

# Falstaff's *Body Politic(s)*

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## Abstract

Ever since its debut in the *Henriad*, Falstaff's body has always been a site and pretext for heated debates about rule and misrule, virtue and vice, containment and subversion, time-saving court and time-wasting tavern, about serious history and festive comedy, and about ideology and body politic(s).

In this paper, I attempt to argue that Prince Hal's dilemma of *Bildung* is not so much to choose between two fathers as to choose between two body politic(s) or two different technologies of body. The body politic(s) which King Henry IV stands for stresses a correspondence between man and state. E. M. W. Tillyard's very influential *The Elizabethan World Picture* gives us the most notorious account of the constitution of the body politic(s). On the other hand, in *Henry IV, Part I & II*, Falstaff is figured first and foremost by his body. He is exceedingly corporeal. From the perspective of the Falstaffian "body" politic(s), the royal body politic(s) is falsely to unify history and social process in the name of order and control, and arrogantly ignores the material bodily principle and the lower stratum of the corporeal body. Whereas the royal body politic(s) endorses the body of the Father, the State, and the Law and is an ideological legitimation of an existing social order, the Falstaffian "body" politic(s) is an alternative "body" politic(s) whose corporeal materialism undermines and transgresses the existing body politic(s).

The Falstaffian body politic(s) is constructed theatrically, culturally, and textually. Besides Bakhtin, I will explore the Falstaffian body politic(s) by means of the work of the theorists of corporeal inscription, primarily Nietzsche, Bataille, Foucault, and Deleuze & Guattari.

## 摘要

自從佛樂斯台夫在莎士比亞《亨利四世》上下集等劇本現身後，他那碩大肥胖、團團油脂的身體，便立即成為眾所矚目的焦點。觀眾們在欣賞他的機智和幽默的同時，也傾瀉他們對這個古錐滑稽角色的同情、認同與想像。莎翁學者和文學批評家們，則以佛樂斯台夫的身體為場域，以各家言論為武器，進行一波波唇槍舌辯的角力和爭辯。

嗜杯中物如命的佛樂斯台夫，則不時的以他那具高度揮發性的言語，發表他那人生即酒店的哲學；並以他那充滿油脂物質性、酒精飽滿的軀體，表演諧擬戲弄那正襟危坐、動不動便訴諸理性的宮廷/國家/身體政治與身份認同。他那無法無天盡情揮霍的身體享樂主義，讓標榜節制禁慾的宮廷/國家/身體政治，恨的牙癢癢，只

曉得用粗暴傲慢的語言和國家機器來污名、醜化、並進而放逐驅離。

佛樂斯台夫以他的另類酒店/國家/身體政治挑戰亨利四世和五世所代表的宮廷/國家/身體政治，踰越、顛覆這樣的機制對身體的訓練、制約和管控。關於這樣的宮廷/國家/身體政治，提爾亞(Tillyard)在其著名專書中《伊利莎白時期的世界圖像》(The Elizabethan World Picture)，有精闢的闡釋。

本文的主要目的即在突顯以上兩種不同的國家/身體政治，探討兩者的互動、預設和差異。論文也將分析佛樂斯台夫國家/身體政治的建構方式。佛樂斯台夫的身體是劇場化的身體，在角色轉化扮演中諧擬；是嘉年華會化的身體，在嬉笑玩耍中顛覆踰越；是文本化的身體，在文字迷宮中建立迷人的想像空間。除了巴赫丁(Bakhtin)外，本文將藉重尼采、巴代耶(Bataille)、傅科和德勒茲(Deleuze)等人的理論來詮釋佛樂斯台夫的酒店/國家/身體政治。

Ever since its debut in the *Henriad*, Falstaff's body has always been a site and pretext for heated debates about rule and misrule, virtue and vice, containment and subversion, time-saving court and time-wasting tavern, about serious history and festive comedy, and about ideology and body politic(s). This body sets off fire and catches the imagination of many later generations. It has become a referent of certain discursive, dramatic, and theoretical productions and a model for the volatile operation of theatrical performances within an outpouring of discourses on the body.

In Chapter 2, "Prince Hal's Falstaff: Positioning psychoanalysis and the female reproductive body," of *Desire and Anxiety*, Valerie Traub has acutely pointed out that "Psychoanalytic criticism of the *Henriad* has tended to perceive Prince Hal's developmental problem as a choice between two fathers: a biological father, King Henry IV, standing for conviction, duty, and control, yet burdened by his guilty acquisition of the crown; and a father substitute, Falstaff, whose hedonism, lawlessness, and wit provide an attractive, if temporary, alternative" (54-55). In the same chapter, Traub questions the above patriarchal relations, and argues that "Falstaff represents to Hal not an alternative paternal image but rather a projected fantasy of the pre-oedipal maternal whose rejection is the basis upon which patriarchal subjectivity is predicated" (55). Thus for Traub Falstaff's body is figured essentially as a feminized grotesque body.

Taking the lead of Valerie Traub, in this paper, I will argue that Falstaff represents to Hal not an alternative paternal image, based on a flawed father-son dynamic that replicates the larger familial problems of patriarchy, but rather an alternative "body" politic whose corporeal materialism undermines and transgresses the existing body politic. For me, Prince Hal's dilemma of *Bildung* is not to choose between two fathers but to struggle between two body politics or two different technologies of body. Prince Hal's harsh rejection of Falstaff at the end of Part II acts not as a symbolic killing of the father substitute but as a symbolic forsaking of the Falstaffian "body" politic(s). The Falstaffian "body" politic in which I am interested is constructed culturally, politically, theatrically, and textually. It is by and large constituted by the mobile and changeable terms of festive spirit as well as textual-analytical production. Besides Bakhtin, I will explore the Falstaffian "body" politic(s) by means of the work of Nietzsche, Bataille, Foucault, and Deleuze &

Guattari.

# 1. The Body Politic(s) in Question

The state of man, like to a little kingdom, suffers then the nature of an insurrection.

--*Julius Caesar*, II. i. 67-9

In *Julius Caesar*, through the mouth of Brutus, Shakespeare draws a correspondence between man and state. According to T. M. W. Tillyard, this comparison of man to the state or "body politic" is fundamental to the Elizabethans. As Tillyard writes, "The state is an organism like the human body, and each part of the body must help the others and be helped by them" (96). But there is also a correspondence between the microcosm, man, and the macrocosm, the universe, implying in the metaphor "body politic".<sup>1</sup> The orthodox body politic aspires to a model of signification, which links the subject's position to signifying chains and world pictures, to the universal order of the signifier, that is, in which the body is the medium of signification. With this body politic, the body, either royal or grotesque, is the external expression of an organic structure. Tillyard's body politic or world picture can then be seen as in some aspects a dominant ideology which endorses the authority and the politics of kingship and royal body. As Jonathan Dollimore argues, Tillyard's world picture "was an ideological legitimation of an existing social order, one rendered the more necessary by the apparent instability, actual *and* imagined, of that order" (48). In order to justify and preserve this idealized picture, social subversion and political dissent are relentlessly repressed and demonized. In addition, this world picture is exemplified by the theory of the four humors, the notion of the cosmic dance, the great chain of being, and the idea of the four elements.

The Tillyardian "body politic" suggests a view of history as man-made as embodied by Henry IV rather than divinely ordained as incarnated by Richard II. King Richard II takes the body as a morally and divinely ordained field of theology-power-knowledge, which has a passive inertia capable of nourishing a decadent and yet poetically noble disposition. By contrast, King Henry IV believes that the body is an active-agent cause of power, able to shape the course of history. This body knows only work, use value, and war. It conquers, challenges, and represses, and eventually homogenizes and consolidates itself into a hegemony. And yet both King Richard II and Henry IV's body politics impose penal and disciplinary technologies and are acted upon by different modes of resistance in the forms of subversion, depending on their strategic positions. As for Prince Hal, he reaches kingly success by tactfully negotiating rule and misrule, court and tavern, discipline and pleasure, work and holiday, and by practicing both Henry IV's and Falstaffian body politics. The execution of rebels at the end of *Henry IV, Part II* is another showcase of disciplinary punishment which can be seen as a variable series of technologies of the body, procedures of the subjugation, manipulation, and control of body. As Foucault expounds in *Discipline and Punishment*, punishment is a "political technology" of the body.

From the perspective of the Falstaffian "body" politic, the royal body politic is, however, falsely to unify history and social process in the name of order and control, and arrogantly ignores the material bodily principle and the lower stratum of the corporeal body. The royal body politic endorses the body of the Father, the State,

and the Law and is an ideological legitimation of an existing social order. On the other hand, the Falstaffian body politic is figured first and foremost by Falstaff's body. Falstaff is exceedingly corporeal. "His corpulence is referred to constantly, invoking, in the emphasis on a swollen and distended belly, associations of pregnancy" (Traub 56). Prince Hal is at once attracted to and repelled by the Falstaffian body politic. His rejection of Falstaff, of the alternative "body" politic, is in strong part fear and hatred of himself since his royal body is always already constituted in and contaminated by his relation to Falstaff.

In *Henry IVs*, as soon as Prince Hal makes up his mind to assume the role of monarch, his festive spirit of merry-making and his ever-changing impetus and force of bodily sensations have become fixed into a state consciousness. His corporeal prodigality becomes reserved in terms of the implied structure of preservation and appropriation. Marked and coded by titles, categories, identities, affiliations, and lineages, his royal body has to consolidate itself and the state apparatus by isolating and rejecting the grotesque body of Falstaff. In the end, Hal has to disavow Falstaff publicly in *Henry IV, Part Two*: "I know thee not, old man" (V.v.47).<sup>2</sup> When Hal says:

Make less thy body hence, and more the grace;  
Leave gormandizing. Know the grave doth gape  
For thee thrice wider than for other men (V.v.52-4),

he not only denigrates the grotesque body of Falstaff, but curses this body to meet its doom. The abusive language of Hal demonstrates the verbal power of a monarch-to-be over the body of Falstaff. And the word "grace" is a notion valorized by Hal as a condition and means of his mastery and power. In the operation of the royal body politics, violence is shown through state apparatuses of banishment, correction, and admonition, keeping the grotesque body confined, constrained, supervised, and regimented. Less openly violent but no less coercive are the inscriptions of cultural and personal values, norms, and commitments according to the morphology and categorization of the body into socially significant groups. Although incised by various forms of technologies through negotiating its environment whether this be in court or in tavern, Hal's royal body defines itself by expelling and ridiculing its bodily Other and in this process establishes its own boundaries and borders to create an identity for itself and to retain its integrity. The royal power would always want to exercise different forms of disciplinary normalization and to produce more refined, improved, and efficient techniques or the surveillance and control of bodies, so as to justify its legitimacy and authority. On the other hand, Falstaff's body is implicitly defined as grotesque, unruly and abnormal, in need of direction and judgment, merely incidental to the defining characteristics of reason and power through its opposition to organic form and grace.

In spite of the fact that the banishment of Falstaff is regarded as a carefully regulated, socially acceptable form of torture, stipulated by law in accordance with the requirements of the sovereign's body politics, the grotesque body of Falstaff still refuses to be contained or repressed. It has its own material bodily politics of resistance. Its capacity for resistance exists in his rebelliousness and in his words and acts of wit, humor, iconoclasm, and role-playing. But how do we make out the Falstaffian body politic and its politics of resistance? What role does Falstaff's body play in the moral and political framework of *Henry IVs*? Rethinking Falstaff's body implies reexamining Tillyard's conception of body politic. Only by re-figuring and re-presenting Tillyard's notion of the body in a corporeal or Falstaffian terms can

the material body of Falstaff move from the periphery to the center of analysis and be understood as the very "stuff" of the Falstaffian "body politic". This "body politic" helps to problematize the Tillyardian universal world picture and its universalizing assumptions of humanism. The Falstaffian body politic deems the body as a central locus in the negotiations of power and resists the tendency to attribute an organism to the body's interior. Falstaff's body is a most peculiar "thing", for it is never quite reducible to being merely a thing; nor does it ever quite manage to rise above the status of thing. It requires quite different intellectual models to represent and understand it. To rethink Falstaff's body is also to stress that the body as at once a thing and a notion can be remapped, refigured, in terms of models and paradigms, through certain technologies of the body.

For those traditionalist scholars, like E. M. W. Tillyard and John Dover Wilson,<sup>3</sup> who read the *Henriad* from a historical perspective and try to place Falstaff in history. Falstaff is often being treated either as a comic interlude which punctuates the serious historical mainstream of *Henry IVs* or as a subversive figure over whom the state must necessarily exercise a ruthless and uncompromising control.<sup>4</sup> For those critics who are concerned with "the education-of-the-prince argument", Falstaff is deemed as Prince Hal's Falstaff. Prince Hal is the prodigal son whereas the gross Falstaff is regarded as an instrument as well as Prince Hal's harmless pastime and "white-bearded Satan." These critics comprehend Falstaff from the standpoint of the ruler and make readers conspirators of the hegemonic power. Dover Wilson's remark is typical of this view: "they [Shakespeare's audience] knew, from the beginning, that the reign of this marvelous Lord of Misrule must have an end, that Falstaff must be rejected by the Prodigal Prince, when the time for reformation came" and the main theme of the *Henriad* is "the growing-up of a madcap prince into the ideal king" (22). For Stephen Greenblatt, Tennenhouse, and other new historicists, Falstaff is deemed oppositional energies which will eventually be contained because he paradoxically authorizes the power he challenges.

For the above scholars and for most of the modern critics, although they concede that Falstaff "has an imaginative life that overflows the confines of the play itself" (Greenblatt 42), they still side with the state, the law and the power and see Falstaff mainly as Prince Hal's Falstaff.<sup>5</sup> Even C. L. Barber, the shaman who conjures up Falstaff's festive spirit by situating Falstaff in popular Renaissance traditions of carnival and saturnalian misrule, is no exception. Although Barber sees Falstaff as a force potentially subversive, a "dangerously self-sufficient everyday skepticism" (214), which would conceivably threaten to break the allotted role of licensed saturnalian revelry, nonetheless Barber deems Falstaff a resourceful character who is at the center of a popular comic history, located within the power or body politic framework of the chronicle-history play. As Barber remarks, "the Falstaff comedy, far from being forced into an alien environment of historical drama, is begotten by that environment, giving and taking meaning as it grows" (192). Barber also sees the rejection as the inevitable outcome of *Henry IVs*: "The result of the trial is to make us see perfectly the necessity for the rejection of Falstaff as a man, as a favourite of the king, as a leader of an interest at court" (216).<sup>6</sup> Barber's view in the end privileges order and authority, and significantly reduces and contains Falstaff and his body politic(s).

For me, Falstaff is not just a foil to Hal, a foil to Hotspur, a foil to King Henry IV, or "a site of contradiction" (Holderness 96) which helps to consolidate their identities. He is not a necessary evil or a scapegoat which must be marginalized and

purged. His body politic(s) is not just the Other politics which authorizes and endorses the orthodox body politic(s). His subversion and resistance to monarchic order is *not* in the end a valuable negative model for Hal, who is thereby enabled more effectively to reject Falstaff's disorderly challenge to normality and kingly power. Falstaff is the one and only as well as the germ of excess and contagion always able to escape and plague the apparent appropriation and structural closure of the royal body politic(s) by constantly changing his masks and renaming his body politic(s). Falstaff's body is able to infest all sorts of other areas in the structures of desire, the desire to eat, to drink, to play a role, or to will power, to seek sexual pleasure. Falstaff's bodily desire is a mobile, indeed volatile force, able to insinuate itself into territories of closure. Falstaff's body is entwined in various networks of traditions. These traditions, be it theatrical or carnivalesque, constitute Falstaff's dramatic and political effectivity.

## 2. Falstaff's *Body Politics*

### Falstaff's Politics of the Theatricalized Body

...Art thou alive?  
Or is it fantasy that plays upon our eyesight?  
I prithee speak, we will not trust our eyes  
Without our ears: thou art not what thou seem'st  
(V.iv.133- 36)<sup>7</sup>.

The above quotation demonstrates Hal's reaction when confronted by the miraculous and comic resurrection of Falstaff on the field of Shrewsbury at the end of *Henry IV, Part I*. Prince Hal's response is very much ours. We are mesmerized by the fantasy invoked by Falstaff's theatrical *tour de force*. With his apology for counterfeiting, he adds to his role a philosophical depth never achieved by other comic characters:

...Counterfeit? I lie, I am no counterfeit: to die is to be a counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man, who hath not the life of a man; but to counterfeit dying, when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed  
(V.iv.113-19).

Falstaff's counterfeiting is a parody of King's counterfeiting. Also his counterfeiting undermines the chivalric code with its mock-chivalric, mock-heroic attitude toward life, death, and honor. Without doubt, the paradoxical nature of his defense is a proof of his superior wit.

As a soldier, Falstaff treasures his life more than to attain honor like Hotspur. As his famous line shows, "the better part of valour is discretion, in the which better part I have save my life" (V.iv.119-20). Falstaff's philosophy rings true when comes to terms with self-preservation in the battlefield. In addition, Falstaff's action to stab the fallen Hotspur in the thigh is an act which involves complete renunciation of the chivalric code.

Falstaff's power displaying above is the power of his "body politics", the politics of theatricalization, of role-playing, of counterfeiting, of creating theatrical illusion. His body is a sphere of mask and popular comedy which is not only juxtaposed side by side with the serious historical drama but at some points usurping the historical action and grasping our full attention. His body expresses the indispensable Nietzschean "gay science" and Bakhtinian carnivalesque through the art

of role-playing. As C. L. Barber has keenly observed, "From the beginning, Falstaff is constantly renaming himself....It is the essence of his character, and his role, in *Part One*, that he never comes to rest where we can see him for what he 'is'. He is always in motion, always adopting postures, assuming characters" (197-8).

Falstaff's theatricalized body is recognized in an illuminating passage by A. R. Humphreys in his "Introduction" to the Arden edition of *Henry IV, Part One*:

And who in fact, is "he"? "He", really, is the comic personality given a chance by the dramatist to revel in a comic role....To schematize Falstaff's shotsilk variety into stable colour is absurd: his dramatic sphere of popular comedy allows a rapid shifting of attitudes....the attempt to fit Falstaff into a formula of psychological realism must finally fail. Brilliant at timely evasions, he escapes this straitjacket as he escapes any other (xliv-xlv).

Unlike the political subversion and rebellion of the Percies and the Archbishop of York's conspiracy which shakes the stability of the Lacastrian dynasty by means of the military and chivalric way, Falstaff's lethal weapon to undermine the orthodox structure of authority and to break the frame of the chronicle-history is his body politics of the carnivalesque, of revelry, of theatricality, of femininity, and of corporeality, exercised through the art of role-playing.

Falstaff is a superb role-player. At one time he is a highwayman identifying himself with youthful riot against age and respectability; at another he is a mock-king wielding his authoritative power in the Boar's Head Tavern or a mock-heroic knight marching in the battlefield abusing the royal and chivalric codes. At one time, he is a grotesque figure roaming about with his huge hill of flesh; at another he is a superb tongue fighter, wittily having a verbal exchange with Prince Hal. He is a self-conscious and proud defender of his vocation, his philosophy of life, and the art of counterfeiting. Indeed, as David Bevington observes, "he is an artist who assumes most of his roles with comic detachment, understanding everything through parody and at a remove, hence never seriously" (52). All his roles, which are pageants themselves, characterize both Falstaff's body and his bodily functions in *Henry IVs* and in the end form a pageantry which goes beyond the historical framework to exemplify and represent the full gamut of Falstaff's body politic.

To further justify his trade, Falstaff urges the prince to have nothing to do with "old father Antic the law" (I.ii.59) and to honor thieves, who are admirable men of "resolution" (I.ii.58). Falstaff's argument culminates in his eloquent assertion that "'tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation" (I.ii.101-2). If one doesn't adopt a moral stance, he has no point to pass his judgment on Falstaff.

### Falstaff's Politics of the Carnivalized Body

According to Barber, Falstaff's roles are derived from two major trends:

In creating the Falstaff comedy, he [Shakespeare] fused two main saturnalian traditions, the clowning customary on the stage and the folly customary on holiday, and produced something unprecedented (195).

Barber's observation as shown in the above passage is keen and perceptive since all the roles that Falstaff has assumed--such as the parasite, the lord of misrule, the clown, the fool, the buffoon, the grotesque, the scapegoat, etc.--are somewhat interrelated because they are derived from the saturnalian traditions.

In the "play extempore" in *Henry IV, Part I* act II scene iv, Falstaff assumes the role of an irate father and king reproving an errant son and heir. Falstaff becomes

a mock-king through the crowning of a cushion. Fully revealing his genius and wit, the "play extempore" culminates in Falstaff's brilliant defense of his body and his way of life:

*Falstaff.* ...And yet there is a virtuous man whom I have often noted in thy company, but I know not his name.

*Prince.* What manner of man, and it like your Majesty?

*Falstaff.* A goodly portly man, i' faith, and a corpulent; of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and a most noble carriage....there is virtue in that Falstaff; him keep with, the rest banish (II.iv.413-425)

After exchanging roles, Falstaff, playing the role of the young heir to the throne, makes his memorable reply to Prince Hal's accusations. His reply justifies not only his various roles as Vice, as glutton, as fool, as grotesque figure, but once again his material and corpulent bodily *raison d'être*:

If sack and sugar be a fault, God help the wicked! If to be old and merry be a sin, then many an old host that I know is damned: if to be fat to be hated, then Pharaoh's lean kine are to be loved....banish plump Jack, and banish all the world (II.iv.464-474).

This speech is eloquent and persuasive. It is hailed by Neil Rhodes in *Elizabethan Grotesque*, "as a splendid affirmation of the power of Carnival" (104). In this speech, Falstaff does not attempt to hide his indulgence in the pleasure of the flesh. On the contrary, he puts everything out in the front and then makes a strong case to excuse himself.

As a descendant of the Roman saturnalia, Falstaff becomes the Lord of Misrule when he presides over the tavern revelry of act II scene iv, playing the role of king with mock crown and mock chair of state. The Roman saturnalia is known for its ritual practice of surrendering to appetite and passion and for its temporary suspensions and inversions of rule, order, and precedence. Its festive spirit is what Barber has exquisitely elaborated in his celebrated *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*. This spirit culminates in festive holidays in which moral freedom and opposition to political authority, the flouting of moral conventions and the inversions of ordinary social structures, are allowed to flourish. Nevertheless, in his fine study, Barber does not explain fully the fact that Falstaff is a grotesque figure. This aspect is complemented by Mikhail Bakhtin's theories on "carnival" and "carnivalization" in medieval and Renaissance literature, developed in his study of Rabelais in *Rabelais and His World*.

According to Bakhtin, Rabelais drew his inspiration directly from the joyous, festive, democratic, popular culture of the middle ages. This culture was organized around festivals, frequently held in conjunction with official celebrations, whose roots extended far back into the past, to the Roman Saturnalia, the Greek Bacchanalia and probably beyond. Bakhtin writes:

The scope and the importance of this culture were immense in the Renaissance and the Middle Ages. A boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture. In spite of their variety, fold festivities of the carnival type, the comic rites and cults, the clowns and fools, giants, dwarfs, and jugglers, the vast and manifold literature of parody--all these forms have one style in common: they belong to one culture of folk carnival humor (4). Upon examining the carnivalized body Falstaff embodies, it is certain that

Falstaff is in line with this "culture of folk carnival humor" and is a rich amalgam of various comic types: a buffoon, a clown, a fool, and a grotesque all at the same time. Enid Welsford, in *The Fool: His Social and Literary History*, calls our attention to Falstaff's role as a buffoon: "This great primal joke of the undignified nature of the human body, repeated for centuries, literally *ad nauseam*, forms a most important part of the stock-in-trade of the buffoon and reached its highest development in the person of that 'ton of flesh', that mountain of a man, Jack Falstaff" (51). David Wiles, in *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in Elizabethan Playhouse*, makes a strong case to affirm to us that "the Falstaff of the two *Henry IV* plays is structurally the clown's part" and "that the part was written for Kemp" (116). Bevington informs us that Falstaff fulfills the role "not unlike that of the professional fool in Renaissance courts or the wise fool in Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, one whose function is to entertain the Prince with madcap inverted wisdom, and to ask the irreverent questions that more worldly counselors are not permitted to ask" (34).

As for Bakhtin, he places great emphasis on the grotesque bodily image of carnival which is characterized by its perpetually unfinished process of change and renewal: "The grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming....The other indispensable trait is ambivalence. For in this image we find both poles of transformation, the old and the new, the dying and the procreating, the beginning and the end of the metamorphosis" (24). Falstaff complies with the above descriptions to a stunning degree. He is "fat-witted" (I.ii.2), physically slow but mentally vivid and bodily aging but spiritually young. He undergoes his metamorphosis like the moon and bears the mysterious ambivalence in his grotesque body. He uses refined but highly metaphorical words, such as "squires of the night's body," "Diana's foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon" (I.ii.24-26), to justify his criminal activity as a highwayman. He subjects his body to the rule of the moon and willingly lets it be "governed as the sea is, by [the] noble and chaste mistress the moon" (I.ii.27-29). If the sun, as many critics have suggested, represents the king who stands for law, order, rule, and royalty, then Falstaff, the knight of the moon, is the thief of the day's beauty who cannot be tolerated under the broad daylight of the sun but, nevertheless, possesses the integrity of his own being. Or given the coupling of the royal body with maleness and the Falstaffian body with femaleness as Traub has suggested,<sup>8</sup> it follows that Falstaff's body is problematized as the royal body's eternal enigma, its mysterious, inscrutable, and alternative object of desire.

Barber is wrong to say that "it is from the prince that he [Falstaff] chiefly gets his meaning, as it is from real kings that mock kings always get their meaning" (198). Falstaff does not necessarily derive his meaning by playing the opposite role. His self-willed exile in the night, under the auspices of the moon is capable of making his body exceed the binary system at work, for, like the moon, he is constantly changing forms and undergoing metamorphoses. Unlike the royal body whose bodily canon presents a body politic organism which is structurally finished, completed, and limited, Falstaff's protean or "rhizomean"<sup>9</sup> body, through the operation of various orifices, ramifications, protuberances and offshoots (sprouts, buds), creates a Body without Organs (BwO) described by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, "the BwO is not at all the opposite of the organs. The organs are not its enemies. The enemy is the organism. The BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism" (TP 158). But what makes the organism which is the enemy of the BwO? For

Deleuze and Guattari, it is "the judgment of God, the system of the judgment of God, the theological system" (TP 158). This divine system is responsible for instituting all royal body politics, all official cultures, all hierarchies in epistemology, all canons and dogmas, and all forms of exclusion, repression, sublimation, and reduction. This system uproots the grotesque body and the BwO of Falstaff from its carnival spirit of festivity and makes it an organism or a royal subject.

Falstaff's counteraction or resistance to the *organic* body politic is to degrade and to descend, to translate the abstract into the concrete, the spiritual into the physical, and to confound both by being the grotesque. As Frances K. Barasch puts it, "in Shakespeare, Falstaff is noble humanity deformed and deformity humanized" (65). Falstaff can be counted as one of the towering examples which exemplifies Bakhtin's grotesque image.

Another reason which qualifies Falstaff as a grotesque figure has something to do with the grossness of his body which in turn is induced by his festive life style. He spends the better part of his life largely in drinking sack, overeating, and wasting half of the day in sleep. Add to all these, Falstaff is also known for his alleged interest in bawds and houses of prostitution. Thus, by leading this festive life style, Falstaff fulfills "the essential principle of grotesque realism"<sup>10</sup>: "degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (19-20).

Falstaff's body is a carnivalized body and its corpulence always invites merciless comments from Hal. In *Henry IV, Part I*, Hal ridicules Falstaff "gross as a mountain, open, palpable" (II.iv.221), or "this bed-presser, this horse-back-breaker, this huge hill of flesh" (II.iv.238-39), or a "tun of man," a "bolting-hutch of beastliness," a "swoll'n parcel of dropsies," a "huge bombard of sack," a "stuff'd cloak bag of guts," a "roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly" (II.iv.442-447). Hal's pictures of Falstaff, as Rhodes suggests, "run the gamut of the grotesque from the physically repulsive to the physically exuberant, concluding with the unmistakable image of Carnival" (109). All these epithet-like expressions are all concerned with "the grotesque concept of the body" which "forms the basis of abuses, oaths, and curses" (Bakhtin 27). For Bakhtin, "the importance of abusive language is essential to the understanding of the literature of the grotesque" (27).

In Act V Scene iii of *Henry IV, Part I*, we come to meet Falstaff appearing on the battlefield as a soldier. Nothing could be much more incongruous, more grotesque than the appearance of the corpulent, white-bearded, unheroic Falstaff on the battlefield. From his soliloquy, we learn that he led his ragged troops into the heart of battle and that all but two or three have been peppered on the battlefield. With his comment on sir Walter Blunt's death,

I like not such grinning honour as Sir Walter hath. Give me  
life, which if I can save, so: if not, honour comes unlooked for, and  
there's an end (V.iii.58-60).

Falstaff not only provides a counterbalance to the heorics in this scene but also has, in a metaphorical sense, brought the tavern to the battlefield. The bottle of sack, which Prince Hal draws from in place of the pistol in his case, is emblematic. Instead of seeing the body in terms of the mind/body distinction or regarding it as a substance to which various attributes, such as consciousness, soul, or organism, can be added, Falstaff sees the body more in terms of their quantities and intensities associated with wine and merry-making more than in terms of distinct characteristics such as honor and recognition.

Falstaff's carnivalized body is all sack and tavern. It is by no means the body licensed by the authority, the body incorporated by the ruling classes as a means to let off steam and energy. Falstaff's carnivalized body affirms life without use, without reserve. It embodies the economy of exuberance. Like the Nietzschean "gay science" or the Bataillean "general economy", the Falstaffian bodily vision of life does not reside in utility but in exuberance. It takes life as Bergsonian *elan vital* striving to expend, to overflow itself uselessly. To be sure, the restricted economy of "the useful" goes against the spirit of the carnivalized body.

Nietzsche, Bataille, and Bakhtin all celebrate the superabundance of the carnivalized body. For Nietzsche, carnival feast is a Dionysian orgy, ecstasy, and sheer waste entirely irreducible and ambivalent. For Bataille, carnival feast is a potlatch and a gift without return. For Bakhtin, carnival feast "is a primary, indestructible ingredient of human civilization; it may become sterile and even degenerate, but it cannot vanish" (RAHW 276).<sup>11</sup>

### Falstaff's Politics of the Textualized Body

Falstaff is indeed a rich amalgam, a world of comic ingredients.

--R. A. Humphreys

Falstaff's body is a fascinating mixture of a host of literary traditions. Falstaff, as a comic character, is associated with a number of stock folklore figures and literary types, among them the Vice of medieval drama, the braggart soldier, the drunkard, the glutton, and the court jester. Each of these antecedents possesses distinct traits and characteristics of its own. They enrich and complicate Falstaff's body which is inscribed and reinscribed by various prototypes.

Falstaff's textualized body is a grotesque composite rather than a "real" material body. His huge belly becomes the sign of his offices as the spokesman for appetite and impulse, a literal rendering of the self-inflation and self-aggrandizement that characterize Falstaff. His belly is always already textualized in words, through words and is inflated by rhetoric, language and text. Mingled with comic glosses and logical inversions are puns, mock invective, parodies, colorful hyperbole, and elaborate epithets. With all these verbal techniques, Falstaff creates his own world, a world of words and texts.

The metaphor of the textualized body also asserts that Falstaff's body is a page or a "mystic writing pad", ready to receive, bear and transmit meanings, intensities, power relations, much like a system of writing. Different technologies of the body or interpretive discourses use different inks to write on the body. They create on the body textual traces that are capable of being written over, retraced, redefined, written in contradictory ways, creating out of the body text a palimpsest, a historical genealogy of prior and later traces and interpretations; some of which have been effaced, others of which have been emphasized, producing the body as a text which is as complicated and indeterminate as any literary manuscript. To be sure, Falstaff's body is positioned by various cultural interpretations and discourses, which are themselves embodiments of culturally established canons, norms and representational forms, so that it can be seen as a living "Book". As Humphreys writes, "Falstaff's transcendent prestige is reflected in a vast literature, and in such abundant reference as to occasion, in the *Shakespeare Allusion-Book index*, the telling entry 'For the purpose of this Index Falstaff is treated as a work'" (Intro. xxxix).

### Conclusion

Falstaff's body is excessive, redundant, superfluous, and yet irreducible in its languid and fervent overachieving. It always seeks more than it needs, performs excessive actions, and can draw any idea (the notion of honor and death), any ideology (official or popular), or any number of identities and roles into its circuits of humor, wit, laughter, and pleasure. It is often reckoned with as body fragments and is not an organic totality which is capable of the wholesale expression of identity, but is itself a heterogeneous assemblage of organs and pleasures. It revels in its possibilities of becoming and corporeality. At once butt and wit, it is a tavern full of wine, appetite, and wisdom. It is contagious, disseminating itself through curses, abuses, slapsticks, and role-playing. It affirms us that we are such stuff as bodies are made on. Dynamic, playful and celebratory, Falstaff's body politics is Dionysiac, Saturnalian, and carnivalesque, actively affirming the pleasures of life and the body.

While Hal's royal body is a contested site of negotiations, Falstaff's exuberant and corpulent body is an impassioned site of fascinations. The somatic icon of Falstaff's body will not go away. Corpulent and grotesque, it cannot be contained to a tender spot in the heart of a well-meaning monarch, existing as a *passe*, a memory, an endearing past, which he desires and repels. It is a constant presence, a reminder not merely of the festive spirit, nor of the violence of the state power, but of something that cannot be exorcised or forgotten. Even after his banishment, Falstaff's somatic iconography is still an irrepressible pollutant on what has become Hal's ideal state, threatening to all who conform to the official body politic.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> As Tillyard suggested, the idea of "body politic" is best explained by Thomas Starkey in his *Dialogue between Cardinal Pole and Thomas Lupset*: "Like as in every

man there is a body and also a soul in whose flourishing and prosperous state both together standeth the weal and felicity of man; so likewise there is in every commonalty city country as it were a politic body and another thing also resembling the soul of man, in whose flourishing both together resteth also the true common weal. This body is nothing else but the multitude of people, the number of citizens in every commonalty city or country. Thing which is resembled to the soul is civil order and politic law, administered by officers and rulers. For like as the body in every man receiveth his life by virtue of the soul and is governed thereby, so doth the multitude of people in every country receive, as it were, civil life by laws well administered by good officers and wise rulers, by whom they be governed and kept in politic order" (qtd. in Tillyard 97).

<sup>2</sup> All quotations of *Henry IV, Part II* are from *The Arden Shakespeare: Henry IV, Part II*, edited by A. R. Humphreys (London: Methuen, 1966).

<sup>3</sup> According to Graham Holderness, both Tillyard and Wilson "share the apparently scholarly (but implicitly polemical) privileging of 'order', defined as a hierarchical state ruled by the 'Principle of Subordination'" (157). For further discussion, see his article, "'Henry IV': Carnival and History," in *Shakespeare's History Plays: Richard II to Henry V* (New York: St. Martin's P, 1992), pp. 151-164.

<sup>4</sup> Take Tillyard for example, he sets his eyes on Prince Hal and elevates the Prince to "Olympian loftiness," while Falstaff is turned into a mere "dog" with whom Hal "condescends once in a while to have a game" (271-2).

<sup>5</sup> A recent essay, "Prince Hal's Falstaff: Positioning psychoanalysis and the Female Productive Body," by Valeri Traub is a good example to see Falstaff in terms of Prince Hal.

<sup>6</sup> A. R. Humphreys in his "Introduction" to *The Arden Shakespeare: Henry IV, Part Two* (London, 1960), has also expressed views similar to those of Barber: The rejection to Falstaff is "necessary, well-prepared, and executed without undue severity"; "Shakespeare has here achieved a balanced complexity of wisdom" (lx-lxi).

<sup>7</sup> All quotations of *Henry IV, Part I* are from *The Arden Shakespeare: Henry IV, Part I*, edited by A. R. Humphreys (London: Methuen, 1960).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Valerie Traub's argument in Chapter 2, "Prince Hal's Falstaff: positioning psychoanalysis and the female reproductive body (*Henry IV, parts 1 and 2, Henry V*)," of *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of sexuality in Shakespearean drama*, pp. 50-70).

<sup>9</sup> According to Deleuze and Guattari, the principal characteristics of a rhizome is opposed to the binary systems of trees. Unlike the tree structure, "which is defined by a set of points and positions, with binary relations between the points and biunivocal relationships between the positions, the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 21). For further discussion of the rhizome, see Chapter 1, "Introduction: Rhizome," of *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 3-25.

<sup>10</sup> Bakhtin takes pains to define the so-called "the concept of grotesque realism." He writes: "Actually, the images of the material bodily principle in the work of Rabelais (and of the other writers of the Renaissance) are the heritage, only somewhat modified by the Renaissance, of the culture of folk humor. They are the heritage of that peculiar type of imagery and, more broadly speaking, of that peculiar aesthetic concept which is characteristic of this folk culture and which differs sharply from the

aesthetic concept of the following ages. We shall call it conditionally the concept of grotesque realism" (18).

<sup>11</sup> According to Bakhtin, on feast days, the economy of exuberance reigns. The feast links together a host of images: the slaughter of cattle, their disemboweling and dismemberment. All these images culminate in the act of devouring the dismembered body. The final devouring act, together with above-mentioned images, creates with great artistry an extremely dense atmosphere of the body as a whole in which all the dividing lines between man and beast, between the consuming and consumed bowels are intentionally erased. On the other hand, these consuming and consumed organs are fused with the generating womb. We thus obtain a truly grotesque image of one single, superindividual bodily life, of the great bowels that devour and are devoured, generate and are generated, consume in the process of giving birth.