

# EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



## **Decapitation, Pregnancy, and the Tongue: The Body as Political Metaphor in *Measure for Measure***

Anna Muenchrath  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
[muenchrath@wisc.edu](mailto:muenchrath@wisc.edu)

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you againe. (Matthew 7:1-2)<sup>1</sup>

Ye have heard that it hath bene said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turne to him the other also. (Matthew 5:38-39)

Shakespeare adapted *Measure for Measure*'s title from the Sermon the Mount, quoted here in the first epigraph.<sup>2</sup> The Sermon on the Mount, comprising chapters five through seven of the Gospel of Matthew, depicts Jesus as the incarnated form of God, giving his disciples advice on how to curb earthly desires in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. The final verse of the fifth chapter, which is generally understood to summarize the message of the entire sermon, states, 'Ye shall therefore be perfite, as your father which is in heaven, is perfite' (Matthew 5:48). The message of the sermon, as well as Jesus' delivery of it as the incarnated voice of God, foregrounds the nature of Christ's body: physical and spiritual, carnal and divine, dead and resurrected; he is at once God's

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<sup>1</sup> *The Bible and Holy Scriptures Conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament* (London: Christopher Barker, 1579). Accessed in *Early English Books Online*, STC 1887:02.

<sup>2</sup> This is also noted by Katharine Eisaman Maus, 'Introduction' to *Measure for Measure*, in *The Norton Shakespeare, Based on the Oxford Edition: Volume 2: Later Plays*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt et al. (2nd edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), pp. 305–313, esp. p. 305. All quotations from *Measure for Measure* are taken from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

subject and God. The dichotomous body of Christ presented in this summation of the Sermon on the Mount provides parallels for thinking about the medieval and early modern conception of the carnal and political bodies of the King, which features so prominently in *Measure for Measure*.

My reading of the play situates itself, on the one hand, against the abstract theorizing of power relationships that risks ignoring Shakespeare's concern with what Mary Thomas Crane calls 'the unruly materiality of the subject'.<sup>3</sup> In her original study of *Measure for Measure*, relying heavily on cognitive science, Mary Thomas Crane correctly emphasizes that the Shakespearean subject is an embodied one and decries the theoretical emphasis on the abstract subject, remarking that 'both psychoanalytic and new-historicist readings have seen the process of subjectification represented in the play as involving a kind of disembodiment'.<sup>4</sup> Instead, I echo Crane's insistence that 'the play emphasizes the physicality of the body and mind, and the necessarily material forms that power must take in its attempts to shape them'.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, my reading denies a pure historicization of the play as topical political commentary that reads a strict correlation between the character of the Duke and King James, and reduces the play 'to a comment on this monarch's belief and practices'.<sup>6</sup> By reconstructing the complicated contemporary discourse surrounding the various metaphors of the King's two bodies, I argue that *Measure for Measure*, through its use of various bodies – pregnant, beheaded, and otherwise – critiques the concept itself by showing that the metaphors, and thereby the political theory that they represent, are always already incoherent. When put in dialogue with the contemporaneous discourse of the King's two bodies, *Measure for Measure* reveals the intricacies and fallacies of a political theory that relies on the separation between sovereignty and the physical body, while simultaneously acknowledging their collapse.

First performed in James I's court in 1604, *Measure for Measure* is considered one of the problem plays; neither comedy nor tragedy, its ending leaves much to be desired in terms of an ethical or political conclusion. James I had ascended to the throne the prior year, bringing with him questions of the nature of monarchical authority. As R.W.K. Hinton notes in his exposition of the political climate during the transition, James

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Thomas Crane, 'Male Pregnancy and Cognitive Permeability in *Measure for Measure*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 49.3 (1998), 269-92 (esp. p. 269).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 270.

<sup>6</sup> Jean E. Howard, 'The New Historicism in Renaissance Studies', *English Literary Renaissance* 16.1 (1986), 13-43 (esp. p. 24). For a summary of such readings, see Manfred Gross, *Shakespeares 'Measure for Measure' Und Die Politik Jakobs I* (Neumunster: Wachholtz, 1965), p. 14.

succeeded ‘not by act of parliament, not by winning an election, not by the will of his predecessor, but by the *will of God* in making him an heir. The right by which he ruled was accordingly *not less than divine*’.<sup>7</sup> According to English law, the King was allegedly ruled and constrained by the law; however, in the spirit of *salus reipublicae*, nothing the King did was technically illegal, as he was, in effect, the embodiment of the law itself.<sup>8</sup> Having already ruled in Scotland practically since his birth, James caused concern amongst his English subjects regarding the relationship between their new monarch and the law,<sup>9</sup> which, as Nigel Wood notes, is precisely the question raised by *Measure for Measure*: ‘Is authority due to the monarch or the law?’<sup>10</sup> The issues raised by the play appear even more topical when compared to James’s treatises, *The True Law of Free Monarchies* and *Basilikon Doron*, originally written as how-to manuals on kingship for his son, published in 1598 and 1599 respectively. Although the relationship between James’s political manifestos and *Measure for Measure* has been addressed in the past,<sup>11</sup> my aim is to discuss the relationship between James’s version of the theory of the King’s two bodies, which pervades both treatises, and its ironic manifestation in *Measure for Measure*.

In his thorough study on the variations of the theory of the King’s two bodies in the early modern period (a political theory, however, with its origins in medieval kingship)<sup>12</sup> Albert Rolls writes: ‘each version negotiates differently the ambiguous relationship between the king as a natural body within the body politic and the King as *the political body*’.<sup>13</sup> Although Rolls laments the current tendency of critics to fail to distinguish between the various permutations of the theory and to ‘collapse all positions into a single one’, he also acknowledges that even in the early seventeenth century, the clarity of the metaphor had become occluded. ‘One facet of the metaphor’, as Martha

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<sup>7</sup> R.W.K. Hinton, ‘Government and Liberty under James I’, *Cambridge Historical Journal* 11 (1953), 48-64 (p. 48; my italics).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> See J. Duncan Mackie, ‘“A Loyall Subiectes Advertiment” as to the Unpopularity of James I’s Government in England, 1603-4’, *The Scottish Historical Review* 23.89 (1925), 1–17.

<sup>10</sup> Nigel Wood, ‘Introduction’, in *Measure for Measure*, ed. by Nigel Wood (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996), pp. 1–8 (p. 6).

<sup>11</sup> See Gross, *Shakespeares Measure for Measure*. Gross’s book provides a detailed comparison of *Basilikon Doron* and *Measure for Measure*. *Basilikon Doron* is also mentioned in Amanda Piesse, ‘Self-Preservation in the Shakespearian System: Gender, Power and the New History’, in *Measure for Measure*, ed. by Nigel Wood (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996), pp. 44–89.

<sup>12</sup> Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> Albert Rolls, *The Theory of the King’s Two Bodies in the Age of Shakespeare* (Lewiston: Mellen Press, 2000), p. 71.

Kalnan Diede points out, ‘depicted the ruler as the possessor of two bodies – a body natural and a body politic’.<sup>14</sup> In another version, which logically should remain completely separate from the first, ‘the monarch became the head of a body politic composed of many members’.<sup>15</sup> In Edmund Plowden’s commentary on legal cases originally published in 1571, it is clear that the distinction between the two facets of the metaphor is not only ignored, but also that it is intentionally obscured and the metaphors mixed to support the political viewpoints of the author:

The King has two Capacities, for he has two Bodies, the one whereof is a Body natural, consisting of natural Members as every other Man has, and in this he is subject to Passions and to Death as other Men are; the other is a Body politic, and the members thereof are his Subjects, and he and his Subjects together compose the corporation...and he is incorporated with them, and they with him, and he is the Head, and they are the Members, and he has the sole Government of them; and this Body is not subject to Passions as the other is, nor to Death, for as to this Body the king never dies, and his natural death is not called in our Law...the Death of the King, but the Demise of the King, not signifying by the Word (Demise) that the Body politic of the King is dead, but that there is a Separation of the two Bodies, and that the Body politic is transferred and conveyed over from the Body natural now dead or now removed from the Dignity royal, to another Body natural.<sup>16</sup>

The mixing of the metaphor occurs when the King’s natural body is diametrically opposed to the King’s political body, of which he then simultaneously becomes the head. Rolls points out that the early modern understanding of the metaphor, ‘seems to require fusing the idea that the king embodies the realm with the idea that he is the ‘head’ of a Body composed of the rest of his subjects’.<sup>17</sup> This understanding allows the King to variously stand for a subject under the law, represented by his possession of the carnal body, and the King who is the law, and therefore above it, represented by his role as the head of the body politic.

James, in his political writing and through his actions as King, completely collapses the distinction between these two facets of the metaphor. According to Rolls, in doing so he

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<sup>14</sup> Martha Kalnin Diede, *Shakespeare’s Knowledgeable Body* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Edmund Plowden, *The Commentaries or Reports of Edmund Plowden, of the Middle-Temple, Esq.* (London: Printed by S. Brooks, Paternoster-Row, 1816), GG3r, Accessed on *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/commentariesorr00plowgoog>.

<sup>17</sup> Rolls, p. 59.

‘bypassed the whole problem of dealing with the difference between the two bodies. His personal will has been collapsed into his political will, and the law has been vested within his natural and politic body’.<sup>18</sup> This collapse of the King’s natural body and his political body implies his infallibility as a ruler, as he purportedly no longer possesses a body that is subject to the law, only one that embodies it, and is, therefore, above it. As James also believed he was divinely appointed as King, his divinely appointed political self becomes identical with his natural self. In essence he becomes Christ-like – fulfilling, through his manipulation of the metaphor, Jesus’ dictate in Matthew to be as perfect as his father in heaven.

However, the collapse of the King’s natural body with the body politic also creates the problem of contagion; as Rolls notes, ‘for Shakespeare, like many of his contemporaries, the king and realm become equivalent by means of the contagious power of the body natural, and this contagion can generate both order and disorder’.<sup>19</sup> Rolls is referring here to the power, ideological and legal, that is transferred when the King’s natural body as a subject and his political body as ruler are collapsed; however, Shakespeare, and surprisingly King James, also seem to be concerned with the contagion of physical corruption into political corruption. When this is expressed through the metaphor of venereal disease, we arrive at the third, slightly less popular facet of the metaphor of the King’s body, in which ‘the state [is] an independent body that the ruler might espouse’.<sup>20</sup>

The foundation of the discussion of the body in both James’s political writings and in *Measure for Measure* is the investiture of the physical body with power through the voice of divine authority. James sees his role as King as having been bestowed upon him by God. In his address to his son he states: ‘learne to know and love that God, whom to ye have a double obligation; first, for that he made you a man; and next, for that he made you a little God to sit on his Throne, & rule over other men’.<sup>21</sup> The image of the King as both a man and as a little God recalls the dichotomous body of Christ from the Sermon on the Mount inhabiting both carnal form and divine presence. When Duke Vincentio bestows his power unto Angelo he expresses the transfer of the abstract power of the law into carnal form:

What figure of us think you he will bear? –

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>20</sup> Dieder, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> James I, *Basilikon Doron Devided into Three Bookes* (Edinburgh: Robert Waldegrae, 1599), B2r. Accessed on *Early English Books Online*, STC 963:17.

For you must know we have with special soul  
Elected him our absence to supply,  
Lent him our terror, dressed him with our love  
And given his deputation all the organs  
Of our own power (1.1.16–21).

The power, having been transferred, is present in ‘the organs’, connoting both the organs of the law and judicial system *and* the carnal reality of Angelo’s bodily organs (a carnality that will become only more apparent as the plot progress).

The most important organ of power is undoubtedly the tongue or mouth. The Duke privileges it when he declares to Angelo that ‘Mortality and mercy in Vienna / Live in thy tongue and heart’ (1.1.44-5). Just as God’s voice generates the universe in Genesis, according to James, the Church and monarchy were ‘founded by God himself, who by his Oracle, and out of his owne mouth gave the law therof’.<sup>22</sup> God’s voice as the emblem of his power parallels the King’s voice as the law. Angelo proclaims himself ‘the voice of the recorded law’ when he pronounces Claudio’s sentence (2.4.61), and, in the final scene, the Duke claims that ‘The very mercy of the law cries out /Most audible, even from his proper tongue, / “An Angelo for Claudio, death for death”’ (5.1.399-403). However, just as the monarch’s body is at once a ruler of subjects as well as a subject of divine law, so too does the monarch’s tongue serve a dual function. As well as issuing the law in the name of and in the likeness of God, the monarch must, according to James I, pray to God and ‘speak with al reverence, for if a subject will not speak but reverently to a king, much les should any flesh presume to crak with God as with his companion’.<sup>23</sup> Angelo’s use of his second tongue, the one meant to pray (be a subject to God), not to rule (to subject others), seems flawed:

When I would pray and think, I think and pray  
To several subjects: heaven hath my empty words,  
Whilst my invention hearing not my tongue  
Anchors on Isabel; God in my mouth,  
As if I did but only chew his name. (2.4.1-5)

The tongue that pronounced Claudio’s death sentence in its role as part of the King’s body as ruler is unable to fulfil its role in prayer as part of the King’s body as subject.

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<sup>22</sup> James I, King of England, *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies: Or The Reciproock and Mutuall Dutie Betwixt a Free King, and His Naturall Subiectes*. (Edinburgh: Printed by Robert Waldegrae, 1598), C2r. Accessed on *Early English Books Online*, STC 1313:10.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, C4v.

Isabella points out the dual nature of the monarch's tongue when she says to Angelo: 'I have no tongue but one' (2.4.139). Although this statement is explicitly in reference to Isabella's denial of Angelo's innuendo-filled speech, the line also quips on the nature of the King's two bodies, or, in this case, his two tongues, and the fact that Isabella, like Angelo's other subjects, is only subject – not ruler.

The duplicity of the King's two bodies in the first valence of the metaphor, as both a carnal body and a political body, is useful and problematic. The separation of the fleshy, mortal body and the political body as 'an unchanging immortal entity free from old age, imbecility, or any other conceivable imperfection obliges the court to accept that the king, when he functions in his capacity as King, always acts correctly despite any imperfection debilitating his natural body'.<sup>24</sup> The truth is, however, that the King inevitably has a fleshy body, as James points out in *Basilikon Doron*, 'the houre of death is uncertaine to me (as unto all flesh)'.<sup>25</sup> The fact that this carnal body must be separated from the infallibility of the Kingship proves that it is imperfect. Its primary imperfection is its mortality, while its other imperfections derive from the fact that it has personal desires that do not always align with the kingdom's political will.

Angelo begins the play surrounded by rumors that he has no natural body, as indicated by Lucio's question to the disguised Duke: 'They say this Angelo was not made by man and woman, after this downright way of creation. Is it true, think you?' (3.1.349-351). In fact, it seems as though, as Janet Adelman notes in her essay on the bed trick, 'the play sets out to test the claim that Angelo does not have an ordinary human body with ordinary human needs'.<sup>26</sup> Angelo, of course, fails this test by succumbing to the carnal desire that his political body is trying to eradicate. These bodily relationships become embedded in one another in Isabella's speech to Angelo when she is suing for her brother's life:

Because authority, though it err like others,  
Hath yet a kind of medicine in itself  
That skins the vice o'th'top. Go to your bosom;  
Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know  
That's like my brother's fault. If it confess  
A natural guiltiness, such as is his,

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<sup>24</sup> Rolls, p. 58.

<sup>25</sup> James I, *Basilikon Doron*, A4r–B1v.

<sup>26</sup> Janet Adelman, 'Bed Tricks: On Marriage as the End of Comedy in *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*', in *Shakespeare's Personality*, ed. by Norman N. Holland, Sidney Homan, and Bernard J. Paris (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 151–174 (p. 165).

Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue  
Against my brother's life. (2.2.137-44)

Isabella's claim that authority is fallible seems taboo to James's conception of a divinely appointed King, who can do no wrong. The use of medicine in the passage reflects the use of the carnal, mortal body to elucidate the ills of the political body, and specifically works to suggest a political remedy, namely the application of justice. The heart of Angelo's fallible body, according to Isabella, should rule his political body, echoing the Duke's lines from the first scene that the law of Vienna resides in Angelo's 'tongue and heart' (1.1.45). Claudio's crime is termed 'natural guiltiness' by Isabella, implying a correlation between sexuality and the natural body that can only be ruled by the law if Angelo also possesses a natural body. When Angelo's natural body is collapsed with his political body, his 'natural guiltiness' becomes the guilt of his political body, which, inevitably, affects its other members through his role as the dispenser of justice.

If the differences between the natural body and the body politic are collapsed in the metaphor, as James implies that they are, the result would be either the making fallible of the body politic, or the making infallible of the natural body. Shakespeare seems to be constantly problematizing this by showing that the relationship between Angelo's natural body and his political body are reciprocal. The Duke's speech concerning Angelo's fallible natural body and its effect on his ability to dispense justice says as much:

He who the sword of heaven will bear  
Should be as holy as severe,  
Pattern in himself to know,  
Grace to stand, and virtue go,  
More nor less to others paying  
Than by self-offences weighting.  
Shame to him whose cruel striking  
Kills for faults of his own liking!  
Twice treble shame on Angelo  
To weed my vice, and let his grow!  
O, what may man within him hide,  
Though angel on the outward side!  
(3.1.281-492)



The bearer of heaven's sword, inevitably fallible in his carnal form, must mete out justice using himself as a standard. This is, however, not how James approaches the issue of justice as it pertains to the King. In *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies* he claims that the King cannot be judged by his subjects, but is 'to be judged onely by GOD, whome to onelie he must give count of his judgement'.<sup>27</sup> While James claims he has 'proved, that the King is above the law', he does say that 'a good King will not onely delight to rule his subjects by the Law, but even will conforme himself in his own actions thereunto, always keeping that ground, that the health of the common-welth be his cheefe law'.<sup>28</sup> Shakespeare criticizes James's hypocritical stance on the metaphor of the two bodies – admitting to the fallibility of the carnal body while simultaneously denying the problem of personal will and desires – when he has the Duke say, 'If [Angelo] had so offended / He would have weighed thy brother by himself, / And not have cut him off' (5.1.110-12). If the carnal body and the body politic are one body then the King's carnal body must be held to the same standard as the body politic, not because the King 'delights' in it, but because his carnal body is one with the law and provides its measure.

The second valence of the metaphor, the King as the head of the body politic, provides for a unity and reciprocity between the King's body and the body politic. King James, although again mixing metaphors, claims that 'The King towards his people is rightly compared to a father of children, and to a head of a bodie composed of divers members'. He goes on to say that 'the head cares for the bodie: so doth the King for his people. As the discourse and direction flowes from the head, and the execution according thereunto belongs to the rest of the members everie one according to their office: so is it betwixt a wise Prince, and his people'.<sup>29</sup> The problematic usage of the word 'execution' notwithstanding, in the early modern period, pre-Cartesian psychology assumed that the mind is 'inextricably part of the material body'.<sup>30</sup> The materiality of the mind and its material relationship with the body gave it the ability not only to direct the body as it saw fit, but also indicated a reciprocal relationship of disease and corruption. As James himself notes, any corrupt member of the body, excepting the head, would have to be excised to maintain the health of the body as a whole:

As the judgement coming from the head may not onley employ it; but likewise, incase any of them be affected with any infirmity, must care & provide for their

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<sup>27</sup> James I., *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*, C5r.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, D1r.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, D3v–D3r.

<sup>30</sup> Crane, 271.

remedy, incase it be curable, and if other-wise gar cut them for feare of infecting of the rest: evenso is it betwixt the prince & his people.<sup>31</sup>

This statement seems to leave open the question: what happens when the head of the body becomes infected? Should it be removed?

In *Basilikon Doron*, James advises that his son should be ‘carefull to keep [his conscience] free from two diseases, which it useth oft to bee infected with, to witte, Leaprosie, and Superstition’;<sup>32</sup> however, it is clear that while James supports the eradication of diseased body parts representing corrupt or rebellious parts of the body politic, he is certainly *not* in favour of the removal of a diseased head. He uses the metaphor to his benefit when he says in *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*:

And for the similitude of the head & the body, it may very wel fall out that the head will be forced to garre cut of some rotten member... to keepe the rest of the body in integritie. But what state the body can be in, if the head, for any infirmity that can fall to it, be cut off, I leave it to the readers judgement.<sup>33</sup>

In stark contrast to this, both John Ponet in 1556 and Robert Parsons in 1594, arguing against the hegemonic control of a tyrant, contend that the head of the body politic should be removed when the head is corrupt.<sup>34</sup> Of course, as David George Hale notes in his book on the body politic, ‘to argue seriously, as both Ponet and Parsons do, that decapitation is a feasible remedy for a diseased body politic is to wreak havoc upon the metaphor. If the metaphor is valid, then its application in this manner is absurd’.<sup>35</sup>

The fact that *Measure for Measure* is teeming with scenes of decapitation, both threatened and carried out, would help to imply then, as I am doing, that Shakespeare is ‘wreaking havoc upon the metaphor’ of the King’s two bodies. Not only is decapitation a constant theme and, in fact, the turning point of the plot, but it is also made into somewhat of a farce. Claudio is the first character sentenced to beheading, which is

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<sup>31</sup> James I, *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*, D3r–D4v.

<sup>32</sup> James I, *Basilikon Doron Devided into Three Bookes*, D1r–D2v.

<sup>33</sup> James I, *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*, D4r–D5v.

<sup>34</sup> John Ponet, *A Shorte Treatise of Politike Pouuer and of the True Obedience Which Subiectes Owe to Kynges and Other Ciuile Gouvernours, with an Exhortacion to All True Naturall Englishe Men* (Strasbourg: Printed by the heirs of W. Köpfel, 1556). Accessed in *Early English Books Online*, STC 349:11. And Robert Parsons, *A Conference about the next Succession to the Crown of England* (Reprinted at N. with license, 1681). Accessed in *Early English Books Online*, STC 1153:34.

<sup>35</sup> David George Hale, *The Body Politic; a Political Metaphor in Renaissance English Literature* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 81.

revealed when Mistress Overdone, the representative of Vienna's bawdy underworld, exclaims, 'within these three days his head [is] to be chopped off' (1.2.61). Lucio exacerbates the comedic effect when he later tells Claudio, 'thy head stands so tickle on thy shoulders that a milkmaid, if she be in love, may sigh it off' (1.2.149-50). Isabella also refers to Claudio's decapitation, albeit in more serious terms; however, contrary to James's assertion that the head should never sustain damage even if it is corrupt, Isabella constantly compares the loss of Claudio's head with the contamination of her own body, always implying that the purity of the body outranks retaining the head. She goes so far as to claim that

had he twenty heads to tender down  
On twenty bloody blocks, he'd yield them up  
Before his sister should her body stoop  
To such abhorred pollution (2.4.180-183).

Isabella's valuation of the purity of the body above the possession of the head is in stark contradiction to James's contention that the safety of the head, even if it is corrupt, trumps any ensuing injury to the body as a whole.

The Duke's subsequent game of decapitation by musical chairs, which equates the heads, first of Barnadine and Claudio, and later of Ragusine and Barnadine, turns the dreaded act of decapitation into a veritable game of chance. When Angelo requests Claudio's head as proof of his death the Duke says 'let this Barnardine be this morning executed, and his head borne to Angelo' (4.2.157-8). When Barnardine does not feel inclined to die, the Provost finds 'one Ragusine, a most notorious pirate, / A man of Claudio's years, his beard and head / Just of his colour' (4.3.63-5). Barnardine's refusal to die is pivotal precisely because it is arbitrary. Why would Shakespeare not allow Barnardine to be killed in place of Claudio? Why make Barnardine refuse death and bring the pirate, Ragusine, into the play at all? Although arguments have been made that Barnardine acts as the only sane character in the play,<sup>36</sup> it is more persuasive that Shakespeare decapitates Ragusine in place of Barnardine in place of Claudio, simply because he can. In doing so he shows the arbitrary nature of the head, which refers back to the original question: 'is authority due to the monarch or the law?' In other words, if there is no difference between Claudio's, Barnardine's, or Ragusine's heads, is there a difference between Angelo's and Vincentio's? In her reading of the play, Marcia Riefer says, 'by using Ragozine's head, for example – *caput ex machina* – to call attention to

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<sup>36</sup> Harold Bloom, 'Introduction', in *William Shakespeare's 'Measure for Measure': Modern Critical Interpretations*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publications, 1987), pp. 1–6.

the ridiculousness of the Duke's machinations, Shakespeare simultaneously calls attention to his own superior skills'.<sup>37</sup> However, it may not only be the Duke's machinations that Shakespeare is calling ridiculous – it seems to be the theory of the head as incorruptible, or, if corruptible, still indispensable. The loophole in the collapsed and, therefore, incoherent metaphor of the King's body as both mortal and immortal – head of the body and the body itself – which Shakespeare is fully exploiting, is the fact that the head of the body politic, once severed from its body, will regrow not only in triplicate, but will endlessly regenerate.

The most blatantly irreverent decapitation joke also corresponds to the third facet of the metaphor of the King's two bodies: the relationship between the King and the body politic as the body he espouses. Pompey the bawd, in response to the Provost's request to help with the beheadings, states, 'if the man be a bachelor, sir, I can; but if he be a married man, he's his wife's head, and I can never cut off a woman's head' (4.2.1-4). This facet of the metaphor, like the others, is convoluted in James's writing. In *Basilikon Doron*, he first advises his son in marriage 'to treat her in all things as your Wife and the halfe of your self, and to make your bodie (which then is no more yours but properly hers) common with none other'.<sup>38</sup> Here, the King's body, and presumably his natural body only, is property of his wife. However, shortly thereafter, James says of marriage, 'ye are the head, shee is your bodie: it is your office to command and hers to obey'.<sup>39</sup> The woman's body is either a separate body that becomes the property of her husband (although James does claim that the husband's body also becomes the property of the wife, which recalls Pompey's irreverent comment that the man's head is property of his wife), or she is the body belonging to the head. In either case, the metaphor indicates that the woman loses control over her body.<sup>40</sup> Isabella's worth and power, although apparent in her speech, originate in her body; her virgin body is at once her gift to God through her renunciation of sexuality as a nun, and it is her bargaining chip to prevent the death of her brother. Angelo refers to her sexuality as 'the treasure of your body' and implores her to redeem her brother 'by yielding up thy body to my will' (2.4.96, 164). Isabella herself calls her sexuality the 'gift of my chaste body' (5.1.97).

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<sup>37</sup> Marcia Riefer, 'Instruments of Some More Mightier Member', in *William Shakespeare's 'Measure for Measure': Modern Critical Interpretations*, pp. 131–144 (p. 143).

<sup>38</sup> James I, King of England, *Basilikon Doron*, P4r.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, O1r.

<sup>40</sup> See Subha Mukherji, *Law and Representation in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 'Common law allowed women very limited legal capacities. They suffered from their differential treatment by the law of inheritance, since primogeniture ensured male children's primacy. Above all, a married woman has no independent legal entity. They were *femmes couvertes* – covered, that is, by their husbands, unable to contract, sue or be sued in their own person' (p. 209).

The female body is always purely carnal, never political; it is to be absorbed and controlled by the male body, just as the subject's body is absorbed and controlled by the political body of the King.

In the final act, when Angelo, trying to deflect the accusation against him, says, 'I do perceive / These poor informal women are no more / But instruments of some more mightier member', he is explicitly referring to Friar Lodowick; however, it is implied that legally, and when it comes to their bodies, women in general are subject to a 'mightier member' that may refer to any number of contemporary definitions. The word member might have connoted either 'the penis', indicating the body of the woman as the instrument of the man's sexual fulfillment<sup>41</sup> or 'a part or organ of the body',<sup>42</sup> indicating the role of the woman as a part of the man's body. Metaphorically, 'member' refers also to 'a person who belongs to the metaphorical body of Christ, or of Satan',<sup>43</sup> which, while parodying the Duke's role as the friar who proposes marriage to Isabella, also reminds us that that women in this play are the subject both of their political ruler, and of God. Again, in all of these instances, the woman remains the subject: of man's sexual desire and of his political body through their marriage contract.

In *Measure for Measure*, the female body, which is always only the natural body, is alternately depicted as either the site of sexual desire, or as the site of pregnancy. The maintenance of *salus publicae* in the face of corruption, presented to the reader in the guise of spreading venereal disease, is constantly lurking as the subtext of *Measure for Measure*, such as when the Duke speaks about the 'aims and ends / Of burning youth' in terms of the 'dribbling dart of love', which 'Can pierce a complete bosom' (1.3.1-6). The sex act itself, although perhaps also morally degrading, always contains the possible threat of bodily contamination as Isabella implies, when she calls Angelo's proposed sex act 'such abhorred pollution' (2.4.183). Angelo's hint, upon word of the Duke's return, that his 'wisdom' may be 'tainted' uses the metaphor of the King as the head of the body to conflate an imagined bodily disease with the possible corruption of the Duke's wisdom, and hence the law. As Crane says, 'the play seems to suggest, there is no escape from penetration and contamination, which are properties of the human, body [and] brain'.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> 'Member, N. and Adj.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press), 1a, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/view/Entry/116296>.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 1b.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 2a.

<sup>44</sup> Crane, 291.

Pregnancy indicates both fertility and corruption, since, like venereal disease, it is the marker of polluting sexuality, and is 'contracted' through penetration. Just as the King's body is always metaphorized, so, too, is the pregnant body. The word pregnant, in fact, is never used in relation to the female body,<sup>45</sup> which is 'striking', as Crane remarks, 'in a play that has as its central image a pregnant female body'; however, it is used at length to describe the male body, or rather the both fertile and corrupting metaphor of conception as the penetration and fertilization of his mind. As Crane points out,

the connection between thought and sexual reproduction... was reinforced by the belief that semen contained the same spiritus that animated the brain, where it may even have been 'concocted'; that the uterus resembled a brain (in its cold, phlegmy nature as well as size and shape).<sup>46</sup>

For example, Angelo's 'future evils' are 'conceived' and then 'hatched and born' (2.2.95-101). In the most obvious conflation of the pregnant body within the theory of the King's two bodies, Juliet's pregnant body is compared to Angelo's body shortly after he is instated as the Duke's substitute:

*Claudio:* The stealth of our most mutual entertainment  
With character too gross is writ on Juliet

*Lucio:* With child, perhaps?

*Claudio:* Unhapp'ly even so.

And the new deputy now for the Duke –  
Whether it be the fault and glimpse of newness,  
Or whether that the body public be  
A horse whereon the governor doth ride,  
Who, newly in the seat, that it may know  
He can command, lets it straight feel the spur –  
Whether the tyranny be in his place,  
Or in his eminence that fills it up  
I stagger in. (1.2.131-143)

Here we see an explicit juxtaposition of two images, both of which contain multiple bodies. The first image is of Juliet's pregnant body. A second body, the body of her

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<sup>45</sup> Only Lucio's description of Juliet's literal pregnancy to Isabella is free of mention from the threat of contamination that predicates conception, both mental and physical: 'That from the seedness the bare fallow brings / To teeming foison, even so her plenteous womb / Expresseth his full tilth and husbandry' (1.4.41-3).

<sup>46</sup> Crane, 279.

unborn child, occupies the same physical space – the foetus is separate, yet it exists entirely within the confines of her body. The second image is that of Angelo riding a horse. Throughout *Measure for Measure*, the horse, or the equine body, represents the body politic, while Angelo's ability to provide the 'the needful bits and curbs to headstrong weeds' equates his horsemanship with his ability to rule (1.2.20). In this passage, the body of Angelo also exists as two distinct entities. He exists in a physical space, denoted here by the word 'place', which parallels Juliet's body in the first image. However, he also exists in 'his eminence that fills it up', which represents the divine authority with which he is invested. Claudio is correct to distinguish that these are two separate bodies – just as Juliet's body and her child's body, while existing in the same physical space, are distinct entities. Angelo's physical body (his tongue and heart) in and of itself has no power to sentence Claudio to death; it is the 'filling up' of his carnal body – its impregnation with divine right – that confers on him the second body, the political body. Angelo himself later seems to collapse these two bodies when he says,

This deed unshapes me quite, makes me unpregnant  
And dull to all proceedings. A deflowered maid,  
And by an eminent body that enforced  
The law against it! (4.4.19-22).

The 'unshapedness' and 'unpregnantness' point to the fact that his carnal sin has led to the nullification of the divine authority given to him. Yes, Angelo's physical body raped Isabella, or so he thinks; however, he, as the physical embodiment of the law, also violated society's, and specifically Claudio's, right to justice. Through his carnal corruption, Claudio has also corrupted the body politic – perhaps he has even aborted the body politic within his carnal body, as the term 'unpregnant' seems to imply. Wood claims that 'Angelo comes to appreciate the divorce between the body and the authority invested in it',<sup>47</sup> however, based on his continued conflation between the carnal body and the body politic, it seems that he finds, instead of a divorce, a necessary, unavoidable congruence between the two. The correlation of the pregnant womb and the King's function as the head and mind of the body politic lends the metaphor of the King's two bodies a plastic ability to attribute either fertile or corruptive production by the King as caused by an exogenous penetration instead of an internal fault.

The image of the pregnant body promotes the idea of sexuality as the act of physical bodies – both in the sense that the sex act occurs between two natural bodies, and that it can produce a new physical body. The relationship between the carnal body and

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<sup>47</sup> Wood, p. 8.

sexuality is, in the collapsed metaphor of the King's two bodies, indicative of the impossibility of the separation of the King's political body and his sexuality. Immediately before questioning if Angelo was 'made by man and woman', Lucio notes that sex is a vice impossible to 'extirp... till eating and drinking be put down' (3.1.347-51). The bridge between the ordered body politic and the natural body's carnal desires is marriage; yet the marriages in the play seem to present more problems than solutions. As Maus notes, 'Claudio and Juliet defer their wedding day; Angelo abandons Mariana; Lucio refuses to support his child or marry its mother. Prostitution flourishes... Once carnal desire comes unhinged from the institution of marriage, it begins to seem subversive of personal and civic order'.<sup>48</sup> According to Frances E. Dolan, in the early modern period, 'biblical language about forsaking all others and becoming one flesh articulated the investment in the marital bond as unique and physical'.<sup>49</sup> The marriage contract at once sanctions sexual unity, while uniting man and woman into the body of the man, or into one body of which the man was the head. However, just as Angelo embodies the strife between the carnal body and the body politic, so does the play's discussion of marriage, which, while purporting to legitimize sexual desire within society, actually ends up undermining its legitimization by being constantly deferred. As Adelman notes, in *Measure for Measure* the marriage contract's role in sanctioning sexual desire is proved to be inadequate: 'insofar as sexuality is felt to be illicit, marriage itself will be equivocal'; when marriage is denied, through the abstinence of nuns, represented in Isabella, or the promiscuity of prostitution, represented by Lucio, 'the sexual alternatives – absolute chastity or absolute sexual degradation – [make] the middle ground of marriage impossible'.<sup>50</sup> The bed trick, which works to preserve Isabella's marriage to the church and consummate Mariana's marriage to Angelo, is precisely that – a trick. The maintenance of these two marriages does not and cannot take place in the light of day, in the realm of law and justice – it takes place in a garden shed at night, in the realm of plotting women. The fact that marriage can only be upheld through the Duke's, and by extension, the playwright's machinations, proves its fallibility as a true regulator of sexuality. In a world where sex indicates marriage, and marriage without sex is not necessarily legitimate, marriage does not so much sanction the physical union of bodies as it demands and controls it.

Much of the dispute about *Measure for Measure*'s genre deals with its ending. In the fifth act, four marriages, the typical sign of a happy ending, are decreed. Only one, the marriage between Claudio and Juliet, is explicitly agreed to by each party, and yet it is

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<sup>48</sup> Maus, 'Introduction', p. 306.

<sup>49</sup> Frances E. Dolan, 'Shakespeare and Marriage: An Open Question', *Literature Compass* 8. 9 (2011), 620-34 (p. 622).

<sup>50</sup> Adelman, p. 151.



the only union we do not see represented on the stage. The marriages act as a restructuring of the carnal disorder into manageable political unions. The Duke's attempt to correct the rift between the carnal body and the body politic that exists both within Angelo and in Vienna as a whole, is enacted through imposing social contracts that inevitably represent the death they are supposed to avoid. 'For Angelo and Lucio, and perhaps for Claudio', writes Adelman, 'marriage is not a matter of comic festivity but a punishment for a sexual sin'.<sup>51</sup> But, the marriages are not necessarily simply punishments; they are failed attempts to combine the carnal body and political body through a contract. The Duke's marriage proposal and its concomitant dismemberment of Isabella's body is emblematic of this failure. In his first proposal the Duke says, 'Give me your hand, and say you will be mine' (5.1.486). Isabella is reduced to simply a hand that will aid the Duke in his position as head; he is attempting to incorporate her body into his own, just as, through his regulation of his subjects' sexuality, he can attempt to fit their carnal bodies into the political sphere. In his second proposal he states, 'I have a motion much imports your good, / Where to, if you'll a willing ear incline, / What's mine is yours, and what is yours is mine' (5.1.528-530). Isabella, already having been asked to give her hand, is now asked to lend her ear – the Duke is slowly absorbing her body parts into his own bodies (his political body through their union under the marriage contract, and his natural body through the imminent sexual union) to eliminate the threat of the sexualized female body completely.

The idea of the marriage as social contract, and the social contract in general, however, implies that there are two distinct bodies to begin with that must be legally combined as one. Upon the succession of James to the throne, the idea of government as a social contract instead of a divinely established monarchy threatened the monarch's absolute authority. Hale claims that the idea of a social contract in England was precipitated by the theology of the Calvinists, who viewed religion as a covenant with God: 'If society is contractually rather than naturally or divinely established, it is easier to effect a thorough reformation and to take action against an unsatisfactory ruler'.<sup>52</sup> James, of course, argued stridently against the concept of the social contract:

As to this contract alledged made at the coronation of a King, although I denie any such contract to be made then... yet I confesse, that a King at his coronation, or at the entry to his kingdome, willinglie promiseth to his people, to discharge honourably and truly the office given him by God over them. But presuming that thereafter he break his promise unto them neverso inexcusably,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>52</sup> Hale, p. 8.

the question is, who should be judge of the break, giving unto them this contract were made to them never so sicker, according to their allegiance.<sup>53</sup>

James's problem with the contractual relationship is that it implies that he is not the head of the body, but rather that he is a body in juxtaposition with the body politic, who stand on equal footing with him, at least insofar as the body politic is able to enter into a binding agreement and call upon a third party to enforce said agreement. This is obviously impossible for James, as God is 'doutles the only judge, both because to him only the Kinge must make count of his administration'.<sup>54</sup> The idea of the social contract is premised on the separation of the King's two bodies and the destruction of the metaphor.

In *Measure for Measure*, the problem of divine authority is solved by the presence of the Duke, who is able to resume his role as regent in order to judge Angelo for the breaking of the social contract; however, the Duke is also not infallible. Although Harold C. Goddard, in his essay on power in the play, claims that 'the only way to make the Duke morally acceptable is frankly to take the whole piece as a morality play with the Duke in the role of God, omniscient and unseen, looking down on the world',<sup>55</sup> it is questionable whether we *should* make the Duke morally acceptable. In fact, he is just as fallible as Angelo: his association with the 'dribbling dart of love' and his proposal of marriage to Isabella that merely doubles Angelo's attempts at rape earlier in the play prove that, far from holy, the Duke is just as incapable of separating his carnal body from his political body as Angelo. The unsatisfactory, and perhaps even tragic, marriage contracts at the end of *Measure for Measure* mirror the problem of introducing the social contract into the metaphor of the King's two bodies. If the King has two bodies, and his subjects have none, they are unable to enter into a contract with him, because the contract requires the 'whole people in one body' as one of the parties, which, according to James, is implausible.<sup>56</sup>

In a 1603 text on discontent with James's rule titled 'A Loyall Subiectes Advertisement', the author complains that the law is not being dealt justly, especially amongst the King's chief officers. His suggestion reads: 'But the law *talionis* must be put in use and the unjust accusers must be severely punished lest the magistrates be

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<sup>53</sup> James I, *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*, E1v.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, E1r.

<sup>55</sup> Harold C. Goddard, 'Power in Measure for Measure', in *William Shakespeare's 'Measure for Measure': Modern Critical Interpretations*, pp. 23–44, (p. 32).

<sup>56</sup> James I, *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*, E2v.

brought in to contempt'.<sup>57</sup> The loyal (and disgruntled) subject calls for the application of law talionis, an eye for an eye, in the case of the executors of the law. The concept of an eye for an eye is also present in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, as indicated in the second epigraph, which equates not only eyes but also teeth and cheeks. But all we have received as an answer in *Measure for Measure* is a head for a head – the Duke for Angelo. Parodied in the interchangeability of heads for Claudio's execution, the replacement of Angelo with the Duke at the end of *Measure for Measure* 'points... to the close affiliation between narrative deceit and legal fiction: the play's sole-plot-maker is also its supreme legal authority' that Subha Mukherji talks about in a different context.<sup>58</sup> Contrary to what Manfred Gross argues, *Measure for Measure* is not an attempt to compare and contrast a good ruler and a bad ruler: 'Angelo is representative of the bad ruler from the sources, whom Shakespeare confronts with the good ruler in Vincentio. Angelo's progressive corruption and Vincentio's development into an ideal ruler make up a large portion of the plot'.<sup>59</sup> Is Vincentio really an ideal ruler? Isabella proclaims to Angelo that she 'has no tongue but one' indicating her sole function as subject, not as ruler; however, by the end of the play, once Vincentio resumes his role as the duke, she has *no* tongue. Her silence for the last 140 lines of the play indicates her complete incorporation into the body of the Duke. His proposal, the acceptance of which is presumably not avoidable other than by death, exerts the same sexual coercion that Angelo's persuasion did.

*Measure for Measure* cannot be read as a prescriptive play that presents an ideal ruler versus his corrupt counterpart. As political commentary it critiques all facets of the metaphor of the King's two bodies, its dichotomy into a natural and political body, its function as the head of the body politic, and its simultaneous ability to espouse the body politic by pointing out the metaphor's incompatibilities; however, Shakespeare also seems to critique the alternative of the social contract, at least when presented within the structure of monarchical government. *Measure for Measure* is a political play, but it is certainly not a comedy, nor does it present a solution; so, yes, in more ways than one it remains a problem play, posing more questions than it answers about the future of the autocratic monarchy in England, and weaving anxieties throughout its textual bodies that would lead to civil war less than forty years later.

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<sup>57</sup> Mackie, 2.

<sup>58</sup> Mukherji, p. 51.

<sup>59</sup> Gross, p. 39: 'Angelo ist der schlechte Stellvertreter der Quellen, dem Shakespeare in Vincentio einen guten Herrscher gegenüberstellt. Die fortschreitende Korruption Angelos und die Entwicklung Vincentios zum idealen Herrscher bilden einen wesentlichen Teil des Handlungsablaufes'.