites, the body politic stands in need of the head; the metaphor itself demands it. The perpetuation of a healthy republican body politic, in other words, would seem to require the identification of an authoritative, or ruling, element that is responsible for cleansing the illnesses to which citizens are inevitably prone. This observation about his plays immediately raises the stubborn scholarly question of Shakespeare's own political persuasion: Does he favor republicanism, in either its classical or Christian form, or monarchy?⁴⁴ Is the shared regime, or way of life, which unifies citizens and defines a republic even possible, once the modern nation-state comes into being? Is the national body politic, which emerged in Shakespeare's own time, an alternative to other forms of community—or does the modern nation-state propose to resolve the political problem which republics could not?

SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLAND: THE BODY POLITIC AS NATION-STATE

When we leave the problem of how to rule cities in the absence of a regime or way of life in Shakespeare, for his representations of the office of monarch in the early modern nation-state, we discover that the king's body literally and figuratively replaces the body politic as a community of citizens.⁴⁵ We also find that the personal virtue of honor, pursued by ambitious and great individuals, supplants the concept of public civic-spiritedness and the republican spirit.

From *King Lear* to *Henry VIII*, Shakespeare's histories chart the emergence of a British national body politic through the evolution of the monarchy and the king's efforts to perpetuate his power and his line. Indeed, there is no theme in Shakespeare's British histories more fundamental or more persistent than the status of the monarchy—of who will rightfully succeed a king, and of the consequences for England when the matter of succession is left open to question. "Who should rule?" and "On what basis should he do so?" are two of the central questions animating Shakespeare's histories. Thus in *Henry VIII*, an apparent conclusion to Shakespeare's history of Britain and a fitting book-end along with *King Lear*, we are presented with a possible solution to the problems facing all of Shakespeare's English monarchs. In this play, we see a king like Lear who has no male heirs but multiple daughters, and who contrives to give his crown to the youngest child, arguably the one whose rightful claim to the throne is most open to question. And yet, within *Henry VIII*, we learn that the passing of the kingdom from father to

daughter, to Elizabeth I (herself unmarried and childless), neither produces a divided body politic nor leads to civil war; this succession promises an era of power, stability, and prosperity the likes of which England had never before seen.

Henry VIII's success here is predicated on his re-articulation of the parts of the British political order, one that finally liberates the grounds of royal authority from religious sanction and substantially frees the crown from the Church's interference. Thus, the divine balm that consecrated Richard II's rule and was thought (by some) to preserve "the king's body" was never actually bestowed upon the "Virgin Queen" by the Archbishop of Canterbury during her baptism at the end of the play. It is her father as king who assumes the priestly duties, blessing his daughter and uttering what could be called the ceremony's only prayer; Archbishop Cranmer merely stands by as "god-father" and, recalling Rome's soothsayers, offers a prophecy about the future Queen, "the maiden phoenix," and her glorious reign (*Henry VIII* V.iii.159-162, V.v.15-63). This ending thus is emblematic of Henry VIII's assault on the Church, which prepared the way for the reign of Elizabeth, who through the office of monarch will—like the legendary phoenix—regenerate *its own authority* in a virgin-born successor absent any divine imprimatur.

To be sure, the blessings Cranmer foresees for Elizabeth I, James I, and England are not achieved by Henry VIII alone. Rather, they are made possible by nearly a millennium of political developments upon the "scepter'd isle," the historical arc and discernible trajectory of which are depicted in Shakespeare's British histories. Henry VIII's England is inconceivable without both the republicanism and the imperialism of Rome, which itself prepared the way for Christianity. Republican virtues of lawfulness, civic pride, and patriotism made it possible for these rough islanders to exchange their servitude for political freedom, while the Christian virtues of humility, charity and forgiveness, in turn, offered to refine the barbarous habits of a pagan people and soften the more manly virtues of ancient republics. Thus the British were given the tools to assert their political freedom under the law and to restrain assertions that threatened to undermine the peace and order of civic life. Yet the triumphant ascendancy of the rule of law and a republican spirit were inhibited by the existence—peculiar to Britain—of the independent centers of power (commercial guilds, feudal lords, merchants, and townships) that resisted the submission to central authority and had other claims on the allegiance of subjects.⁴⁶ The obedience of the people to feudal lords was further reinforced by the pacific morality of the universal Church. Indeed, as the mediator of the "divine right" supporting the crown and political authority, the Church required its believers to obey and preserve the body of the king, even as it reserved to itself the right to interfere with the affairs of such a sovereign. It was this contest over sovereignty—who would be "under heaven, supreme head" of England—that King John waged and ultimately

lost. This contest was rejoined by the noble Bolingbroke who, ostensibly to save England from the feckless rule of Richard II (and later consolidate his own hold on the throne), deposed the king, usurped the crown, and eliminated the Archbishop of York. To preserve a rule obtained in this way, however, required that the legitimate basis of monarchical rule be re-founded. Instead of divine imprimatur, Henry IV rooted the dignity of the crown in a display of political virtue derived from nature and cunning.

Bolingbroke's usurpation, whether he intended it or not, also required a fundamental re-orientation in the political awareness of his subjects, from seeing themselves as Christians who happen to live in Britain to understanding themselves to be members of the British body politic who also happen to be Christian. This change is facilitated by the career of King Henry V, one that culminates in the fantastic victory of the vastly outnumbered British forces over the Catholic French at Agincourt. Although Henry V is careful to give credit for the victory to God, he also promises his men an immortal glory for their efforts, knowing full well that his own name will be forever attached to St. Crispin's Day. So impressive was Henry's victory over the French, and so critical was it to British national identity, that nearly thirty years after his untimely death, during the reign of his son, Henry VI, the English nobility could, through the mere invocation of his glorious memory, disperse the Jack Cade-led rebels who had already sacked London (2 *Henry VI* IV.viii.11-18, 34-37). Henry V thus takes on a rule which, under his father, had necessarily been rooted in secular authority and through his own seemingly miraculous victory in France invests it with the blessings of Providence. This is not a return to the rule of Richard II; the British nation and the king who is its sovereign head do not owe their victory—and thus their legitimacy—to divine sanction. On the contrary, their victory and their legitimacy is rather evidence of their providential character. A victory symbolizing the birth of the British nation and anticipating the phoenix-like rule of Elizabeth is predicated upon the fact that the English, Welsh, Irish, and Scottish parts of the British empire in fact share a common (or nearly common) language. By establishing national identity as the primary source of political identification—over against feudal attachments and religious commitments—the career of Henry V prepares the way for the rule of Elizabeth I to enforce religious toleration and to demolish the custom of inheritance as the highway to greatness. Of course, while certain national similarities made it possible for Henry V to forge a new political body, the divisions between men (like those between the French and British) also impose important limitations on Henry's ambitions, with respect to his union with Katherine of Valois,⁴⁷ his hold on France, and his grander imperialist designs.

The history plays of Shakespeare remind us that military victory, no matter how complete or spectacular, cannot by itself eliminate the divisions in the nobility that threaten the kingdom. The radical solution to the problem

of the instability of monarchy that Henry IV envisioned is inconceivable without a diminished Church and a significantly reduced nobility. In his portrayal of the War of the Roses in the three parts of *Henry VI* and in *Richard III*, Shakespeare vividly depicts both: a nobility gutted by years of internecine warfare and a Church whose weakness and corruption discredit it in the eyes of the nation. Thus by the time he ascends to the throne, Henry VIII steps onto a playing field more amenable to his designs and those of his predecessors. In securing his divorce from Katherine of Aragon and in replacing the Catholic Wolsey with the Anglican Cranmer, Henry VIII achieves what had eluded the British kings from Lear to Richard III: he arrogates to himself the right to determine both his own lawful heir and the religious hierarchy in England, and he does so without earning the reputation for tyranny or laying the grounds for incessant civil war. Finally, by abolishing "blood" as the means to greatness, the rule of Elizabeth I will produce a fundamental change in the civic loyalty of the British people; no longer will they honor the body of the king, but the *office* of the monarchy, the zenith of their constitutional order. The allegiances once demanded by a particular king and the factionalism that such allegiances generated dissolve as the British people unite to support by consensus a public office that is the image of their national body politic.

We need not be concerned with the fact that Shakespeare knew well the turbulent history of the rule of Elizabeth I and James I; that religious toleration came at a high price for Catholics and Protestants alike; and that Cranmer's prophecies uttered at the end of the play may be little more than stories to please the women, as the Epilogue to *Henry VIII* implies. There are no kings in Shakespeare who embody all the virtues one might wish for in a monarch. And whether it is the history of *Henry VIII*, or perhaps the tragedy of *Hamlet*, which finally provides readers with Shakespeare's most complete account of the political problem that faces all of the monarchs in his British histories and that confronts all of the dukes or princes of the other political orders in his other plays, we can at least say that the manner in which that political problem is addressed by Shakespeare casts doubt on the ability of any regime or statesman to sufficiently combine the virtues of classical republicanism with Christian morality in a healthy body politic.

CONCLUSION

One might ask (and many have) which regime or political order Shakespeare thought best or most fitting. The answer still eludes his readers. Shakespeare, in and through his plays, seems rather to be engaged in a kind of comparative political theory which cannot easily be reduced to a practical solution to perennial political problems. The action of each play has an argument, and an

argument which at least in part is profoundly concerned with political problems or questions. The arguments of the plays, then, as parts of a single body of work (a *corpus*)—insofar as that body can or should be taken as a whole—are in an important sense in dialogue with one another. In his plays, Shakespeare studies politics and even offers subtle commentary on political forms and attempts by various regimes and statesmen to answer the questions or resolve the problems associated with politics. But while he is clearly attentive to these perennial questions and problems, he refrains from passing judgment on the regimes and statesmen he depicts for us; he forgoes the temptation to issue prescriptive remedies of his own. In all of his plays, the audience or reader is invited “to sit in judgment on the action as it takes place.”⁴⁸ The perspective of Shakespeare is a genuinely philosophic one, which takes its bearings from an experience of politics that is familiar—or at least available—to us all.

In reflecting on Shakespeare's meditation on the particular image of the body politic as a paradigmatic political metaphor, we can at least conclude this much: that one must keep in mind the conditions under which a body politic can be made whole; that the constitution of any formal commonwealth requires a self-conscious articulation of the body politic—of how parts relate to the whole—and that this articulation could not happen without the parts themselves being aware, in some sense, of their partial character within the whole political order. In other words, the parts which seem to be so much trouble to the unification of the body politic themselves play an indispensable role in its attainment. Shakespeare's plays put this insight into relief insofar as they have as their backdrop communities with multiple social orders, communities that are thus more likely to understand the need for constitutionalism without requiring a written constitution (perhaps one reason why Shakespeare never shows us Runnymede in his *King John*). By being aware of their particular status in the whole, these subordinate components—citizens or subjects, plebeians or patricians, nobles and kings—are made aware of the need to constitute an order or whole that transcends partiality. Because the various members of a political community must not simply confuse their partial view of justice for the whole of justice, and hence the good of the whole, the need for the consent of those members as well as their participation becomes suddenly more evident. In Shakespeare's dramatic representations, the urgency of consent always emerges within a complex array of pre-existing cultural, religious and social conditions, conditions that allow not only for the granting of consent, but also for the securing of rights within a defensible political framework.

Such preconditions of course are inevitably embedded in discrete political communities: Shakespeare's Rome rather than Corioles or Egypt; Venice or Vienna, rather than Belmont or the Turkish empire; Britain rather than France. Thus, as Shakespeare's works make clear, it is the constituent parts

of these communities that must grant consent, exercise and enjoy their rights, and participate in the whole within the limitations that are always circumscribed by political boundaries and borders. Citizens of liberal democracies who cherish the principle of consent and who find this principle increasingly threatened by its most zealous advocates as well as by its opponents would do well to hearken to Shakespeare's timeless and timely wisdom with respect to the seminal image of the Body Politic. Reading Shakespeare, in other words, is essential not only to liberal education but also to an education in liberal politics.

NOTES

This chapter is expanded and revised from an article published in the journal *Perspectives on Political Science*: "Shakespeare, the Body Politic, and Liberal Democracy," by Bernard J. Dobski and Dustin A. Gish (Vol. 41, Issue 4, 2012); *Perspectives on Political Science* is available online at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10457097.2012.713260>. Portions of that article are reprinted here by permission of Taylor & Francis (<http://www.tandfonline.com>).

1. See Harry Jaffa, "The Limits of Politics: An Interpretation of *King Lear*, Act I, Scene i," *American Political Science Review* 51/2 (1957), 405-427; Allan Bloom, "Cosmopolitan Man and the Political Community," *American Political Science Review* 54/1 (1960), 130-157; cf. Sigurd Burkhardt, "English Bards and APSR Reviewers," *American Political Science Review* 54/1 (1960), 158-166, esp. 158: "A new school of Shakespeare criticism may be in the making . . . [which] one should like to welcome." See also Allan Bloom, "Political Philosophy and Poetry" and "A Restatement," *American Political Science Review* 54/2 (1960), 457-464 and 471-473. The two essays were republished in Allan Bloom, with Harry Jaffa, *Shakespeare's Politics* (Basic Books, 1964; University of Chicago Press, 1986).

2. See, e.g., Howard White, *Copp'd Hills toward Heaven: Shakespeare and the Classical Polity* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1970); Michael Platt, *Rome and Romans according to Shakespeare* (Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1976); Paul Cantor, *Shakespeare's Rome: Republic and Empire* (Cornell University Press, 1976); John Alvis and Thomas West, eds., *Shakespeare as Political Thinker* (Carolina Academic Press, 1981; ISI Books, 2000); Jan Blits, *The End of the Ancient Republic: Shakespeare's Julius Caesar* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1993); John Alvis, *Shakespeare's Understanding of Honor* (Carolina Academic Press, 1990); Joseph Alulis and Vickie Sullivan, eds., *Shakespeare's Political Pageant: Essays in Literature and Politics* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1996); David Lowenthal, *Shakespeare and the Good Life: Ethics and Politics in Dramatic Form* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1997); George Anastaplo, *Law & Literature and Shakespeare*, Special Issue of *Oklahoma City University Law Review* 26/1 (2001); Leon H. Craig, *Of Philosophers and Kings: Political Philosophy in Shakespeare's Macbeth and King Lear* (University of Toronto Press, 2001); Timothy Spiekerman, *Shakespeare's Political Realism: The English History Plays* (SUNY Press, 2001); Mary Ann McGrail, *Tyranny in Shakespeare* (Lexington Books, 2002); Steven Smith and Travis Curtright, eds., *Shakespeare's Last Plays: Essays in Literature and Politics* (Lexington Books, 2002); Robert Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); John Murley and Sean Sutton, eds., *Perspectives on Politics in Shakespeare* (Lexington Books, 2006); and, most recently, Bernard J. Dobski and Dustin A. Gish, eds., *Souls with Longing: Representations of Honor and Love in Shakespeare* (Lexington Books, 2011).

3. While a few scholars have studied the concept of sovereignty in Shakespeare through the image in speech of the body politic, none have sought to think through the significance of the image in its detail to contemporary politics: see David Hale, *The Body Politic: A Political Metaphor in Renaissance English Literature* (Mouton, 1971); see also Andrew Hadfield,

Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics (Arden Shakespeare, 2004) and *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

4. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (University of Oklahoma, 1993).

5. See Pierre Manent: "The Wars of the Twentieth Century," *Perspectives on Political Science* 31/3 (2002), 139-147; "Autumn of Nations," *Azure* 16 (2004); *Democracy without Nations? The Fate of Self-Government in Europe*, trans. Paul Seaton (ISI Books, 2007; originally published 2006); and *A World beyond Politics? A Defense of the Nation-State*, trans. Marc Le Pain (Princeton University Press, 2006; originally published, 2001); Daniel Mahoney, *De Gaulle: Statesmanship, Grandeur, and Modern Democracy* (Praeger, 1996); and Marc Plattner, "From Liberalism to Liberal Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 10/3 (1999), 121-134; "Sovereignty and Democracy," *Policy Review* 122 (2003).

6. Manent 2006, 136-140.

7. Aristotle, *Politics* VIII.1.4, 1337a27-30. The best account of the problem of individualism in a modern democratic context remains Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*.

8. See esp. John Ruggie, "Territoriality and Beyond: Problematising Modernity in International Relations," *International Organization* 47/1 (1993), 139-174, 140; see also, more recently, Hent Kalmo and Quentin Skinner, *Sovereignty in Fragments: The Past, Present, and Future of a Contested Concept* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

9. See Christopher Caldwell, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam and the West* (Doubleday, 2009).

10. See Plattner 2003; Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 76/6 (1997), 22-43.

11. On the critical difference between a body and an organism, see Manent 2006, 136: "But a body is more than an organism. In a body, the whole is present in each part; the same life animates each part because it animates the whole. This is the most significant aspect of the notion, much more than potential subordination among the parts or of the parts to the whole."

12. See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (University of Chicago, 1980).

13. See Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton University Press, 1957); cf. David Northbrook, "The Emperor's New Body? Richard II, Ernst Kantorowicz, and the Politics of Shakespeare Criticism," *Textual Practice* 10/2 (1996), 329-357. See also Albert Rolls, *The Theory of the King's Two Bodies in the Age of Shakespeare* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2000).

14. See "Areopagiticus," §14, in *Isocrates I*, trans. David Mirhady and Yun Lee Too (University of Texas Press, 2000), 182-200, 186.

15. Aristotle reiterates this image of the body politic, with the *polis* presented as a macrocosm of a human being or a natural organism, in his *Politics* (I.2.13, 1253a20-25) and *On the Motion of Animals* (703a30ff.). On the classical background of the body politic, see Hale 1971, 18-24.

16. Hale (1971, 35-39) cites Aquinas's *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard* (ca. 1255), Pope Boniface VIII's *Unam Sanctum* (1302), and Dante's *De Monarchia* (ca. 1312).

17. On the use of the body politic as the paradigmatic metaphor in their discussions of politics, see esp. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* V.2; Christine de Pizan, *Book of the Body Politic* I.1-2, II.1, III.1; see also Hale 1971, 39-47.

18. See *Policraticus* V-VI, esp. VI.20 (p. 126): "The health of the whole republic will only be secure and splendid if the superior members devote themselves to the inferiors and if the inferiors respond likewise to the legal rights of their superiors, so that each individual may be likened to a part of the others reciprocally and each believes what is to his own advantage to be determined by that which he recognizes to be most useful to others." See also Cary Nederman, "The Physiological Significance of the Organic Metaphor in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*," *History of Political Thought* 8/2 (1987), 211-223.

19. Pizan literally derives her title, theme, and opening chapter from John of Salisbury's elaborate description of the polity as a human body: see "Introduction," in Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*, ed. Kate Forhan (Cambridge University Press, 1994), xx. John declares, and Pizan accepts, that the metaphor of the body politic originated in antiquity in a

letter written by Plutarch to the Roman Emperor, Trajan. Most scholars today, however, think that the elaborate metaphor belongs to John and that the letter was a useful fiction created to cover his own novel views in the dignity of ancient garb. See "Introduction," in John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, ed. Cary Nederman (Cambridge University Press, 1990), xxi.

20. See *Book of the Body Politic* III.4; Forhan 1994, xxii-xxiii.

21. Hale 1971, 45-47.

22. See Takashi Shogimen, "'Head or Heart?' Revisited: Physiology and Political Thought in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries," *History of Political Thought* 28/2 (2007), 208-229.

23. See especially the first two sections of Hobbes's monumental work, *Elements of Philosophy*, and Part One of *Leviathan*, as well as his *De Corpore Politico*, "On the Body Politic," Part Two of his *Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*. Hobbes introduces *Leviathan* with reference to the bringing into being of the Sovereign or State as "an artificial man, though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defence it was intended; and in which the 'sovereignty' is an artificial 'soul,' as giving life and motion to the whole body; the 'magistrates' and other 'officers' of judicature and execution, artificial 'joints'; 'reward' and 'punishment,' by which fastened to the seat of the sovereignty every joint and member is moved to perform his duty, are the 'nerves,' that do the same in the body natural; . . . 'equity' and 'laws,' an artificial 'reason' and 'will'; 'concord,' 'health'; 'sedition,' 'sickness'; and 'civil war,' 'death.'" See also Hadfield 2004, 174: "Thomas Starkey, for example, saw the body as the people, very much as the state is portrayed as a giant body in the famous frontispiece to Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651). Whereas Hobbes saw the king as the head of state, Starkey argued that the soul ruled the body and that the soul stood for civic law."

24. Hadfield 2004, 131, 173. See Hale 1971, *passim*.

25. See Markku Peltonen, "Citizenship and Republicanism in Elizabethan England," in *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, eds. Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge University Press, 2002), I: 85-106.

26. Smith and Starkey, like John of Salisbury and Marsilius, employ the body politic metaphor in diagnostic as well as physiological accounts of government, arguing that, like the human body, mixed government is protean and subject to changing internal and external conditions which can lead to corruption and a revolution of form. On the related medical and political implications of the body politic metaphor, see Nederman 1987; Shogimen 2007.

27. Hadfield 2004, 175.

28. Hale 1971, 84-85, 90-92; Hadfield 2004, 4-5.

29. Kenneth Muir, "The Background of *Coriolanus*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 10/2 (1959), 137-145, esp. 141-144.

30. Henry VIII, Address to Parliament, Act 24, 1543. Cromwell's Preamble to an *Act Concerning Peter's Pence and Dispensations*, 1534, also imputed lawmaking power to the combined body of king, nobles, and commons, above all other authority (in particular the outside authority of the Pope in Rome): "It stands therefore with natural equity and good reason that . . . your Royal Majesty and your Lords spiritual and temporal and commons, representing the whole state of your realm in this your most high court of parliament, have full power and authority to dispense . . . with those and all other human laws of this your realm . . . as it shall seem unto your Majesty and the commons of your realm meet and convenient for the wealth of your realm." See J. Patrick Coby, *Thomas Cromwell: Machiavellian Statecraft and the English Reformation* (Lexington Books, 2009), 15-16, 98-104. On James I's reading of the body politic analogy in his treatise, *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (1598), see Hadfield 2004, 176.

31. See Markku Peltonen, *Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought, 1570-1640* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. 1-17.

32. Hale 1971, 92-93: "The fables of Aesop were quite popular in the sixteenth century . . . The first printed edition of Aesop in England was William Caxton's translation, printed at Westminster in 1484. . . . The fable gained fresh circulation through the publication of Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives* (1579) and Philemon Holland's rendering of Livy (1600)."

33. Christine de Pizan also repeats at length the fable of the belly at the beginning of her treatment of the role played by the commons in the body politic (*Book of the Body Politic* III.1).

34. See esp. Hale 1971, 96-107; Andrew Gurr, "'Coriolanus' and the Body Politic," *Shakespeare Survey* 28 (1975), 63-69. See also David Hale, "Coriolanus: The Death of a Political Metaphor," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 22/3 (1971a), 197-202, 199. See also Hadfield 2004, 170: "[T]he play that demonstrates the most sustained interest in political institutions and processes is *Coriolanus* . . . a work that has always divided critics concerned to establish Shakespeare's political persuasions."

35. Citations are from *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, edited by David Bevington (Pearson Longman, 2009, Sixth Edition).

36. Menenius likens the people to "discontented members" and "mutinous parts," and derides the First Citizen as "the great toe of this assembly" of people; Coriolanus contemptuously dismisses the "rabble" as mere "fragments" (*Cor.* I.i.103-112, 153-162, 218-221).

37. Thus, the body politic analogy in the play—as in Shakespeare's time—can be used for different purposes and is subject to opposing interpretations. See Hadfield 2004, 173-176.

38. Coriolanus's anger forces the "parts" of Rome to the brink of civil war (III.1.60-259); he cannot be reconciled with the other parts. See Hale 1971a, 199, 201: "Gratitude for Coriolanus' services as 'the arm our soldier' is part of their obligation as members of the body of the state. Such gratitude might be said to contribute to the spiritual unity, the *homonoia*, of the city, the soul which animates the body politic. . . . [But Coriolanus] is not a political animal; his aristocratic nature does not permit him to think of himself as a member of the body of the city."

39. See Hale 1971a, 202: "With the exception of Volumnia's line that her son is 'tearing / His country's bowels out' (V.iii.100-101), the imagery of the body politic disappears in the fourth and fifth acts."

40. "Volumnia's speech and her son's submission to its cogent rhetoric rest upon a concealed and unexamined assumption. So compelled are they both by this assumption, that it can be said to have the force of constitutional law in the Rome of Coriolanus. Their agreement rests upon the assumption that what most reveals the nature of a thing is not so much what it aims at but what its origin is . . . Put more abstractly, origin is higher than end (understood as aim or [*telos*])." See Platt 1976, 122.

41. In the end, Coriolanus saves Rome (as he has before) by being willing to sacrifice himself, and for his "part" he knows he can never return: V.iii.182-202.

42. See Cantor 1976; Jan Blits, *New Heaven, New Earth: Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra* (Lexington Books, 2010).

43. The plebs in *Coriolanus* learn that the political principle of representation is no substitute for sovereignty; through the Tribunate they surrendered their voices to those who would speak for them. By the time of *Caesar*, the tribunes themselves have been silenced by a man who would make himself the head of Rome.

44. Hadfield 2004, 31-32: "The question which needs to be asked [about Shakespeare's representation of monarchy and classical republicanism] is: does Shakespeare represent historically or geographically different forms of government in such a way as to suggest that they offer benefits that are not experienced by the inhabitants of England living under a hereditary monarchy? His works certainly demonstrate an interest in a variety of systems of government, even if they do not necessarily represent all of them with obvious approval. . . . Shakespeare of course was not alone in employing foreign settings in his plays and relating them to contemporary England. . . . No other contemporary dramatist, however, explored the meaning and significance of such a wide variety of political and social systems, or established such a carefully nuanced relationship between examining alternative constitutions in their own right, and reading them in terms of English or British politics."

45. See Kantorowicz 1957; cf. Lorna Hutson, "Not the King's Two Bodies: Reading the 'Body Politic' in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*," in *Rhetoric and Law in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Victoria Kahn and Lorna Hutson (Yale University Press, 2001), 166-198.

46. See Winston Churchill, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples, Vol. I: The Birth of Britain* (Dodd, Mead & Company, 1956). On the virtues of reading Shakespeare as a guide to British history, note Churchill's remark that Shakespeare's "magic finger touches in succession most of the peaks of English history and lights them with the sunrise so that all can see them standing out above the mountainous disorder." *Churchill By Himself: The Definitive Collection of Quotations*, ed. Richard Langworth (Public Affairs, 2008), 60-61. See also Alvis 1990.

47. It is all-too-fitting that when we first see her (*Henry V* III.iv), Princess Katherine is learning the English names for the parts of her body. As a woman who we know will become Henry V's queen, Katherine's practice here suggests to us that the means to political union (that is, sharing a common language) requires us first to identify and then translate those things that are closest to us and distinctly ours that we also happen to share in common with others. That Katherine's malapropisms resemble French profanities, bringing her lesson to a premature end, suggests that there are yet limits even to this approach to political communion.

48. Hadfield 2004, 30.