
Julian Yates
but understandably, the authors do not venture analysis of literary representations between women, nor do they attempt to rethink or restructure dominant definitions of sexuality. Such rethinking is vital as the dominant psychoanalytic vocabulary for reading sexual affect and desire is a relatively ineffective frame of reference for grasping the modes of erotic connectedness among women.

Relative to its expansive discussions of economics and female community, *Women in Early Modern England* is weaker in relating women’s lives to religious belief and practice. This isn’t surprising since Patricia Crawford’s own *Women and Religion in England: 1500–1750* covers much of that ground. Still *Women in Early Modern England* makes a contribution to understanding the effects of gender in late seventeenth-century churching, the ritual through which post-partum women returned to the church community (62), even as it oversimplifies the significance of different practices in different religious communities. David Cressy’s *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* will provide a useful counterpoint for more in-depth information about religious practices, though it lacks the kind of serious interest in gender issues that makes Mendelson and Crawford’s work most exciting.

*Women in Early Modern England* will be a vital resource for scholars of early modern England, women’s history, culture, and literature, as it provides a coherent and diverse account of women’s lives in the period. I can well imagine asking advanced undergraduate literature students to read selections in a course in early modern literature, especially as a way of opening discussions of the canon and specific literary works, including *The Witch of Edmonton*, *The Adventures of Master Ff.*, and Aemelia Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. Graduate students, especially those interested in historical contexts, will probably find this among their most useful historical readings, vital for those working on women’s literature and representations of women alike.

Jan Stirm  
Monmouth College

If, as Mary Douglas once observed, “the body is the central trope of culture,” Jonathan Gil Harris has provided us with a book that explores the complex ways in which this “body” signifies according to the allied registers of medical and social thought in Tudor and Stuart England. *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic* takes “organic political analogy” as its subject, “that is, the diverse ways in which writers of the period conceived of social structure and process through the prism of the human body” (i). But, as Harris’s title makes clear, this book focuses less on the metaphor as an end in itself than on its failures, its pathology. “Its primary focus is not on how organic political analogy worked, but rather, on how it didn’t work,” Harris proclaims. Accordingly, the cast of pathological “characters” or cases he marshals to tell his story includes the familiar grouping of the sodomite, the Catholic, the Jewish doctor, and the witch—a grouping, I would argue, that Harris’s revealing analysis makes legible differently, not as individual cases but as a cadre of infiltrating foreign bodies, some imminent fifth column whose arrival precipitates a crisis in the social and metaphorical body of a Reformed England.

Central to this project are two contrasting principles of social thought, says Harris, the “two most distinctive—and problematic—axioms of twentieth-century functionalist social pathology: first, that social illness has its origins exclusively in external factors; and second, that the social organism’s pathologies can contribute to rather than undermine its health” (5). Harris elaborates on these twin axioms early in the book, focusing on the double strategy by which Durkheimian sociology “subscribes to the question-begging functionalist premise that every ‘fundamental’ component or product of the body is ‘normal’” while endorsing “the exogenous explanation of illness formulated by nineteenth-century germ theory microbiologists such as Louis Pasteur and replicated by anthropologists like [A. R.] Radcliffe-Brown—namely, that disease originates . . . in an external invading pathogen” (8). Thus, Durkheimian sociology “figures the criminal as an invading pathogen” but does so in order to “disqualify the suggestion” because the “criminal is not foreign to the body but is produced by and in it.” Harris’s interest in twentieth-century social thought is not merely the prehistory of his own methodological impulses, however. One of the most refreshing and sustaining aspects of this book is the way he traces the genealogy of the concepts of pathology and disease that remain with us today, demonstrating a variety

---

of ways in which early moderns accessed the very axioms that would come to structure our own ideas of "organic political analogy." Undaunted by the very questions of alterity or historical distance that tend to hamstring much historicist writing, Harris takes the metaphoricity of the body as a trope for culture seriously and reveals the ways in which the emergence of the "anti-Galenic iatrochemical pharmacy of Paracelsus and others provided Elizabethan writers . . . with a new and [he argues] mystificatory vocabulary for explaining the origins of social illness" (14).

As Harris's use of the word mystificatory signals, all this talk of bodies and borders, of pathology and social organisms, cannot fail to register in terms of New Historicist and Cultural Materialist practice, and specifically in terms of those two bywords: subversion and containment. Pinpointing exactly where Harris falls on these scales is difficult, in part because both New Historicism and Cultural Materialism are treated in very much the same way as Durkheimian social thought and Paracelsian iatrochemistry—as configurations of thought that are themselves implicated in the evolution of the "organic political metaphor" rather than as supracritical accounts of its functioning. Reprising, for example, the argument of Steven Greenblatt's essay "Invisible Bullets" about Thomas Harriot and the Algonquian Indians in the Virginia Colony, Harris notes Greenblatt's famous formulation that "the apparent production of subversion is . . . the very condition of power" (9), as an allegory of Durkheimian social thought. Reading these "invisible bullets" as "blanks or at least not to have any genuinely disruptive effect" (11), Harris recovers the ways in which Greenblatt's argument replicates the "problematic double whammy of functionalist organicism—its displacement of the origins of social 'illness' and change to external agencies, coupled with its recuperation of deviance for the health of a largely homeostatic organism" (12). Trumping Greenblatt's contained reading of the bullets with the Algonquian perspective (the phrase "invisible bullets," as you will remember, is credited to the native observers) Harris notes that in microbiological terms "the harmless transgression initially suggested by Greenblatt's title does . . . have a genuinely disruptive pathological potential" (11). But crucially, this effect is projected onto the Other as Europe infects the New World. "The extent to which social 'illness' and transformation may afflict the English body politic itself as a consequence of factors within its structural organization," notes Harris, "remains undisclosed" (12). And so Harris wishes to supplement the outward gaze with one that examines the English body politic itself, or rather that watches it examine itself, charting the strategies it develops to explain and explain away its failures, its lapses, its implosions.
Part one, “Pathologizing the body politic,” charts the development of Paracelsian concepts of disease, their coexistence with the more traditional, medieval, and scholastic privileging of Galenic humoral models of bodily infection and their gradual influence on political and social body analogies. Harris notes that humoral conceptions of the body figured disease as the result of an “imbalance” (22) and notes how evolving explanations for the syphilis epidemic spread across Europe gave rise to a counter-argument based on infectious “seeds.” Throughout, Harris insists upon the “palimpsestic quality of the body” (25) as the site of numerous, overlapping inscriptions and as a site simultaneously configured by the various vocabularies in circulation. Chapter two examines the “palimpsestic,” or what we might call “hybrid,” form that the body assumes in Thomas Starkey’s *Dialogue Between Reginold Pole and Thomas Lupset* (ca. 1535) and William Averell’s *Mervailous Combat of Contrareties* (1588). In both cases, Harris attends to the ideological consequences that each incarnation of the body metaphor produces. In Starkey, Harris finds a seemingly conventional humoral conception of the body’s illnesses as based on internal imbalance, but by carefully reading the shift from “the religious body of Catholic Europe to the largely secular body of the English Nation state” (32), he discovers the shape of an argument for Absolutist monarchy. The “mutual interdependence of the body’s many parts” is figured as “the unquestioning obedience of the body’s subordinate members to the monarch” (33). There remains a “dissident potential” to Starkey’s strategies, however, because they risk recognizing that “the body politic’s afflictions can be generated by powerful elements inside the organism.” Likewise, in Averell’s various revisions to the famous fable of the Belly in Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, Harris finds a writer “anxious to avert the potentially subversive consequences of a model that would present disease as originating inside the body” (42) and so pathologizing the Catholic threat in a Paracelsian fashion. Even here, there remains a “subversive counter-narrative” (41), however, that may lead readers to view Averell’s demonization of the “tongue” as ideological scapegoating designed to protect his betters. Taking up the growing pathologization of Catholic subjects, chapter three reads Edward Forset’s treatise on the Gunpowder Plot and Thomas Dekker’s *The Whore of Babylon* as two texts that anticipate Durkheimian sociology in their “committedly pathological vocabulary” (49) and in their figuration of disease as a social medicine. Again foregrounding the paradoxical Paracelsian formulation of poison as cure, Harris reads Forset as brokering a proto-functionalist political pathology and Dekker as offering a pointed critique of that very ideology (71). As a result, the lines between moral vigilance and
Machiavellian ideological management become blurred and authority itself risks becoming merely a version of the pathogen that it is said to seek to exclude.

As the title of Part two, “Handy-dandy, which is the justice which is the thief?” makes clear, it is this very instability of moral and ideological reference that drives the last half of the book. Chapter four offers an inspired reading of the Jew as “excremental other,” as poison, cure, and anal-infiltrating toxin to the body politic, using Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* as the occasion for a reading of the contradictory identity of “Jewishness” as “pure performance” (98) that demonstrates the subversive potential of Marlowe’s play. The Jew-as-Derridean Pharmakos becomes the focus of this analysis, and Harris surveys Elizabethan literary formulations of the Jew and accounts of the alleged conspiracy of one Dr. Lopez to poison the queen in 1594 to reconstruct the symbolic meanings of “Jewishness” as poison and imitation, turning then to Barabas as the embodiment of these poisonous and mimetic functions. Rather than seeing Barabas as merely a pathological externalization of internal antagonisms, Harris reads “his reappearance from the sewers [as] potentially styl[ing] him not as irreducibly alien, but as that which the city has produced but rejected, its cultural excrement” (105). Tracing out the lines of filiation between social toxins, Harris finds the figure of the Jew twinned with that of the Catholic, the Witch, and her synecdochical representative, the tongue. Chapter five centers on the dislocations that faced a patriarchal authority anxious to avoid the risk that its “medicinal tongue” might be “confused with the poisonous female tongue it sought to contain” (109). Harris uses Thomas Tomkins’s play *Lingua, or the Combat of the Tongue and the Five Senses* (1607) as an occasion for disclosing the gender economy that predicates “the restoration of health to the body” on the scapegoated “female tongue” (114). Revealing the ideology that enabled contemporaries to associate this female tongue with the figure of the witch and the Catholic occupies the remainder of this chapter, which culminates in a reading of Thomas Dekker, John Ford, and William Rowley's *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621). Setting this play’s representation of Elizabeth Sawyer against the prose account of her real-life precursor, Agnes Ratcliffe, Harris sees the play as “locating and exposing many of the ideological faultlines” that structure the prose account’s “perceptions of witchcraft” (132). That Harris hears in Elizabeth Sawyer’s now famous observation “‘Tis all one / To be a Witch as to be counted one’ . . . a decidedly modern conception of identity as socially constructed or interpellated, rather than innate” (135) merely echoes the comments of earlier critics such as Jonathan Dollimore and Viviana Comensoli, but what he
contributes is a dynamic sense of the witch's membership in a class of social pathogens in terms of whose existence the meaning of England's overlapping social, religious, and political bodies was fashioned.

Harris ends this book with a short but closely argued account of the ways in which "the organic political analogy" shapes modern discussions of disease. But the real object of this conclusion is the rehabilitation of the anus as no more dirty a bodily site than any other in the writings of Tongan author Epeli Hau'ofa. In Hau'ofa's dislocations of colonist paradigms, Harris finds a model to describe both the dislocations he has found in early modern discourse of the body and in his own critical enterprise, which has been to "read against the grain of our culture's discourses of social pathology . . . transform[ing them] into a vehicle for dissent and critique" (146). Harris is, finally, a Cultural Materialist more than he is a New Historian: he values ideological faultlines and the interrogative dimensions of the drama over the perhaps more monological mode of the prose texts he analyzes. He succeeds in making "the organic political metaphor" a vehicle for critique, in discovering the points of tension within its rules of internal coherence. I have learned much about medical discourse, social theory, and most importantly, the symbolic logic that dictates why certain figures of social infection appear together in the Tudor and Stuart imaginary. Yet, though I may appear ungrateful, I am left with a series of nagging questions that lead me to wonder if Harris does not describe the symptomology of an even larger phenomenon, the semiotic fine edge of another set of changes. A number of questions remain unanswered. How exactly did Paracelsian ideas travel across and between discourses? Was the line of transmission unidirectional or did political theory shape medical discourses even as they were shaped by them? Should we not consider also models of parasitology as understood by Natural Histories of the period? Such questions do not reflect a desire on my part for a less ideologically focused mode of reading in favor of the traditional form of intellectual history. On the contrary, what I have in mind is an inquiry into scientific and social discourses that attends to the rules of their production more closely, that perhaps takes up the contributions of such writers as Bruno Latour and Steven Shapin in order to understand the narrative forms that inhere to

---


differing structures of knowledge. In conclusion then, Jonathan Gil Harris has given us a book I value, a book I admire and shall use, but I wonder what might have happened if he had subjected the medical origins of the metaphors he describes to the same kinds of ideological critique that he so skillfully uses to decode the meanings of those "co-mutineers," the "excremental or mimetic Jew," the witch, the Catholic, and the "unruly, female, dissident Tongue."