Falstaff’s Body, the Body Politic, and the Body of Trade

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The metaphor of the body was at the heart of the symbolic order in early modern England; it forged a language of intersubjectivity that enabled people to see the concrete particulars of experience and the sacrifices and pleasures of everyday life as part of a social totality. Using Falstaff’s comic paean to sack in act 4, scene 2, of Henry IV, Part Two as a focal point, this essay argues that the debauched knight calls somatic theories of society into question. Examining metaphors of the body of trade and the body politic, the essay places Falstaff in the context of global trade and argues that his body is a synecdoche for the marketplace.

KEYWORDS body, Falstaff, marketplace, pleasure, private, Shakespeare, totality, trade

In early modern societies, the image of the body was an indispensable tool for establishing many different — often competing — models of unequal, interdependent relationships among the social classes. Political unity required that the prince be the “head,” a representative of God and the embodiment of reason, and that his subjects be ranged downward in a set of hierarchical relationships based on a principle of absolute order. Modeled on the regulation of the body natural, the order of the body politic proscribed a variety of pleasures. The pleasure-seeking body, Edward Forset warned soon after the Gunpowder Plot, must be controlled by the head because the body is so often “consumed with ease and voluptuousness, or eaten into with the rust of a revolting disobedience” (44). For the corpus economicum to remain cohesive, private pleasure and private profit must remain subordinate to the public good, the collective health of society. The metaphor of the body was at the heart of the symbolic order: it forged a language of intersubjectivity and defined the roles and duties of people from the king to the lowliest subject, the head to the toe. Thus it enabled people to see the concrete particulars of experience, the sacrifices and pleasures of everyday life, as part of an abstract social totality. These models of collective
social organization provided ethical guidance in economic transactions, and in doing so placed restrictions on social interactions and the experience of pleasure.  

In *Henry IV, Part Two*, Falstaff presents a remarkable comic paean to sack that calls these somatic theories of social totality into question. The passage builds on an earlier quip directed at Bardolph, who is given the mock-chivalric title “the Knight of the Burning Lamp.” When it comes to his own body, Falstaff is more generous. Sherry, he says, circulates in his blood, leaving an entire population ready for battle:

> It illumineth the face, which, as a beacon, gives warning to all the rest of this little kingdom, man, to arm; and then the vital commoners and inland petty spirits muster me all to their captain, the heart; who, great and puffed up with this retinue, doth any deed of courage; and this valour comes of sherry. So that skill in the weapon is nothing without sack, for that sets it a-work; and learning a mere hoard of gold kept by a devil, till sack commences it and sets it in act and use.  4.2.103–122

Falstaff’s unorthodox *corpus politicum* confounds an audience’s sober-blooded expectations: the work of the battlefield overlaps the pleasure of the tavern, sherry inspires valor instead of sloth, and learning, like gold circulating in the *corpus economicum*, is set “in act and use.” Falstaff counters the austerity of the symbolic order with the enjoyment of the imaginary. His images and metaphors, the “delectable shapes” of the mind, he tells us, are the product of personal, bodily pleasure, the consumption of sack. Indeed, Falstaff mocks the very idea of a social totality by conflating his own pleasure-seeking body with the body politic. As Todd McGowan argues, the sense of the “whole,” the unified social body in the symbolic order, depends upon prohibition, the experience of the Lack that creates social bonds (11–40). In *Henry IV, Part One* this is evident as early as Bolingbroke’s opening speech, which posits a war against the infidel as the antidote to the fragmentation of civil war: he wants to see the English, “all of one nature, of one substance bred,” “march all one way” (1.1.11, 15) to the Holy Land. The imaginary, understood as the domain of images that offers enjoyment within the symbolic order’s established reality, is more suitable to Falstaff. He demonstrates that the body politic can potentially deviate from, rather than merely confirm, the entrenched norms of analogical order.

Falstaff embodies the unproductive sensual pleasures that corporeal metaphors sought to regulate, if not eliminate. According to the topsy-turvy logic of this “reverend vice,” drunkenness is a sign of mental vigor and “inflammation” a symptom not of sickness but vitality. Pleasure, the prime mover in Falstaff’s microcosmic body, is the source of virtuous husbandry and heroic endeavors. This comic strategy butts heads with the logic of collective social organization at a time when pleasure and virtue were typically placed in opposing, hostile camps.

Puritans were the most notorious advocates of discipline and productivity, but they were hardly alone. Those who found themselves “sleeping upon benches after noon,” or otherwise enjoying a Falstaffian existence, might well have been urged to heed
the admonitions of humanists, mercantilists, and Protestant reformers. The Puritan William Perkins offers us a fine example of the stern morality that accompanied the expansion of the market economy: Christians, he says, “may not live idly, and give ourselves to riot and gaming, but labour to serve God and our country, in some profitable course of life” (quoted in Todd, 148). As an ethos of industry and thrift gained force in the sixteenth century, those pursuing more unproductive pleasures were keenly aware of the heightened scrutiny.

Falstaff’s body, a synecdoche for the marketplace, resonates with the Elizabethan experience of “pleasure fairs” in towns like Smithfield or Manningtree, where eating, sex, and theater often took place alongside trade, hucksterism, and theft. Hal describes Falstaff as a “roasted Manningtree Ox with the pudding in his belly” (1HIV 2.4.436) and as the “Bartholomew boar-pig” (2HIV 2.4.228–29), a likely model for Ben Jonson’s Ursula, the “World, in a fair.” In addition to the topographical realism of these references to localized market exchanges, we find a more global sense of space. Mistress Quickly, for example, sees “a whole merchant’s venture of Bordeaux stuff in him” (2HIV 2.4.63–64) and Hal calls him “a globe of sinful continents” (2HIV 2.4.283). Thus Falstaff offers us the local and the global, the physical and the metaphysical. The first section of this essay argues that Falstaff’s parody of abstract social totalities is inspired by his commitment to convivium and the concrete pleasures and exchanges of the marketplace. Hal falls back on a traditional model of the body politic as a means of rejecting this conviviality and the plebeian marketplace embodied by Falstaff. Whereas Hal implements an economy of pleasure — a prudent management of his political and economic resources — Falstaff strives for a pleasurable economy. He seeks out forms of trade and consumption that fail to benefit the health of the body politic.

Juxtaposing two periods of economic crisis, the 1590s and the 1620s, the second section turns to mercantile metaphors, placing Falstaff’s body in the context of global trade. The analogy between physiological and economic circulation was pervasive at that time. Mercantilists believed, as Gerard de Malynes put it, that trade could “infuse life” into the kingdom as the vital spirit did into the body (Center dedicatory); he creates an elaborate metaphor, the “body of traffique,” to describe the relationship between commodities, money, and exchange (Maintenance 38). Edward Misseldon described money as “the vital spirit of trade, and if the spirits faile, needs must the body faint” (Free Trade 28). Francis Bacon also found the topos appealing: his essay “On Empire” describes merchants as “vena porta; and if they flourish not, a kingdom may have good limbs, but will have empty veins, and nourish little” (379). Taking up this language of the body of trade, I argue that Falstaff’s practices of trade and consumption, his relationship to “commodity,” exemplify the dangers of private profit and private pleasure described by three mercantilists. In the final section I contrast the economic practices of Falstaff and Hal by linking the abstraction of money in Hal’s symbolic exchanges to the abstraction inherent in metaphors of the social totality.
Falstaff’s “little kingdom” appears in a passage in which he contrasts his friend Hal, who shares his love of sherry, with Hal’s “sober blooded” brother, John. Because John and others like him are incapable of laughter and never feel the sanguineous effects of wine, Falstaff insists that they are “generally fools and cowards.” Falstaff extends the analogy of the body politic to Prince Hal, reversing Henry IV’s notion that his son enjoys “barren pleasures” (1H4 3.2.14). The Prince, Henry says, has become “alien” to people of his own social position and has “grafted to” people lacking his royal blood. But Falstaff proffers a substitute for aristocratic consanguinity: “Hereof comes it that Prince Harry is valiant; for the cold blood he did naturally inherit of his father he hath, like lean, sterile, and bare land, manured, husbanded, and tilled, with excellent endeavour of drinking good and good store of fertile sherry, that he is become very hot and valiant” (2HIV 4.2.112–18). Imagining a social bond based on mutual enjoyment rather than natural inheritance, Falstaff portrays drinking as a fertile rather than a barren pleasure. Of course, Falstaff is terribly mistaken: Hal is no kindred spirit with sherry coursing through his veins. The prince’s blood runs cold, even if it doesn’t approach the freezing temperatures found in the veins of Prince John.

Although critics today acknowledge that the Henry IV plays draw upon the morality tradition, they have for the most part stopped regarding Falstaff as the “ill angel” of a psychomachia. Hal may be a “Protestant hero,” as Michael Davies has argued, but Falstaff is not simply a reprobate serving the plays’ homiletic ends. His model for social interdependence is inspired by the classical tradition of conviviality, the shared experience of pleasure in the act of drinking, eating, and conversing. Roy Strong notes how in Greek and Roman culture,

Conviviality . . . was seen as one of the cornerstones of civilisation, though an ambiguous and complex one. The table and those bidden to gather round it and share its pleasures could be a vehicle for social aggregation and unity; but equally it could encourage social distinctions, separating people into categories by placement or, even worse, exclusion. 7

Falstaff imagines a form of social solidarity similar to the solidarity sought in communal meals and collective festivities. We might also think of Falstaff’s body as a parody of, if not a substitute for, the communion that binds Christians together in a universal corporation with Christ as the head. Even after Hal’s reconciliation with his father, King Henry worries that his son will return to Falstaffian conviviality, the “mirth” that can only poison the “united vessel of their [his sons] blood” (2HIV 4.3.44), a metaphor with eucharistic overtones. Falstaff replaces the corporate communities envisioned by the Church and state with attachments that do not rely upon preordained organic ties and fixed hierarchies. In this model of convivium, the common roots of a particular family, estate, religious group, or the “blood and soil” of the nation count for less than the mutual pleasure experienced in drinking, feasting, and conversing. With its images of fertility and growth, pleasure expanding
and overflowing social boundaries, Falstaff’s *corpus politicum* presents an irrevocable challenge to the austere master tropes of unity that carefully distribute and organize pleasure.

Conviviality thus has the potential for upsetting the equilibrium established by the subordination of the part to the whole. Corporeal metaphors reinforced class distinctions by insisting that the social organism could only function properly if each person performed his or her God-given role in the way a particular part of the anatomy performed its biological function. Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, a locus classicus on this subject, includes Menenius’ “fable of the belly” in which the aristocracy is compared to the stomach distributing goods throughout the body politic. The speech temporarily distracts the famished plebs, but their point holds that the aristocracy has not lived up to its moral obligation to share food with other members of the body politic. Although Menenius tries to convince them otherwise, the plebeians have already determined that the various parts of the body politic occupy antagonistic positions in a dysfunctional system. Thomas Starkey, a prominent humanist of the Henrician era, provided a model for an ideal commonwealth *sub specie corporis* that also stresses the importance of interdependence. *A Dialogue Between Cardinal Pole and Thomas Lupset* insists that persons who “openly despise” the “order, unity, and concord, whereby the parts of this body are, as it were, with sinews and nerves knit together” shall be banished or killed lest they “corrupt” and spread disease to the whole body. In order that “the whole body of the commonalty may live in quietness and tranquility,” every man must perform his “office and duty” (158, 5). He must not “intermeddle” with other vocations for that would create discord and division. 6

Falstaff’s damnable iteration on vocation early in *Part One* challenges the ideological cornerstone of Starkey’s body politic. Responding to Hal’s quip that he has “amended” his life by turning from “praying” to “purse-taking,” he says, “’tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation” (*1HIV* 1.2.99–100). The line mocks 1 Corinthians 7:20 — “let every man abide in the same vocation wherein he was called” — and the *Homily on Idleness.* 7 This joke on vocation in *Part One* has increased significance when we come to Falstaff’s convivial “little kingdom” in *Part Two*, where the restrictions of hierarchy based on blood or status, key ingredients in many models of the social totality, are called into question. Embracing the anarchy of unrestrained bodily pleasure, Falstaff’s corporeal microcosm defies the forms of social differentiation that define corporeal metaphors. For a brief moment, his sinful body turns the pleasure of conviviality into what Fredric Jameson calls a “figure for the transformation of social relations”:

the right to a specific pleasure, to a specific enjoyment of the potentialities of the material body — if it is not to remain only that, if it is to become genuinely political, if it is to evade the complacencies of hedonism — must always in one way or another also be able to stand as a figure for the transformation of social relations as a whole. 74

Falstaff’s paean to sherry does just that: sack replaces the “natural inheritance” of his father’s blood, and thus allows him to join Hal as his companion. Instead of merely
celebrating the hedonistic joys of sack, he imagines a world in which the restrictions of vocation and class position have vanished; the strict adherence to hierarchy based on blood or status has given way to camaraderie based on mutual pleasure. Such a change in social relations would make what Starkey and Forset call “intermixing and intermeddling” permissible and desirable. The enjoyment of puns and wit — the slippery nature of language — is crucial to Falstaff’s resistance to the abstractions that impose a stagnant, inflexible order on society. He is pregnant with linguistic and philosophical possibilities, or, as Whitman might put it, he “contains multitudes.”

Falstaff is described in proliferating detail that never adds up to a focused picture of his social position. The body politic’s reductionism works in the opposite direction: the details of material life are sacrificed in the name of an abstract, authoritarian moral ideal. Although Falstaff appears to be a debauched knight, a “gentleman” living out of all compass, the language of festivity and the marketplace gives him a plebeian air: he is “Bartholomew boar-pig,” “roasted Manningtree Ox,” and Hal’s “sweet beef.” Reminiscent of communal experiences of festive excess throughout the year, he is “Martlemas,” the embodiment of holiday feasts that were increasingly under fire at a time when idleness was regarded as “the great and national sin” of England (Hill 100). Hal registers a sense of loss as Falstaff exits in act 1, scene 2, wistfully describing his aging companion in terms of seasonal change: “Farewell, thou latter spring; farewell, All-hallown summer” (1HIV 1.2.149–50). Framed thus, he appears like the mélange of an Arcimboldo painting, a composite of materials — apples, beef, sack, capons — that never completely merge into a naturalistic picture. If the description of Falstaff works as a centrifugal force, that of the traditional body politic performs the opposite function: it creates what Forset calls a “reductive pattern,” or “well compacted Epitome,” a moral order imposed on and indeed obfuscating the complexities of social life. The procrustean model of vocation in Starkey’s Dialogue, for example, was based on an antiquated, medieval notion of “estates” and it overlooked salient features of the marketplace in sixteenth-century England.

Falstaff’s trading practices have been inscribed in his diseased body: even the gout or pox in his big toe — presumably the result of living “out of all order, out of all compass” (1HIV 3.3.19) — can be exploited for profit: “A good wit will make use of anything. I will turn diseases to commodity” (2HIV 1.2.241–43). While Falstaff contests abstractions — honor, vocation, virtue — that compete with his pragmatic and hedonistic interests, Hal ultimately sides with the decidedly non-pragmatic thinking found in traditional corporeal metaphors. He distances himself from a plebeian world that does not share his interest in abstract social totalities. Falstaff’s big toe is one of many reminders about the concrete realities of life in the plebeian marketplace. Shallow blurts out a non sequitur about the price of cattle at Stamford Fair even as he reflects on death; one of the traders heading to the market at Charing Cross describes the effects of urinating in the fireplace; and we are reminded of poor Robin Ostler, who “never joyed since the price of oats rose. It was the death of him” (1HIV 2.1.11–12). Falstaff is the “old boar,” a bestial representative of the seamy, commercial side of the taverns and markets in London’s Eastcheap, and he is the old pike
snapping up the young dace (Shallow) in a marketplace that, for Falstaff at least, looks like the Hobbesian state of nature. His verbal and cerebral acumen, his “good wit,” are tied to the flux of a marketplace in which he must constantly find new ways to forge profits.

The integrated *corpus economicum* pursues enemies like Falstaff in the cause of social prophylaxis. Somato-economical metaphors supported the state control of work habits, trade, and consumption that would pave the way for the identity of the body politic by purging its waste matter. Starkey, we can be sure, would appreciate Hal’s image of Falstaff as a “swollen parcel of dropsies” (*1HIV* 2.4.434). Dropsy, Starkey writes, is a disease of idleness that fills a commonalty with inertia: “In a dropsy the body is unwieldy, batten, unlusty, and slow, nothing quick to move, neither apt nor meet to any manner of exercise, but swollen with ill humors . . . so is a commonalty”(79). Hal compares Falstaff to “the melancholy of Moorditch,” the sewage and filth running through town. Images of indolence, waste, and disease in the Henry plays shape a negative portrayal of a life devoted to “holiday.” Hal informs us that Falstaff’s temporal experience is measured — if we can call it that — by amounts of sensual pleasure: cups of sack, capons, and illicit sex. This undisciplined recreational existence is precisely what reformers like Starkey and Forset wanted to eliminate. Forset, for example, sees the nation as a body that requires the “naturall sustenance” of the market but must also “release the hurtfull overcharge, as the unprofitable excrements of the weale publique” (14). The *Comparative Discourse* describes the sovereign as the “ruling soule” that must command the body (the people), increase the population by establishing colonies, reform the “idle” and “unprofitable” poor, and provide subjects with the “appetite” for acquiring commodities while ensuring that their sensual pleasure does not devour the social organism from within. Forset warns against people like Falstaff, represented as the “chiefly vegetable” parts of the body politic, who “live sensually, giving no rest for contentednesse to themselves, but by pleasing of their senses, feeding of their affections, and fulfilling of their desires” (42). The ethical norms that limit the appetites of the individual human body form the contours of a cognitive map representing economic life in the social order as a whole.

Hal’s rejection of Falstaff resonates with the reductive, aestheticized visions of the social totality that bifurcate social relations. Forset’s *Comparative Discourse* imagines a harmonious, beautiful body politic (modeled on Leonardo’s Vitruvian man), in which “the nobilitie and gentrie of the land be better stored and furnished than the meaner of the people” (46). The diversity of the human anatomy permits the metaphor to insist upon inequality; true proportion requires that sustenance be spread throughout the body such that a vast gulf separates the nobility from the meaner sort, a category that lumps together a large assortment of people. The language of dichotomous “sorts” Hal appears to inherit from his father distances him from the plebeian culture of the marketplace and the convivial experiences of eating and drinking associated with it. Hal plans to eventually behave like the proper courtier: his aristocratic *sprezzatura* will contrast sharply with the carnivalesque body of
Falstaff. Like his father, he will insist upon a corporate community that reinforces the high/low culture distinctions threatened by Falstaff. Throughout the two plays he focuses on conduct and the perception of distinction, which, as Erasmus, Ascham, and other Renaissance humanists liked to point out, were essential to the establishment of authority and status. In order to control the kingdom, Hal must banish Falstaff and separate himself from unproductive, lower-class pleasures. As Anna Bryson notes, “the form of the body politic and the experience of the body personal are always interlinked” (138–39). Starkey’s Dialogue argues that the re-education of the nobility entails that hunting, hawking, eating, drinking, gambling, and other forms of “base pleasure” must be abolished and replaced by proper education and discipline (129). Ascham makes a similar point that princes would jeopardize their gentlemanly identity if they were to be seen in a marketplace or tavern. He quotes Isocrates: “It was some shame to a yong man to be seen in the open market, and if for business he passed through it, he did it with a marvelous modesty and bashful fashion. To eat or drink in a tavern was not only a shame but also punishable in a young man” (47). Ascham blurs the distinction between the tavern and the marketplace, making them spaces for the Prince to avoid. Gentlemanly identity is constructed by eschewing forms of pleasure that can be marked as plebeian, even though people across the social spectrum frequently engaged in them.

By rejecting Falstaff’s two bodies — the “tun of man” and his “little kingdom” — Hal makes himself look like a credible replacement for his father’s two bodies. As the dying, apoplectic Henry IV says, “Then you perceive the body of our Kingdom, / How foul it is, what rank diseases grow” (2HIV 3.1.36–37). Henry plays a role here described by Forset and others: the monarch examines the kingdom from a distance like a physician diagnosing diseases in a body (in this case it is his own two bodies). Although Hal finds his own way of interacting with the people once he becomes king, he takes his father’s advice seriously as he pushes aside the undisciplined, wasteful joys of “holiday.” It should come as no surprise that when Hal becomes Henry V, the head of the “great body of state” (2HIV 5.2.135), he invokes the theological-political logic of the body politic, counterbalancing Falstaff’s unorthodox somatic metaphor of the “little kingdom” with a traditional political metaphor that describes the “tide” of his blood flowing back to its royal origins. As a representative of sovereign reason, Henry V purges the kingdom of Falstaff’s body and selects the appropriate “limbs of noble counsel.” Having been “engrafted” to what his father calls the “rude society” of his companions, their “low desires” mingling with the “greatness of [his] blood,” Hal now turns back to what Falstaff calls the “natural inheritance” of his father’s blood.

When Henry IV criticizes Hal and Richard II for spending too much time among the plebeians, he expresses a fear of being consumed by the commons, what Archbishop York calls the “beastly feeder” (2HIV 1.3.95). Thus he lays out his strategy for power: the king must not mingle with the lower classes, for that would mean he has “enfeoffed himself to popularity” (1HIV 3.2.69). In Part One, Henry attributes his political success to the way he carefully controls the commoners’ diet of political
images: “and so my state, / Seldom, but sumptuous, show’d like a feast” (3.2.57–58).

Richard and Hal, he says, make the mistake of enjoying “vile participation”; they supply the people with a surfeit of images by appearing among them on a daily basis: “That, being daily swallow’d by men’s eyes, / They surfeited with honey, and began / To loathe the taste of sweetness” (3.2.70–72). Plebeians in Shakespeare’s England did indeed enjoy feasts, but Henry’s analogy of state and feast invokes images of the “solemnity” of royal feasts, spectacular affairs in which the people were merely onlookers. There may be some historical accuracy to Henry’s portrait here: Richard II was known as “the best and royalest ‘vyaundier’ of all Christian kings” and, as Roy Strong reports, he fed up to a thousand people every day in his household (87). Henry would seem to approve of the cultural shift that Strong reports took place in the Renaissance: the royal banquet became “a highly organized ritual” with the “exaltation of the ruler” and “the presence of the public as onlookers” (134).

Henry thus rejects the convivium practiced by Richard at court and Hal in the tavern. Although he is attempting to maintain an organic society, he is in fact destroying the communal bonds that might keep it functioning. Ben Jonson’s nostalgic country house poem, “To Penshurst,” shows how organic bonds might be reinforced through convivium:

Where comes no guest but is allowed to eat
Without his fear, and of thy lord’s own meat;
Where the same beer and bread and self-same wine
That is his lordship’s shall be also mine.

61–64

Beleaguered by civil war, Henry focuses entirely on the relationship among aristocratic families in his blood and soil model of the nation. But Henry is hardly exempt from the market mentality that puts a heavy strain on organic political models. For example, Henry frames his affection for his sons with a description of dubious economic transactions when he complains that ungrateful, unnatural sons hardly care for the fathers who have “engrossèd and piled up / The cankered heaps of strange-achievèd gold” (2HIV 4.3.195–97, 201–2) for their sons. These lines suggest that Henry IV is at least partly responsible for the fact that the commonwealth has started to function like an unregulated marketplace in which the pursuit of private profit (“commodity”) goes unchecked. Gadshill, who plans to join Hal and Falstaff in the highway robbery, describes the “commonwealth” as a battered or ravished female body. Hal jokes about profiting from the conditions of bloody civil war: “if there come a hot June and this civil buffeting hold,” he says, “we shall buy maidenheads as they buy hobnails, by the hundreds” (1HIV 2.4.351–52). Fungible maidenheads, like Falstaff’s “commodity of warm slaves,” give a clear warning that the corpus economicum is tearing apart.15

Falstaff’s parodic corporeal metaphor is a symptom of the political fragmentation that haunts the Henriad. The rebellious Hotspur, himself described as one of the state’s rotten limbs, compares his father’s absence in the rebellion to “a very limb chopped off” before talking himself into believing that “yet all our joints are whole”
Conviviality, a means of social integration, seems to suffer from this fragmentation as the comradery of drinking is vitiated by ulterior motives and underhanded tactics. The festivity in Shallow’s orchard, a depressing combination of drinking and senility, appears strained after we have learned that Falstaff and Shallow see each other as prey. Still, these old friends hardly reach the level of deceit we find in the drinking ceremony led by John, who creates a false sense of peace in order to get the rebels to disband their soldiers at Gaultree. The experience of “communion” or sharing in convivium is constantly threatened by economic and political exchange, the experiences of separation and competition in a fragmented corpus politicum. Nevertheless, that same fragmentation creates the opportunity for Falstaff’s parodic body politic to challenge the symbolic order that is based on the prohibition of pleasure. The pleasure of eating and drinking together creates new possibilities for social bonds that are not based on the fixed hierarchies of an organic community.

II

In the 1620s somatic metaphors took on a new character: they placed individual bodies in the context of global trade and a national economy. As Jonathan Gil Harris suggests, we should distinguish between premercantilist metaphors in which “the body politic is synonymous with its internally generated wealth” and mercantilist metaphors that see the nation as a body that must be open to international trade while protecting itself from foreign diseases — like the influx of luxury goods (Sick Economies 22). Falstaff’s “little kingdom” carries even more importance when we consider that the metaphor of the body politic, mutatis mutandis, continued to play a major role in economic thought well into the seventeenth century. Organic models of economic life insisted that private wealth must be intertwined with the “public good” or the needs of the commonwealth. The commonwealth did not signify — as More’s Hythlodaeus might have it — that wealth should be held in common. Rather, in a commonwealth members would receive a share commensurate with their position and function in the body politic. Some supporters of a commonwealth argued that self-interested foreign trade could benefit society as a whole. Merchants, who were themselves often regarded as a disease in the body politic, argued, no doubt in part out of self-interest, that, as Thomas Mun put it, “private gain may ever accompany the publique good” (England’s Treasure 1). Edward Misseldon agreed:

Is it not lawfull for merchants to seeke their privatum Commodum in the exercise of their calling? Is not gaine the end of trade? Is not the publique involved in the private, and the private in the publique? What else makes a commonwealth, but the private-wealth, if I may so say, of the members thereof in the exercise of Commerce amongst themselves, and with forraigne Nations?

The word “members,” a residue of the body politic metaphor, contributes to Misseldon’s rebuttal of the charge that mercantile practices do not nourish the larger social body. Misseldon might have used the etymology of the word “commerce” to
strengthen his argument. As Craig Muldrew points out, “the words common, community, commutation, commerce, and communication all come from the Latin committo meaning to unite or bring together in fellowship” (139). Mercantilists tried to alter the meanings of “commodity” and “commonwealth” so that the former would no longer be seen as antagonistic to the latter.17

An image of social cohesion, the corpus economicum countered the commonplace image of the atomistic market. Robert Burton insisted that the market (and thus the entire world) was a place of predation and deception in which everyone “for commodity” will “squeeze blood” and “tear others or be torn in pieces themselves.” Elsewhere he used the body economic as an image of cooperation: “As it is in a man’s body, if either head, heart, stomach, liver, spleen, or any one part be misaffected, all the rest suffer with it: so is it with this economical body” (I: 64, I: 108–9). Burton, like mercantilists of the 1620s, was responding to economic depression, widely recognized as a crisis. While Burton faulted the market itself for people’s woes, economic writers faulted the cloth trade, the balance of trade, currency exchanges, and the Thirty Years War. Physiological metaphors of “circulation” revealed that money was the key to the economic growth that was currently lacking. Mercantilists not only defended the public benefits of trade, they made the nation itself look like a joint-stock company in which everyone contributed to prosperity by working to ensure that there was a trade surplus on the global market.18

Its innovative features notwithstanding, in particular the role of money as the “vital spirit” of the kingdom, the metaphor of the corpus economicum followed a long-standing ethical tradition of economic interdependence. It also hearkened back to another period of crisis, the 1590s: the years in which Shakespeare created, and audiences first enjoyed, Falstaff. Especially during the years 1594–97, economic cooperation was seen as a dire necessity, and moralists constantly reminded people of their duties and responsibilities. As unemployment spiraled out of control and food shortages became more frequent, reformers of the 1590s harped on the problems of idleness and prodigality. Malynes, whose early tracts date from 1601, incorporated the ubiquitous language of reform as he ranted against the Falstaffs of the world who “live licenciously, following whores, harlots, wine-taverns, and many other unlawful games, to their utter destruction . . . spend their stocks by prodigall riot, sumptuous fare, and strange and proud new fangles in their apparell . . . spending their time and dulling their wits, with the use of dicing and carding” (St George 21–22). The shrill voices of reformers focused on disciplining the poor, but, like Malynes, they also took aim at the Falstaffian, prodigal nobility who poisoned the body politic. Nina Levine goes so far as to argue that “Falstaff’s appetite for luxury foodstuffs would, in fact, have bordered on the criminal in the dearth years of 1596–97” (415). Although they did not focus on money as the lifeblood of the kingdom, moralists in the 1590s did develop a rudimentary concept of circulation. They wanted to see employment rise so that there would be more exports, an increase in the nation’s “stock,” and thus a more favorable balance of trade and a healthier body politic. The word “private” was bandied about to characterize avaricious behavior such as the exporting of grain badly needed in a time of dearth.
A significant component of the mercantile body politic was national unity, which depended upon the willingness of the people to sacrifice some of their individual pleasure for the common good. Misseldon’s image of merchants circulating their money through the healthy “body of trade” counters the commonplace notion that they merely pursued “private profit.” Many of the reformers’ ideas from the 1590s were reiterated by Misseldon, Mun, and Malynes as the crisis of the 1620s unfolded. Misseldon, for example, insisted in 1622 that the state should crack down on the unemployed and the prodigal, people from all social classes who clogged the arteries of trade: “the poor starve in our streets for want of labour; the prodigall excell in excess” (Free Trade 96). For mercantilists, economic circulation was the source of political stability; the wealth they created did not sit in their hands, it flowed into the veins of the nation. In his essay “Of Empire,” Francis Bacon described merchants as “vena porta” that must flourish if the kingdom is to avoid “empty veins.” A prosperous nation, he recognized, was also a socially stable one in which uprisings were unlikely to occur (379). The moralistic language of mercantile writing added to earlier efforts to construct an orderly, harmonious, prosperous nation when bad harvests, plague, low wages, and inflation threatened to rip the corpus politicum into pieces.

Falstaff’s corpus economicum is antithetical to the mercantile models of circulation that kept pleasure in check. For Falstaff, pleasure in excess, the consumption of sack, is the sine qua non of economic circulation; it fuels or “commences” the trade in commodities by moving the “hoard of gold kept by the devil” (2HIV 4.2.111). Far from arguing, as Mandeville would a century later, that “private vices” have “public benefits,” mercantile writers tried to separate Falstaff’s pairing of private profit and vice so that merchants might be granted a legitimate role as contributors to the public good. They saw the reform of pleasure as a requirement for a national economy in which the part remains subordinate to the whole. In this way they hoped to move away from the negative associations with “commodity” represented by Falstaff. The word “private” was, of course, once tied to the experience of “deprivation,” as its etymology suggests. In their attempt to legitimize the private accumulation of wealth through trade, mercantile writers incorporated the sobriety of social reform into their metaphors of the body of trade. Advocating what Andrea Finkelstein calls a “properly disciplined prosperity” (81), Thomas Mun, Edward Misseldon, and Gerard de Malynes argued that economic gain entailed moral reform.

Misseldon and Mun created their body of trade metaphors as a response to the bullionists who blamed economic depression on the export of money. They defended mercantile practices, especially those of the East India Company, by describing money circulating through the corpus economicum. The loss of bullion in England, Mun argues, would not undermine the all-important balance of trade so long as “wantonesse and riot” did not cause the English to “overwaste both forren and domestike wares” (Discourse 2). Multilateral trade can keep money and wares in circulation until a supply greater than the investment has been accumulated and brought back into England. The goal is not immediate consumption, but constant
increase and motion in the body of trade. For example, Mun describes what happens when money leaves England for the purchase of raw silk: when the silk returns, hundreds are employed to turn it into clothing, which then leaves England and is sold for a profit. But trade did not always work that way: money frequently left England in exchange for excessive quantities of “unnecessary” luxury goods made in foreign countries. The only people who profited were the merchants.

Mun reworked the body politic cliché by focusing on the circulation of money and commodities: “the whole body of trade” could not function “if the harmony of her health be distempered by the diseases of excess at home” (England’s Treasure 84). In this case, the corporeal metaphor propped up the theory of the balance of trade, which maintained that the total value of commodities exported had to exceed that of commodities imported. A proper balance would increase the amount of bullion in England. Mun’s work contributed to the establishment of a national economy by arguing that the health of the body of trade, the so-called “public good,” is dependent upon the prohibitions placed on English behavior. Mun’s goal is not merely to increase the wealth of the East India Company (which he directed at one point) or England’s wealth, it is to shape a particular kind of culture — namely, one that shuns wantonness and excess in favor of frugality and industry. The employment generated by foreign trade keeps people industrious, from the shipbuilding at the beginning of the process to the various kinds of work required to make and subsequently “vent” English commodities abroad. The East India Company does not merely export English coin in order to give merchants a profit. Trade, Mun claims, serves the national interest when it is properly organized. It can keep the poor from idle consumption in taverns and the rich from simply consuming excess of imports without contributing to further trade and an accumulation of profit. Trade should be driven by circulation and “increase,” rather than immediate and immoderate consumption. Thus Mun has harsh words for people who focus on consumption rather than investment and work:

Piping, Potting, Feasting, Fashions, and mis-spending of our time in Idleness and Pleasure (contrary to the Law of God, and the use of other Nations) . . . have made us effeminate in our bodies, weak in our knowledg, poor in our Treasure, declined in our Valour, unfortunate in our Enterprises, and contemned by our Enemies.

England’s Treasure 180

The body of trade, like the body politic, creates a sense of national unity based on the prohibition of unproductive pleasures.

Falstaff’s body is associated with the patterns of trade and consumption that mercantilists saw as the obstacle to England’s economic success. Defending moderation in the consumption of imported luxuries, Mun expresses outrage at the excesses that might generate an imbalance of trade: the English must “soberly refrain from excessive consumption of forraign wares” (England’s Treasure 16). Wine, of course, was one of the major luxury imports, as Doll reminds us in Henry IV, Part Two. The victim of an asymmetrical sexual exchange, she is “meat” for her “master” and at risk to be crushed by Falstaff’s body, packed with commodities: “Can a weak
empty vessel bear such a huge full hogshead? There’s a whole merchant’s venture of Bordeaux stuff in him; you have not seen a hulk better stuffed in the hold” (2HIV 2.4.62–65). The image of a hulk crammed with wine from Bordeaux is apt for an aging, bibulous, and corpulent man seeking profit and pleasure. Although Doll associates Falstaff with profit maximization and the risks attending international trade, her metaphor emphasizes Falstaff’s body — the luxury imports themselves — rather than his mind — the merchant’s business acumen.

Misseldon follows Mun’s lead when he attacks the self-interested behavior that threatens a harmonious body of trade. If proper circulation is created in the body of trade, Misseldon shows, private gain can serve the public good. Using civil war as a metaphor for the unregulated trade that destroys economic interdependence, Misseldon insists upon the God-like control of the monarch over the particulars of commercial life: King James is the “sacred Majesty, the intellectual part of this Microcosme” (i.e., the head) that must serve as a physician to “the great decay of Trade” in the “Nerves” of the “body” (Free Trade 4). At the same time, Misseldon challenges older assumptions about organic social relations: merchants making money for themselves are not necessarily a disease in the healthy body politic.

For money is the vitall spirit of trade, and if the Spirits faile, needes must the body faint. As the Body of Trade seemeth to be dead without the life of money: So doe also the Members of the Commonwealth without their meanes of trade. We say, that an Artizan or workemann, cannot worke without tooles or instruments: no more can a Merchant trade without money or meanes. Free Trade 9

The expansion of trade, Misseldon believed, depends upon the increased circulation of money. Blaming the “under-balance of trade” on “poverty and prodigality,” Misseldon suggests that the body of trade will deteriorate if pleasure is not reined in. Excess consumption of wines, raisins, silks, cambrics, sugar, tobacco, and spices drain money from the commonwealth while native goods are not properly “vented.” Misseldon defends the East India Company along the same lines as Mun: instead of wasting bullion on frivolous imports, merchants would re-export goods purchased in the East Indies that were not needed in England, sell them for a profit in other nations, and bring coin back into England. Good circulation also had to involve keeping manufacturing in England alive and well so that the poor were employed. Thus it was important to vent goods made by the English, not merely to consume goods made in other countries. The body of trade has poor circulation when trade increases the consumption of imports and the private profit for merchants without adding to the industry and increased gain of the nation as a whole. In such a situation “the Great Body” is drained of its “Life blood.”

Misseldon’s proposals for economic reform are framed with a Platonic figure, the “circle of commerce,” that puts God’s cosmic harmony — the heavenly orbs — into an analogical relationship with the perfectibility of the organizing principles of trade and consumption. Falstaff’s patterns of consumption are also represented in terms of a circle. He is at his best when he pokes fun at his own inability to remain “in compasse,” and makes a mockery of the healthy body politic that would discharge
his illicit pleasures. In *Part One*, he lampoons the “virtue” that would instill proper order, balance, and harmony in the individual members of the social body.

Why, there is it. Come sing me a bawdy song; make me merry. I was as virtuously given as a gentleman need to be, virtuous enough: swore little, diced not above seven times — a week, went to a bawdy-house not above once in a quarter — of an hour, paid money that I borrowed — three or four times, lived well and in good compass; and now I live out of all order, out of all compass.

The idea that a “gentleman” might be virtuous by being economical about his sins, by only going to a bawdy-house “once in a quarter,” is absurd enough. Falstaff takes the irony much further as he makes it virtually impossible to count his vices. If dicing seven times a week is considered living in “good compass,” how often does he do it when he is living “out of all compass”? Whether he is living in or out of compass he is living well, which means living in excess. For Falstaff, living well also means living outside the ideological parameters set up by the early modern discourse on virtue, which attempted to severely delimit, if not eliminate, the experience of sensual pleasure, the private withdrawal from the body politic. The circle of commerce metaphor was intended to keep such private, irresponsible consumption in check, as we see when Edward Forset adopts the “beautious and uniforme proportion” of the Vitruvian man (what Leonardo da Vinci called “Man in a Circle and a Square”) as his “reductive pattern,” an aesthetic model for anatomizing the “orderly or disproportionable” features in the “form of commonwealth” (2). Falstaff, the anti-Vitruvian man *par excellence*, mocks the universal principles of harmony that connect the microcosm to the macrocosm.

Malynes was especially wary of the dangers of private profit. His “body of trade” strictly adhered to a functionalist model of society in which “every member should be contented in his vocation” lest there be “discord and dissention.” In particular, he feared that a collapse of balance and harmony in the body politic would have a devastating impact on the poor. A pressing concern for him, then, was the way merchants sought “their particular profit, or Privatum Commodium,” and ignored the “general good of the Commonwealth” (*St George* 21–22). Vehemently opposed to what he called the “merchandizing exchange,” he proposed instead what he called *par pro pari*, the “value for value” measure of each country’s money based on its intrinsic worth rather than on the fluctuations of the marketplace. The state, namely the office of the Royal Exchange, would regulate exchange rates so that merchants could not negotiate such rates in private. Thus Malynes described the body of trade:

*Exchange for moneys by Bills of Exchanges (being seated everywhere) corroborateth the Vitall Spirit of Traffike, directing and controlling (by just proportions) the prices and values of commodities and money . . . And then he shall finde, that as the Liver (Money) doth minister Spirits to the heart (Commodities) and the heart to the braine (Exchange) so doth the brayne exchange minister to the whole Microcosm or the whole body of Traffique.*

*Maintenance* 38
Because money is the “public measure” between England and foreign nations, the determination of value cannot be left to the private negotiations among merchants who frequently traded in a way that was advantageous to themselves but not to the nation-state as a whole. The royal exchange would base value on the “intrinsic weight and fineness,” the supposed true value of money. This “brayne exchange” controls mercantile profits, regulating trade in the interests of proportional justice. Malynes borrows from Galenic medicine: “The blood,” he says, “full of Spirits, shall fill all the veins, and supply the want of moneys.” In Galenic medicine, the spirit moving through the body’s veins consisted of compressed heat and air, a combination that created motion. Malynes follows Galenic anatomy by making the organs of the body receive blood created by the liver, the organ of digestion. Galen’s theory, which would be overturned by William Harvey during Malynes’ lifetime, argued that the veins and arteries formed two separate systems. The medicinal metaphors demonstrate that a corpus economicum with good circulation must include a central economic authority that keeps private and public interests in harmony.

The pike snapping at the dace, Falstaff’s blunt metaphor for his exploitation of Shallow, creates a picture of the kind of economic circulation Malynes deplored. Falstaff justifies his rapacious behavior by mocking “natural law,” a crucial component of Malynes’ corpus economicum. After reminiscing with Shallow about the “chimes at midnight,” he makes it clear that money, not nostalgia, explains his interest in his old friend: “If the young dace be a bait for the old pike, I see no reason in the law of nature but I may snap at him” (2HIV 3.2.314–16). This “law of nature” looks more like the pre-societal law of the jungle than anything Renaissance theorists would recognize in the term. The line sounds like yet another damnable iteration, a reversal of the commonplace notion that reason is at the center of natural law. According to Richard Hooker, for example, the orderly arrangement of social life depended on God’s gift of reason: “Since the time that God did first proclaim the edicts of his law upon it, heaven and earth have heark’ned unto his voice, and their labor hath been to do his will” (222). Malynes believed that the balance and harmony of a God-given moral order were features of the body politic that would protect the poor from the predatory economics of a market society. Falstaff’s pursuit of private profit turns out to be a willful distortion and violation of natural law that extends to his defiance of monarchical authority: he “abuses the king’s press damnable” by taking bribes to release recently conscripted soldiers. The body of trade was meant to rein in such pursuits of private profit: it includes a central “head” that maintains rational control over the economic body and its pleasures — Misseldon’s King regulating commerce, Malynes’ “brain exchange,” Forset’s Platonic monarch.

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By rejecting Falstaff’s pleasure-seeking, private way of life, Hal seeks to become a figure of stability in an economy based on the abstractions of money and credit. For Hal, Christian economics — his commitment to reputation, value, and credit — is
essential to economic circulation and symbolic power. Always aware that he will be the “head” ruling the body politic, Hal holds on to his creditworthiness despite what he calls his “low transformation” in the tavern. At no point does Hal seem to panic over the damage done to his reputation. We never hear him cry out, as Cassio does in *Othello*, “Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation” (2.3.258–59). Well aware of his low value prior to his reformation, Hal never panics in this way. Hal’s success has to do with his manipulation of what Craig Muldrew calls an “economy of obligation.” Creditworthiness and the “communication of social trust” took on great significance in early modern England; the judgment of others in the community could determine one’s economic success or failure. Thus it is no surprise that pleasure, widely believed to be the product of a dissolute, unthrifty existence, came under such heavy fire. One might build a solid reputation, what people called “credit,” by living a moral life, which entailed being an industrious and thrifty Christian. Falstaff’s trading practices work against Hal’s Christian economics. As Poins suggests, he barters in order to achieve immediate sensual gratification: “How agrees the devil and thee about thy soul that thou soldest him on Good Friday last for a cup of Madeira and a cold capon’s leg?” (*1HIV* 1.2.108–10). He treats economic and spiritual reckonings in much the same way. Indeed, his defiant sensualism fuses impiety and fiscal irresponsibility. He will defer paying his debts and patching up his old body for heaven as long as he possibly can.

Hal plans to establish creditworthiness through a symbolic exchange: replacing his old self with the new, improved prince. His value will increase as he, like “bright metal” (money), is contrasted with something of no economic value — “sullen ground.” He calculates that one’s value will be determined in relation to others (the way things are priced on the market). The prince’s mastery over symbolic exchange is also apparent when, imagining the combat at Shrewsbury, he says he will use Hotspur as a “factor” who will “engross” honors “on his behalf” (*1HIV* 3.2.147–48). His burden is to prove that he is, as Falstaff puts it, “a true piece of gold” and not a “counterfeit” (*1HIV* 2.4.473–75). His intrinsic worth, like that of early modern coins, must be conveyed in a Christian economy of symbolic exchange. Falstaff is always suspect in this regard: for example, he confesses he is what the Lord Chief Justice calls an “ill angel” (the misleader of the prince) and alters the Justice’s metaphor to refer to the clipping of Elizabethan coins: “Your ill angel is light, but I hope he that looks upon me will take me without weighing” (*2HIV* 1.2.161–62). Falstaff is not only a “tun of man,” he is, like an ill angel, a disruption of the healthy body of trade. Coins that were clipped posed two main problems: they might contain a disfigured representation of the monarch and, more importantly, they had a distorted value, as they lacked the quantity of gold or silver ascribed to them. In order to gain trust and credit in an economy of obligation, Hal must be so successful at seeming to be “essentially made” that his subjects will forget or never know that it is indeed only seeming. The same thing can be said of value based on the intrinsic worth of gold. In order for money to function properly, especially money that contains substantive value, people must first have a sense of trust in its institutional environment. And that is precisely what Hal wants to create by banishing Falstaff in a public display of his
power. When Hal becomes Henry V he will embody the institution that manages the circulation of money. He is poised to protect the body of trade by stabilizing value at a time when his father appears like a “counterfeit.”

Thus Hal’s Christian economy plays an important role in his political ambitions as the future king who will attempt to unify the kingdom. The construction of a social totality, the kingdom of Henry V conceived as a body politic, would collapse without the relative stability of value that ties subjects together into a meaningful order.

Unproductive pleasure, Hal realizes, can destabilize value, which is based on sacrifice and trust. Traditional, pre- or early capitalist models of social totality — the commonwealth, the nation, the body of trade, or the Church (the body of Christ) — always produce some variation on the notion of shared sacrifice. Falstaff, of course, does not properly sacrifice his pleasures for the good of the commonwealth. This is especially obvious on the battlefield when he gives Hal a bottle of sack rather than a pistol to “sack a city.” His unwillingness to sacrifice his life for “honor” or for England is crucial to his resistance to the abstraction of Hal’s “imagined community” and its requirements of discipline and restraint. The pleasures and pains of the body are subjective, private experiences that carry more weight for Falstaff than honor, the collective goals of the body politic, or credit.

The battle at Shrewsbury in Henry IV, Part One reveals that Hal is willing to make the requisite sacrifice of his life on the battlefield, a display of heroism that also becomes an essential part of nation-building in Henry V. Hal’s sacrifice builds trust, the sine qua non of monetary transactions in a Christian economy. He will become the transcendental guarantor — what Malynes calls the “brain exchange” — that sutures individuals together into a totality, instilling them with confidence in money, the abstract representation of value. In order to construct a viable social totality, Hal must first stabilize value by rejecting Falstaff.

Falstaff may be the old pike snapping at the young dace, but as such he is merely a big fish in a small pond. For all of his associations with the marketplace, Falstaff lacks Hal’s command over market processes. Indeed, Hal’s jokes about Falstaff’s corporeality contribute to his symbolic power as the future “head” of the body politic. Although Falstaff frequently praises the power and scope of his own wit, Hal repeatedly emphasizes Falstaff’s brute material nature; in fact, Falstaff’s wit can never be entirely disassociated from his body. He may have “a whole school of tongues in [his] belly” (2HIV 4.2.18), but the Prince, claiming to encompass a larger world, outperforms him as he acquires linguistic capital in the tavern and elsewhere.

By banishing Falstaff, Hal affirms his commitment to a body politic sub specie aeternitatis that is in stark contrast to Falstaff’s “little kingdom” and the temporal, excessive bodily pleasures that shape what he calls “the world.” At the center of this ordering, Hal can control circulation in a money economy that will extend the reach of royal power. In Falstaff’s parodic humor, on the other hand, circulation is driven by the anarchic energy of pleasure that disrupts the centripetal political force of corporeal metaphors. Lacking a commitment to the ordered world of large-scale economic calculation, the control of bodies and pleasures by the science of government, Falstaff mocks the future-oriented calculation of exchange guided by moral restraint, and thus challenges the concept of totality.
Notes

I am grateful to Richard Abrams, Peter Herman, and Louis Montrose for their helpful advice on this article.

1 I am indebted to Jonathan Gil Harris’ important work on early modern corporeal metaphors in *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic* and *Sick Economies*. See also David George Hale, *The Body Politic* and Leonard Barkin, *Nature’s Work of Art.*

2 Citations for *1 Henry IV* refer to the edition by Bevington; *2 Henry IV*, the edition by Weis. Citations from other plays are from the Riverside edition.

3 Falstaff’s “little kingdom” is, of course, a parody of the traditional notion of the king’s two bodies that informs the entire Henriad. According to the doctrine of the king’s two bodies, the king has a mortal “body natural” and an immortal “body politic.” The classic work on the importance of the king’s two bodies metaphor in Shakespeare is Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*. On the politics of Kantorowicz’s work, see David Norbrook, “The Emperor’s new body?” See also Lorna Hutson’s criticisms of Kantorowicz in “Not the King’s Two Bodies.”

4 On the polarization of pleasure and virtue in the Renaissance, see Brian Vickers, “Valla’s Ambivalent Praise” and Debora Shuger, *Political Theologies*. There were, of course, writers who did not simply denounce corporeal pleasure. See Catherine Gimelli’s discussion of John Donne and neoplatonists in “The Erotology of Donne’s ‘Extasie’.”

5 On the relation between puritans and Christian humanists, see Margo Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Social Order*. For more on Falstaff and Elizabethan religious discourse, see Kristen Poole, “Saints Alive!” Poole argues that Falstaff “epitomizes the image of the grotesque puritan” (54).

6 I have modernized Starkey’s spelling. See also Forset, who asserts that a kingdom can only function when “each part is to know and administer his own proper works, without entermixing or entermedling in the office of any other” (50).


8 The language and imagery of carnival in Shakespeare is by now very familiar. “Plump Jack” has his iconographic form in Brueghel’s *The Battle between Carnival and Lent* and in the *theatrum mundi* topos. The Latin etymology of the word “carnival” — *carn* (flesh) and *levare* (put away) — supports readings that link Falstaff and carnival. See Francois Laroque, “Shakespeare’s ‘Battle of Carnival and Lent.’”

9 Falstaff’s aging body represents pleasures that were increasingly viewed as relics of “merry olde England.” There had been over a hundred Saints’ Days in the Middle Ages, and workers took the day off on many of them. Saints Days, May Day, Midsummer Day and many other forms of “merry-making” were eliminated or put in jeopardy. By the time the Henriad appeared, many people had started to feel that Saints’ Days, seasonal celebrations and customary pastimes — important sources of intense pleasure — were not what they used to be. As Ronald Hutton argues, “The early Tudor culture of seasonal celebration was in decline over the whole subsequent period of a century and a half” (153).

10 As trade in England grew increasingly complex and the guild system that had positioned people in particular crafts had less power, it became harder to ensure that workers did not “intermeddle” in Starkey’s sense. Laura Stevenson gives two examples: “a glover might buy a little extra leather and sell it to other men in the leather trade, a tanner might become a butcher by selling the meat of cattle he slaughtered for their hides” (*Praise and Paradox* 36).

11 Lars Engle defines pragmatism as “the substitution of a mutable economy of value, action, and belief for what the philosophic tradition has tried to establish as a fixed structure of fact, truth, and knowledge” (*Shakespearean Pragmatism* 3). See also his excellent chapter on economic language in the Henriad in the same book.

12 Starkey argues that economic prosperity has been held hostage by the lethargic, hedonistic behavior of the multitude. Also, excessive pursuit of individual pleasure derived from imported luxuries detracts from the public good and creates “deformity” in the *corpus economicum*. The “ill occupied” and “unprofitable” people who drink imported wine in taverns are the weak link in the social organism. Thus, wine “causith, also, much drunkenness and idleness among our common people and craftsmen in cities and towns, which, drawn by the pleasure of these delicate wines, spend their thrift and consume the time in common taverns, to the great destruction and ruin of the people” (94).

13 Erasmus’ *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516) anticipated the arguments of Starkey, Ascham, and
Falstaff, Body Politic, and Body of Trade

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other humanists who believed that the reformation of manners was essential for the reformation of society. Erasmus sees the Prince as a God-like philosopher-king who must be kept away from the “poisoned opinion of the common people” and insists that “the low pleasures of the people are so far beneath a prince, especially a Christian prince, that they hardly become any man” (159). Roger Ascham is less rigid about pleasure. He recommends that a “young gentleman” should experience “honest pleasure” and “good pastime”: “I was never that a “young gentleman” should experience “honest pleasure” and “good pastime”: “I was never

Falstaff and Hal’s joke about maidenheads is not unlike Falconbridge’s personification of commodity as a “broker” who robs the “poor maid” of her virginity. In his speech about “tickling commodity” (2.1.561–98), Falconbridge, the bastard in Shakespeare’s King John, uses the metaphor of bowls to describe a world thrown off balance by the allure of self-interest: the “bias” of commodity disrupts the natural order of things. Falstaff and Falconbridge make commodity and private gain appear inseparable.

Despite his intense disagreement with Misseldon, Malynes shares his competitor’s sense of urgency about linking the private wealth to the commonwealth. For all of their talk about “gain” and “private profit,” Misseldon and Malynes are not advocating possessive individualism. Instead, they insist that trade must be highly regulated and the desire for excess kept under control.

Keith Wrightson describes a new way of thinking that “attempted to reconcile the competing claims of commodity and commonwealth” (Earthly Necessities 158). On the evolving meanings of the term “commonwealth” in early modern England, see also William H. Sherman, “Anatomizing the Commonwealth.”


Thomas Mun, A Discourse of Trade 7. For more on Mun and multilateral trade, see Valerie Forman, “Transformations of Value.”

Merchants, of course, depended upon the investments of the nobility, who in turn gained social status through their conspicuous consumption of luxury goods. See Linda Levy Peck, Consuming Splendor.

Misseldon argues that, “where Trade is disordered, and the traders ungoverned, there they are like a house divided, which cannot long subsist” (Free Trade 134).

On the meaning of “spirit” in early modern medicine, see Gail Kern Paster, “Nervous Tension: Networks of Blood and Spirit in the Early Modern Body.” See also Paster’s reading of Falstaff’s body in Humoring the Body.

The analogy of blood and money would become even more prominent with the publication of Hobbes’ Leviathan. Harvey’s discovery — that there is one system in which the heart pumps and recirculates blood throughout the body — enabled him to also rethink the body politic metaphor by making the king the heart rather than the head: he is “the basis of his kingdoms, the sun of his microcosm, the heart of the state, from him all power arises and all grace stems” (3). Hobbes, following Harvey, reworked the corpus politicum metaphor by describing money recirculating like the blood that nourishes every member of the body (Malynes and Misseldon had already given money the central function of nourishing the rest of the body). Falstaff’s Galenic body shows blood moving to the heart, not, as in Harvey, pumped by the heart. Sherry provides courage by warming the liver and the blood, which circulates to the face and the extremities.
Muldrew argues that community, rather than individualism, shaped the morality of the early modern market. At a time when self-interest or self-love were still negative terms, trust was rooted in notions of Christian community. Sermons, plays and pamphlets drummed these virtues into the minds of all Protestants worthy of the name. A good reputation, it was frequently pointed out, opened the door for economic success.

For more on the idea of the “counterfeit” king, see David Kastan, “The King Hath Many.”

See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Patricia Cahill, “Nation Formation and the English History Plays”; and Claire McEachern’s excellent analysis of Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, Falstaff, and the body politic in “*Henry V* and the Paradox of the Body Politic.” On Falstaff and “private life,” see Mark Taylor, “Falstaff and the Origins of Private Life.” He makes the much bigger historical claim that “this tavern world displays the beginnings of the institution of privacy as we today understand and use that term” (63).

**Works Cited**


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**Notes on Contributor**

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