

“The body is with the King, but the  
King is not with the body”:  
Sovereign Sleep in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*

BENJAMIN PARRIS

IN A PATERNE FOR A KINGS INAVGVRATION, James I of England advises his son Charles that the king must be “a great watchman and shepheard . . . and his eye must neuer slumber nor sleepe for the care of his flocke, euer remembring that his office, beeing duely executed, will prooue as much *onus* as *honos* unto him.”<sup>1</sup> James’s twofold vision of an overburdened yet ever-wary king belies the simple fact of the body natural’s compulsion to sleep, which inevitably suspends the sovereign eye of care. But the king’s fatherly advice also suggests the *onus* of rule could rob the sovereign of his ability to sleep, as he is anxiously consumed by the pressing concerns of state and the demands of the subjects that compose the body politic. James’s notion of the trials of sovereign vigilance thus raises the central question motivating this essay’s reading of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*: what *does* happen to the body politic when the sovereign body natural sleeps?

As is well-known to students of early modern European history, political theory, and literary studies alike, the king was held to possess a natural body common to all humans, as well as a mystical “superbody” that perpetuates the life of the state and lends an aura of divine perfection to the sovereign. Just as its physiological counterpart must be cared for, James suggests that the care of the king’s numinous body coextends with the care of his political subjects—and that both require steady attention. In the pages that follow, I push the implications of James’s metaphor much further, arguing that both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* imagine substantial connections between the bodies of the sovereign and his subjects, routed through the potentially ill or evil effects of sleep on the King’s Two Bodies.

These tragedies hinge on the violent deaths of sleeping kings and a politically chaotic aftermath, both of which resist the highly wrought fictions of constant vigilance, immortality, and stately perfection that help to legitimate the doctrine of the King's Two Bodies.

Put simply, sleep and insomnia constitute "altered cases"; a concept developed by Tudor jurisprudence to denote the sudden incorporation of the body politic by the newly sovereign body natural, but which I argue elucidates Shakespeare's visions of the King's Two Bodies crippled by sleep and insomnia. Sleep creates an image of human imperfection in the sovereign body natural: bodily life in sleep resembles death, and so the king's mortality resurfaces, even though his body natural's flaws are supposedly taken up and wiped away by the presence of the body politic. For Shakespeare, sovereign sleep becomes a threatening moment of kingly regression, an "altered case" whose curious trajectory is one of decline rather than ascension. And with the character of Macbeth, the playwright pursues this logic to its opposite extreme, by tracing the miseries of insomnia that deny Macbeth the life-sustaining properties of sleep, and serve as corrosive agents of his demise. The tragic dissolution of sovereignty in both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* suggests that sovereign sleep and insomnia not only impinge upon the monarch's ability to maintain watchful rule, but also radically alter the metaphysical bonds between bodies natural and politic.

In the wake of Giorgio Agamben's work on sovereignty and biopolitics, many scholars of early modern English literature and history have returned to the topic of the King's Two Bodies.<sup>2</sup> The concept of bare life and its manifestations alongside sovereign power seem to have opened a new path for the analysis of early modern sovereignty and states of exception, while abandoning the critical assumption that the visual spectacle of power is its most significant or coherent locus. Agamben's take on Carl Schmitt's theory of the sovereign exception, which Schmitt develops in large part by championing the work of Thomas Hobbes as a watershed moment for European sovereignty, has provided rich fodder for Shakespeareans looking to situate Renaissance drama within its political and ideological contexts.<sup>3</sup> Given this recent proliferation of scholarship, reading *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* alongside the King's Two Bodies and the structures of sovereign power may risk yet another return to near-hackneyed themes. But among the discussions of Shakespearean drama and biopolitics, none develop an account of the metaphysics and politics of sovereign sleep—more specifically, how Shakespeare imagines the "metaphysiologies" of sleep

and insomnia to impinge upon juridico-political institutions such as the King’s Two Bodies, and potentially threaten the security of early modern sovereignty.

Though it is specifically foregrounded in these later tragedies, Shakespeare’s view of sovereign sleep as a perilous venture clearly precedes both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Take, for instance, Prince Hal’s famously premature donning of the crown in *II Henry IV*, which imagines his father repeating the fate of so many English sovereigns, by falling prey to a deep and careless slumber:

Did he suspire, that light and weightless down  
Perforce must move. My gracious lord! my father!  
This sleep is sound indeed. This is a sleep  
That from this golden rigol hath divorced  
So many English kings.

(IV.v.34–37)<sup>4</sup>

Likewise, *Richard III* stages a juxtaposition of King Richard and Henry Richmond’s tents on the eve of their battle, and both sovereign and sovereign-to-be share in a dream whose substance heralds the outcome in advance. It is as if the metaphysical transition of the body politic from one king to the next takes place while they sleep, before the physical conflict of the battlefield. Richard’s spirit, overburdened with sin and melancholy, sinks before the vindictive procession of his slain rivals; meanwhile Henry’s spirit rises, blessed with good fortune in anticipation of taking the crown:

*Enter the Ghosts of the two young Princes.*  
GHOSTS [*To Richard*]

Dream on thy cousins smothered in the Tower.  
Let us be lead within thy bosom, Richard,  
And weigh thee down to ruin, shame, and death.  
Thy nephews’ souls bid thee despair and die!

*To Richmond*

Sleep, Richmond, sleep in peace, and wake in joy.  
Good angels guard thee from the boar’s annoy.  
Live, and beget a happy race of kings!  
Edward’s unhappy sons do bid thee flourish.

(V.iii.151–57)<sup>5</sup>

The downward pull of melancholic despair and heavy sin weigh upon King Richard’s soul, and manifest quite “unkingly” aspects of sovereign sleep. Shakespeare then conspicuously juxtaposes this image to a vision of divinely sanctioned sovereignty in the figure

of Henry Richmond, whose sleep is peaceful and protected. These scenes suggest a metaphysical and theological significance to the sleep of the king, but the argument I make here also attends to the form of life that sleep brings to the surface of the body natural, life whose depiction under Shakespeare's hand resonates with but also qualifies Giorgio Agamben's concept of bare life and its particular significance to the early modern state.<sup>6</sup>

This essay first connects accounts of Queen Elizabeth's aging body natural during the Tudor-Stuart succession crisis to the juridical concept of an "altered case," underscoring the weird temporality suggested by the decline of the sovereign's health. I then give readings of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* that show sovereign sleep and insomnia to be events of metaphysical and political consequence in both plays, for the life of the monarch and for the health of the kingdom. Shakespeare's visions of life cut short in the body of sleeping kings do not reflect the same logic that, according to Agamben, defines and guarantees the continuity of sovereign power. Agamben argues that the sacred life of the king is bound to the bare life of his body natural, and that it infuses the sovereign with the power to define and eradicate bare life in the bodies of his subjects. In the tragedies of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, however, sovereign sleep and insomnia crack open that metaphysical seal, and prevent the sacred life of kingship from attaching to the body of the sovereign successor—even though both Claudius and Macbeth appear to exercise a "sovereign decision" by killing the bare life of the sleeping king. While Shakespearean tragedy thus exposes the outworn ideologies of the King's Two Bodies, these plays more strikingly present an uncanny vision of the biopolitical foundations of the modern state, which rest upon the prolific fictions of a split between public and private, or political and moral forms of life.

## I

Seneca the stoick (who according to the opinion of those of his sect, held that *a wise man neuer changeth his opinions*,) expoundeth it in such sort that he includet in the opinion of a wise man a necessarie exception, to wit, if nothing hap that may alter the case.

—Thomas Fitzherbert, *The First Part of a Treatise Concerning Policy, and Religion* (1606)

In March 1603, as Queen Elizabeth's aging body increasingly displayed signs of her imminent death, she told the Earl of Nottingham

“I am tied with a chain of iron about my neck . . . I am tied, I am tied, and the case is altered with me.”<sup>7</sup> Nottingham and Elizabeth were grieving the very recent death of his wife, who had been a close friend of the queen, so his visit was punctuated by mutual sadness for the Countess of Nottingham’s passing, as well as for Elizabeth’s own declining health. Not long after Nottingham’s visit, the Earl of Northumberland discreetly sent word assuring an eager James VI of Scotland that Elizabeth had indeed taken a turn for the worse:

Her Maiestie hath bene euell now almost one monthe. In the twelve first dayes it was kept secrett vnder a misprision, taking the caus to be the displeasoure she tooke at Arbella, the motions of taking in Tyron, and the deathe of her old acquaintance the Lady Notinghame. Those that were nearest her did imagine these to be the reasons. Moer dais told ws it was ane indisposition of bodie; siknes was not in any maner discerned, her sleep and stomak only bereft her, so as for a 20 dayes she slept very little. Since she is growne very weak, yet sometymes gives ws comfort of recoverie, a few hours after threatnes ws with dispaire of her well doing. Phisick she will not take any, and the phisitions conclud that if this contineu she must needes fall into a distemper, not a frensie but rather into a dulnesse and lethargie.<sup>8</sup>

The “euell” describing Elizabeth in Northumberland’s letter is an antiquated usage that denotes a state of evil health—a wretched physical condition or a corruption of the body’s humors.<sup>9</sup> No wonder, then, that for the first twelve days Elizabeth’s sickness was kept secret, since its cause remained uncertain. But once Northumberland felt confident that Elizabeth’s state was in fact “ane indisposition of bodie” and not simply a temporary psychosomatic effect of her friend’s death, he found the nerve to write. Northumberland goes on to assure James of a consensus regarding her majesty’s encroaching death, as well as James’s right to the throne: “Euery one almost imbraces yow, for which we that are your trew servantes are glaide of.”<sup>10</sup> Once Elizabeth’s body natural had been taken over by evil health, Northumberland suggests, the kingdom’s subjects could not help but look forward to the investiture of sovereignty with James VI of Scotland.

This account of her melancholic condition and Elizabeth’s own admission of her “altered case” may simply appear consistent with common early modern expressions describing life as it approaches death. The word “case” in Elizabeth’s time could mean the sheath

of a sword, garments covering the body, or even the body itself. Cleopatra uses this latter sense to describe Antony's body—"This case of that huge spirit now is cold" (IV.xv.89)—once death has robbed it of its animating force and presence. But Elizabeth's choice of words with the Earl of Nottingham reflects her unique condition of sovereign embodiment. While a "chain of iron" for other humans might simply figure the physical burden of an aging and "euell" body natural, in Elizabeth's case the "chain of iron" more plausibly denotes the body politic, whose weighted interests were slowly becoming too much for Elizabeth to manage.<sup>11</sup>

"The case is altered with me," she tells Nottingham. Tudor jurists used the phrase "the case is altered" to designate the body natural of the monarch that was suddenly and irrevocably transformed by its incorporation of the body politic, and it became a popular proverb associated with Plowden's legal construction of the King's Two Bodies in his *Reports*.<sup>12</sup> The logic of the altered case also helped to account for the legal continuity of the corporative body politic with regard to the landed possessions of the king or queen, who could never relinquish a claim to property because the king or queen never truly died. While the phrase developed amid the arguments of English courtrooms, its presence in popular literature and parlance illustrates seepage into other public registers. "'The case is altered,' quoth Plowden," became a familiar expression beyond the juridical court, working its way into ballads and theatrical scripts from writers such as Whetstone, Dekker, Heywood, and Jonson—the latter even published a play titled *The Case is Altered*, which Thomas Nashe mentions during his parody of the red herring in *Lenten Stuffle*. As Marie Axton notes, the phrase was taken broadly in Elizabethan vernacular to designate "a change of identity which the law would recognize."<sup>13</sup> Still, the common character of the expression in both juridical and poetic surroundings does not entirely explain the significance of Elizabeth's usage. For one thing, Elizabeth's accession in 1558 meant that from that moment onward, her body had become an altered case, bound to the body politic and forever changed in its political, legal, and metaphysical status. For her case to be altered again, after the fact, implies a reverse trajectory, as if the body politic had already begun to depart or evacuate—an event that ought not to happen until Elizabeth's natural death.

At the moment of the monarch's bodily death, Plowden held that the body politic would immediately reinvest itself within the body

natural of the new sovereign. As he argued, “every removing of the state Royall from one body naturall to another is called in lawe *Demise Le Roy*,” and this process marks the legal difference between the natural inheritance of primogeniture and the rights of royal succession.<sup>14</sup> The king never dies: in the state of royal demise, there is no event of complete or final death, since the body politic remains an ideal and continuous presence. Instead, only a brief severing of the sovereign body natural from the body politic would take place, the latter being “instantaneously vested in his successor [since] Demise, in legal terminology, was not equivalent to death.”<sup>15</sup> The ground of sovereign power is not subject to the bodily infirmities of its possessor, but rather moves from one incarnation of the king to the next. And in fact, Plowden produced a manuscript in 1566 (which he wisely kept guarded from print, but which circulated among sympathetic jurists) titled “A treatise of the two Bodies of the king, vis. natural and politic . . . The whole intending to prove the title of Mary Quene of Scotts to the succession of the crown of England and that the Scots are not out of the allegiance of England.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, Plowden devoted some serious legal wranglings to establishing a juridical counter against Elizabeth, challenging her claims to sovereign authority and surreptitiously looking to undermine the legitimacy of the Tudor dynasty.

It would seem, then, that Elizabeth’s learned sense of irony was at play when she spoke wryly of her “altered case” approaching death.<sup>17</sup> On the one hand, Elizabeth recognized the impending decay of her own body, and the inevitable legal confirmation of sovereignty upon another body—the body of James VI of Scotland, waiting hopefully in the wings. That event would ultimately represent the claim of Mary Stuart coming to fruition, against a good part of Elizabeth’s political work of the past half-century, and in line with Plowden’s legal argument for Scottish legitimacy. But beyond a shift in legal status, the “altered case” to which Elizabeth referred was one of physiological and even metaphysical degradation, exacerbated by irregular patterns of sleep during her final months in power. It is as if she imagined the supernatural bonds between her body natural and the body politic slowly dissolving, a grim consequence of her amble towards death. Because sleep is an inevitable event for all sensing bodies, whether they be sovereign or not, when the monarch sleeps it registers the persistence of the body natural’s most basic need: the renewal of natural life that is necessary for the corporeal instantiation of sovereignty. Yet by some ac-

counts, during her final days of life Elizabeth actually resisted sleep, despite her extremely weak and exhausted state. In defying the wishes of her physicians and counselors, Elizabeth's refusal to sleep may have constituted a final attempt to exercise sovereign authority over her own body, and suggests her recognition of sleep's potential to slide easily into death—to finally and irrevocably sever the knot between her body natural and the body politic.<sup>18</sup>

When James I finally sat upon the English throne, the question of sovereign sleep may have come into more immediate focus given his notorious tendency to fall asleep during long public events, especially at the performance of plays. According to the casebooks of his personal physician, Dr. Theodore Turquet de Mayarne, James I battled mightily with insomnia, along with other physical ailments that kept him restless and uncomfortable at night.<sup>19</sup> James's insomnia and his propensity to fall asleep in public suggest that his sleepless nights found ways of intruding upon the king's public life and his magisterial presence, and can help to explain his preferences for shorter drama. The court masque was famously developed under the purview of King James, who appreciated its formal brevity compared to the lengthy productions favored by Queen Elizabeth.<sup>20</sup> Henry Paul even asserts that James's visit to Oxford in 1605 was likely present in Shakespeare's mind while writing *Macbeth*, since a firsthand account tells us that during the third evening in a row of tedious theatrical performances in his honor, King James "fell asleep and when he wakened he would have been gone saying I marvel what they think me to be."<sup>21</sup> What his subjects seemed to think him to be was a man and yet not a man—or at least, ideally, a king whose divine presence would not succumb to the temptation of sleep during theater performed in his honor. While the king's prerogative hypothetically meant that he could sleep when and wherever he desired, such moments of physical lapse expose a near comic, yet gravely concrete fragility to the sovereign's bodily life. In different ways, then, the public personas of both Queen Elizabeth and King James registered struggles with the body natural's compulsion to sleep, despite the supposedly perfecting influence of England's body politic.<sup>22</sup>

Given the many biblical and classical references to sleep as an image or anticipation of death, reproduced in medical texts, philosophical writings, and literary representations of Tudor and Stuart England, sleep presented a conceptual aporia for the doctrine of the King's Two Bodies.<sup>23</sup> For while Plowden's juridical theory of *De-*

*mise le Roy* clearly accounted for the brief retreat and reappearance of the body politic upon the *death* of the sovereign’s body natural, it did not offer an account of what, if anything, might happen to the body politic when the sovereign fell asleep. Admittedly, Shakespeare’s knowledge of Elizabeth’s final days, or of James’s insomnia, cannot be ascertained with certainty. Yet it is clear that both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* reflect an abiding interest in sovereign sleep and insomnia, and that he conceives of these events as a matrix of metaphysiological forces that capture and compromise the King’s Two Bodies.

Discussions of this doctrine and the structures of sovereign continuity in Shakespeare typically begin with Ernst Kantorowicz’s seminal work on the concept’s history, which takes *Richard II* as an exemplary case—“the tragedy proper of the King’s Two Bodies,” as he puts it.<sup>24</sup> Citing the apparently contradictory language of Tudor jurisprudence, which irrationally finds two bodies to be located in one, Kantorowicz proposes that the English jurists’ legal opinion of the twinned nature of the king might seem less outlandish if one reconsiders it in theological terms:

In fact, we need only replace the strange image of the Two Bodies by the more customary theological term of the Two Natures in order to make it poignantly felt that the speech of the Elizabethan lawyers derived its tenor in the last analysis from theological diction, *and that their speech itself, to say the least, was crypto-theological*. Royalty, by this semi-religious terminology, was actually expounded in terms of christological definitions. (Kantorowicz, 16, my emphasis)

Kantorowicz finds a coded meaning carried over from theology to juridical reason, a “tenor” that is buried in the diction of the Tudor jurists. In his account, Elizabethan language acts as a kind of sepulchre that “encrypts” the Two Natures doctrine of Christian theology within the secular juridical doctrine of the King’s Two Bodies. Kantorowicz goes on to argue that Tudor courtrooms “applied, unconsciously rather than consciously, the current theological definitions to the defining of the nature of kingship” and that “the crypto-theological idiom was not the personal spleen of any single one among the Tudor lawyers, nor was it restricted to a small coterie of judges.”<sup>25</sup> These points and the psychic-humoral register of Kantorowicz’s metaphor resonate with the readings of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* that I shall give, but for the moment they are meant to show that the language of Tudor jurists unconsciously based the

mystical perpetuity of the body politic, and its perfecting transformation of the king's body natural, on this Christian theological precedent. Just as early church debates framed Christ's incarnation, Tudor jurists found that the everlasting body of the king was conjoined to the sovereign body natural, yet subject to no part of its fallible nature. Rather, the ideal body of the king takes up and wipes away the king's physical inferiorities, even though the king must have a "Body natural, consisting of natural Members as every other Man has, and [that] in this he is subject to Passions and Death as other men are."<sup>26</sup>

It is this "common" aspect of human embodiment that, Kantorowicz argues, determines Shakespeare's tragic depictions of monarchical decline. While Kantorowicz finds underlying Christological and mystical influences in Plowden's writings, he finds little to no indication that such concerns are central to Shakespeare's interest in the King's Two Bodies. So while his discussion of *Richard II* opens with an allusion to the proverbial life of the legal phrase "the case is altered," and he even cites Shakespeare's undoubted "familiarity with legal cases of general interest" alongside "other evidence of his association with the students at the Inns and his knowledge of court procedure" (25), Kantorowicz then retracts the insinuation that Shakespeare's dramaturgy takes up these juridico-political dilemmas:

Admittedly, it would make little difference whether or not Shakespeare was familiar with the subtleties of legal speech. The poet's vision of the twin natures of a king is not dependent on constitutional support, since such vision would arise very naturally from a purely human stratum. It therefore may appear futile even to pose the question whether Shakespeare applied any professional idiom of the jurists of his time, or try to determine the die of Shakespeare's coinage.<sup>27</sup>

Risking such futility, in the pages that follow I not only pose that very question, but also answer it in the affirmative, by arguing that Shakespeare's depictions of the violent deaths of sleeping kings is not a "vision" that arises naturally from his contemplation of a "purely human stratum," bound to the sacred nature of kingship. Shakespeare rather clearly and critically recognizes the gap at which a series of discourses concerning the King's Two Bodies converge—religious, political, metaphysical *and* juridical. In fact, Kantorowicz's concept of the "crypto-theological" as an unconscious idiom of Tudor juridical language can be used, if slightly re-

vised, to describe the condition of the states represented in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. The bodies politic of Denmark and Scotland are rotten, rank, and disjointed—they appear to take on, precariously and unconsciously, the decaying condition of the bodies natural of King Hamlet and King Duncan, forever sleeping in their sepulchers. This fate emerges as a consequence of these kings being killed in their sleep—events which generate phantasmatic reverberations between the body of the sovereign and the bodies of his subjects. In these moments of political and ontological emergency the human is not, as Kantorowicz claims, a universal stratum that grounds Shakespeare’s visions of kingship cut short by death in sleep. Rather, Shakespeare’s human can be historicized precisely because it is a product of his reflections on political, juridical, and theological crises of the time. Both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* look to reassess the terms binding the life of the sovereign and his subjects to the well being of the early modern state, yet ultimately neither play offers a reassuring view of these connections, or of the direction in which they would seem to be headed.

## II

Taking our example from Seneca’s extraordinary tragedies, we ask: what is the unity between Stoic thought and this tragic thought which stages for the first time beings devoted to evil, prefiguring thereby with such precision Elizabethan theater . . . What is really Stoic here is the discovery of passions-bodies and of the infernal mixtures which they organize or submit to: burning poisons and paedophagus banquets . . . Everywhere poisonous mixtures seethe in the depth of the body; abominable necromancies, incests, and feedings are elaborated.

—Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*<sup>28</sup>

Prince Hamlet’s Denmark is a polity in demise, whose wretched state is brought on by the murder of a king sleeping in his garden—a king whose body is compromised and enfeebled by the “altered case” of sleep. In a recent essay, Rebecca Totaro argues that a dialectic of secure sleep and vigilant watch determines “civil, bodily, and spiritual health” in *Hamlet*’s Denmark, and that King Hamlet’s sleep represents an indulgent lapse in care, which Prince Hamlet eventually recognizes as an improper and “ill maxim” for state rule.<sup>29</sup> “Hamlet changes it,” Totaro writes, “arriving at a new conclusion: every man must watch over himself, because only in

this way will his sleep be secure. If the audience imagines that Horatio's blessing over the dead body of Hamlet is answered and that Hamlet is attended by angels who sing him to his rest, perhaps this is because Shakespeare convinced them that Hamlet had become his own best watch."<sup>30</sup> The play becomes a macabre success story in Totaro's account, sanctioned by a theological assurance: Hamlet's "successful watch" does not repeat the sins of the father, figured as the immoderate sleep to which his body and the health of the state temporarily succumb. Denmark's prince overturns Claudius's rule, and finds peace in the final, blessed sleep of death. And Totaro frames this odd success in biopolitical terms, though her essay does not explicitly develop that line of thought. Prince Hamlet never learns how to maintain sovereign vigilance, rule a healthy kingdom, or even preserve his bloodline of succession; he rather learns how to "watch over himself," just as "every man must."

This claim strikes me as an important insight, though Totaro does not consider the more nefarious implications of the historical and biopolitical transition that she seems to be describing. She argues that Denmark's "watch" is first a function of the sovereign body, which bears responsibility for securing the kingdom's well being at night. But by the end of the play the "best watch" is recognized as that which the self (the implication is, any disciplined self) exercises over its own bodily life: the paradigmatic center of constant and vigilant care is relocated from the sovereign body to the bodies of his subjects, and this becomes the optimum method to "secure" sleep among sovereign, subjects, and kingdom alike. Yet if Shakespeare imagines this care for sleeping life in the positive terms that Totaro ascribes to him, it seems strange that the prince only finds such peaceful security in death, and that Denmark is then given over to Fortinbras, who is heir to a foreign throne that annexes Hamlet's kingdom. If *Hamlet* imagines the King's sleep at the core of Denmark's crisis of sovereignty, it remains difficult to see how exactly the prince's final sleep of death constitutes a Shakespearean affirmation of political or ontological certainty.

Keeping these points close, I would like to turn to the ghost's narrative, where the sleeping King Hamlet's body natural and its poisoning by Claudius figure forms of gross carnality and rankness. The play suggests that this unnatural amplification of the king's bodily life slides easily into his death, and moreover that it complicates the metaphysical transmission of the body politic to Prince Hamlet—Denmark's ideal successor in a patrilineal scheme of

power. Claudius intrudes upon the king’s secure and holy space of sleep as a means of wresting the body politic from him, but the sovereign’s sleep implies more than just a suspension of the king’s conscious defenses. King Hamlet’s sleeping condition also exposes the common, bare reality of his body natural, alongside the fleshly history of sin written into his soul. The ghost’s narrative thus retroactively constructs an image of the sovereign body natural that co-extends with its humoral environment, in ways that bear political-theological implications: the king sleeps in a sanctified garden, meant to protect the sovereign’s rest. But the humoral flows of the sovereign’s blood, opened up to its fecund surroundings, also expose a form of biological life that Claudius’s poison takes hold of and destroys. This double truth makes the sovereign’s sleep an equivocal event that oscillates between poles of recovery and vulnerability, as well as sanctity and pollution.

When Hamlet first encounters his father’s ghost, he is told that

Sleeping within my orchard,  
My custom always of the afternoon,  
Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole  
With juice of cursed hebona in a vial,  
And in the porches of my ears did pour  
The leperous distillment, whose effect  
Holds such an enmity with blood of man  
That swift as quicksilver it courses through  
The natural gates and alleys of the body,  
And with sudden vigor it doth posset  
And curd, like eager droppings into milk,  
The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine,  
And a most instant tetter barked about  
Most lazarlike with vile and loathsome crust  
All my smooth body.  
Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother’s hand  
Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched.

(I.v.59–75)<sup>31</sup>

The ghost calls the king’s sleeping hour “secure” because it is the time of day in which the king retreats from life as a king, withdrawing into a cocoon of protection. The scene should be one of idyllic removal from the cares of state, to a place that keeps the king safe from worry and treachery. Such associations between sleep, security, and pastoral retreat are familiar tropes in works like Sidney’s

*Arcadia*, in which a movement away from the world of politics and war dovetails with romantic idealizations of slumber and lethargy as escape.<sup>32</sup> The ghost's tale is also consistent with literary associations of sleep with self-renewal, a "care-charmer" that gives solace to weary minds and anxiously exhausted nerves.<sup>33</sup> The life of his body natural waxes, while the mystical influence of the body politic wanes, as the king's sleep restores bodily life in the manner common to humans and animals alike. But while these valences of the king's sleep assume its natural and customary character, the ghost repeatedly insists that the murder is "most foul, strange, and unnatural," and thus imparts to it a radical evil—an evil that *Hamlet* suggests is in rather close proximity to the sacredness of sovereignty, and to the sanctified sleep of the king.

Just before Hamlet meets his father's ghost, the prince laments the nightly carousing and excessive drinking of the Danes at court. This inclination, he tells Horatio, is endemic to the souls of the Danish nation, and Claudius's indulgent drinking grossly exacerbates it. Hamlet muses that the new king should be sleeping, but he "doth wake tonight and takes his rouse" (I.iv.8). And when Horatio asks his prince if such behavior is "custom," Hamlet admits as much, though he rues the implications: "Ay, marry, is't, / But to my mind, though I am native here / And to the manner born, it is a custom / More honored in the breach than the observance" (I.iv.14–16). Prince Hamlet's words anticipate the ghost's story by figuring his uncle as an inversion of his father: Claudius indulges in a "custom" that keeps him and his subjects awake into the early hours of the night, while King Hamlet's sleep is a "custom in the afternoon" that replenishes his health; also, Hamlet describes this flaw of Danish custom as a "vicious mole of nature" that burrows through the soul and storms the forts of reason, which anticipates his comparison of the king's ghost to an "old mole" burrowing through the earth under Hamlet's feet—the same "mole" whose influence leads the prince to affectations of madness in his plot for revenge. The mole of nature in Denmark's subjects, the prince imagines, takes over their "general censure" like a totalizing "corruption / From that particular fault", and so "The dram of evil / Doth all the noble substance often dout, / To his own scandal" (I.iv.24–38). The shared imagery of Hamlet's descriptions of Claudius and the ghost's narrative of sovereign sleep, suggests that villainy and corruption bear a substantial affinity with the humoral circulations of sleeping bodies, and are even drawn to the sacred life encrypted in the body of the king.

This is clear from Hamlet’s descriptions of nature and the peculiar agency he attributes to evil. The “mole” of corruption is a natural presence in the Danish character, but this tendency threatens to grow and swell disproportionately, becoming a custom whose indulgence might overdetermine the ontological bearing of the Danish king and subjects alike. The “noble substance” falls victim to a “dram of evil”: the process Prince Hamlet imagines looks ahead to the ghost’s description of the sacredness attending King Hamlet’s life in sleep, which then falls victim to the dram of poison that Claudius pours into his ear. The trajectories of corruption in these two cases move, however, through slightly different vectors. The Danish flaw is a seed of corruption that is already present, and it unfolds to take over its host. The poison, meanwhile, introduces a foreign agent through the king’s ear that seethes through his blood and colonizes his body. Yet in both instances, we see a natural substance subtly corrupted to fulfill a latent and wicked potential. Holiness and evil alike seem to spring from a common source. In other words, *Hamlet’s* vision of the decrepit state begins with a meditation upon the treacherously thin boundary between what is noble, sacred, and holy in nature, and what is rank, accursed, and evil—and these attributes spring from the corporeal mixtures that engender them. The ghost’s story thus indicates that sovereign sleep, much like the drunken and “heavy-headed revel” of the Danes, risks indulging a mixture by which sacred life all too easily becomes accursed. Yet it is not simply the inability of the sovereign to maintain watchful, vigilant care that marks his sleep as an indulgent lapse in kingliness and a loss of sacred identity. It is rather the transformative powers of Claudius’s poison, introduced within the sanctified environment of the sleeping king, that brings about these consequences.

Part of this seems due to the simple fact that during the king’s sleep, his bodily life becomes more vulnerable. In multiple terms the ghost casts the king’s body natural as a miniature fortress or city whose defenses are suspended, its conduits of circulation open to hostile takeover—the poison enters through the “porches of my ears” and “courses through / The natural gates and alleys of the body.” The distillment of “cursed hebona” that Claudius employs is a phrase used by both Marlowe and Shakespeare, but first coined by Gower, whose verse “hebenus, that slepy tre” in turn paraphrases a passage from Book XI of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. The line “hebenus, that slepy tre” refers not to “a tree having a soporific

juice, but simply ebony (Latin *ebenus*), the wood used by the God of Sleep in the walls of his chamber.”<sup>34</sup> Claudius’s poison is an essential distillation of the wood that encases the chamber of Somnus, and his wicked alchemy infuses and corrupts the king’s sleeping life. “So did it mine”: the effects of the poison take hold between two bookends to the ghost’s narrative, “Sleeping within my orchard” and “Thus was I, sleeping,” further demarcating the event within the shell of sovereign sleep.

The poison’s substantial affinities with sleep, and with the humoral flows of the king’s body natural in repose, seem in fact to purge the sovereign body of its sacred life. When the king’s body releases slowly into what should be a brief and “edenic” return to primordial life in recovery, Claudius’s intrusion disrupts and violates that sanctified space by turning it rank. Hamlet is robbed “of life, of crown, of queen” as the poison saturates his sleeping body, and each of these three claims constitutes a distinct aspect of sovereign selfhood. But while “crown” and “queen” point clearly enough to the king’s roles as head of state and head of the royal family, the term “life” constitutes a third identity that seems less explicitly tied to the purviews of kingship per se. And though the ghost’s tale gives two distinct visions of the king’s royal persona, it does not split the king’s life into two images. It rather demarcates a single form of life tied to the sovereign body natural, life that should remain sacred but which Claudius’s treason pollutes and evacuates. So while the sovereign’s bare life is brought to the surface for Claudius to take, the presence of sacred life is occluded, as if the “cursed hebona” both transforms and removes it from the king’s humoral circulation, while hastening his bodily death.

Such sudden death is one of the worst medieval nightmares: “the horror is not only the fact of his murder, at the hands of his treacherous brother, but also the precise circumstances of that murder, in his sleep, comfortable and secure” (231). Thus Stephen Greenblatt connects the ghost’s story to Hamlet’s hesitation to kill Claudius while he prays, noting that Hamlet “remembers that Claudius took his father ‘grossly, full of bread, / With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May.’”<sup>35</sup> Here, Hamlet worries that Claudius’s blood may have been purged and cleansed by this confession, whereas the ghost has told him that his father’s blood was in a state of extreme impurity, bound up with the repercussions of fleshly sin as well as the thickening effects of the poison. The controversies over Holy Communion and its claims to physically constitute a commu-

nity of shared blood and body through Christ seem to haunt the ghost's tale of King Hamlet's death, much as they haunted Elizabeth's attempt to balance such religious controversies during her reign.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, these allusions coincide with the ghost's narrative precisely because they trace a shift from the smooth ideality and purity of abstraction into a condition of bodily life as such, which first swells into relief and is then annihilated by poison. In this sense, the ghost describes a crypto-theological effect taking hold of King Hamlet's body natural, through which the buried theological histories of sin and fleshly indiscretion resurface in the flow of sovereign blood, and hold immediate consequence for the sacred life of the king and the state for which he cares.

And so, the ghost says, the poison works to "posset" and "curd" the otherwise "smooth" body of the king. As an index to royal identity that is both physical and ideal, blood is the most crucial humor affecting the tenuous unity of bodies natural and politic—especially the common blood between father and son that patrilineal succession prioritizes. Blood both contains and transfers sovereign legitimacy; it is a shared current that the ghost says runs "thin and wholesome," encrypting the line of the king. But the poison turns this sacred ideality of blood into a foul and unnatural counterimage, ruining the smoothness of sovereign sanguinity. The point here is twofold: blood can serve a similar sort of ideological function as does the body politic because it encodes monarchical continuity, tracing the family bloodline as a pure, uninterrupted flow. But blood is also a living and natural substance shared by all humans, and it resists idealization or abstraction because of this common status, as well as its capacities to coagulate, thicken, and scab when exposed to air. Hence, blood equally recalls the materially recalcitrant qualities of the body natural. The poison that thickens, possets, and curds the king's blood while he sleeps arrests the recuperative flows of King Hamlet's bodily humors, extracting and transforming the animating substance of his natural life, while also bringing out his flesh's history of impure transgressions. This volatile metaphysiological mixture thus grounds the event of the king's death, and arrests the transition of sovereignty from King Hamlet to his son.

But the ghost also describes his blood as if it were milk, "like eager droppings" that "posset" and "curd," and this suggests a maternal source of the sovereign's bodily life. And being overfull of blood, bread, or milk, recalls the quality of gluttonous sin that

Prince Hamlet ascribes to his mother Gertrude's appetite for his father: "she would hang on him / As if increase in appetite had grown / By what it fed on" (I.ii.143–45). This poisonous thickening of the king's blood thus overcodes it as fleshly and feminine, further problematizing the ideal scheme of patrilineal succession. While the political crisis that follows the king's murder indicates a failed or imperfect transition of sovereign power—a power invested by the metaphysical continuity of the body politic—the flip side of that coin insists that the sacred life of sovereignty is precariously grounded in the physical life of the sovereign body natural, and even in the humoral substances that sustain it. In other words, Shakespeare imagines the infirmities of the king's body natural not only to compromise sovereign vigilance, but also to weaken or corrupt the majesty of the body politic. And this seems possible precisely because the ground of sovereign power depends at least as much upon its physical *corpus*, as it does upon a metaphysical form of sacred life or an image of kingly *dignitas*.

To clarify, I am not arguing that Shakespeare articulates a clear and novel theory of sovereign continuity grounded in bodily constitution, and thereby rejects any idea of kingship as a holy or sacred presence. But Shakespeare's depiction of sovereign sleep does tease out a certain conceptual aporia in the King's Two Bodies doctrine, since these bodily infirmities directly compromise the sacredness of the king's existence. And this results in a somewhat heretical image of sovereignty in *Hamlet*: it is an elusively fluid yet corporeal presence that is subject to physical contingencies, and thus it cannot be grounded solely in theological or juridico-political abstractions. The physical ties between the sleeping body of King Hamlet, his son, and the body politic itself, map a crisis of state that is at once a crisis of bodily life *and* ontological presence. And Queen Gertrude scripts her son into this very framework when he confronts her in her private closet, and the prince suddenly encounters a second vision of the king's ghost, this time dressed in his nightclothes:

Alas, how is't with you,  
That you do bend your eye on vacancy,  
And with th'incorporal air hold discourse?  
Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep,  
And as the sleeping soldiers in th'alarm  
Your bedded hair like life in excrements

Start up and stand an end. O gentle son,  
Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper  
Sprinkle cool patience.

(III.iv.118–25)

Gertrude’s vision links Prince Hamlet to Denmark’s body politic by imagining a common state of interrupted sleep—the hairs on his head stir from their “bedded” repose, like so many soldiers of the state violently pulled from slumber by a sudden alarm. The second visitation of his father’s ghost thus renders Prince Hamlet’s body into an echo or refraction of his father’s body natural at the time of his murder: sleeping soundly, he is suddenly and violently wrested from that gentle state, his body subjected to a harsh awakening that rises up “like life in excrements.” Like the sleeping body natural of his father, Prince Hamlet’s body registers a vision—routed through the gaze of his mother—of incensed and turbulent passions rising to the surface. Here, however, it is a phantasmatic after effect of the sovereign father’s bare life being killed in sleep. The fractured image manifests and replays the death of King Hamlet through the body of Denmark’s heir.

Moreover, Gertrude’s description of the Prince’s appearance mirrors the conditional state that the ghost earlier tells Prince Hamlet *could* be produced if he were to describe the perils of his purgatorial surroundings:

I am thy father’s spirit,  
Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,  
And for the day confined to fast in fires,  
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature  
Are burnt and purged away. But that I am forbid  
To tell the secrets of my prison house,  
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word  
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,  
Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres,  
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,  
And each particular hair to stand an end  
Like quills upon the fearful porpentine.

(I.v.9–20)

The ghost promises he could deliver a tale of such fantastic horror, it would “harrow up” Prince Hamlet’s soul, “freeze” his blood, and transform him into a vision of stellar ghoulishness. Just as the

“cursed hebona” worked metaphysical effects upon the king’s physiological humors, so the ghost’s story could induce awestruck paralysis in the body of Denmark’s prince. The bonds between the ghost’s tale, Hamlet’s body, and Denmark’s body politic, are only strengthened when the ghost goes on to say

Now, Hamlet, hear.  
 ’Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,  
 A serpent stung me. So the whole ear of Denmark  
 Is by a forged process of my death  
 Rankly abused.

(I.v.34–37)

This narrative characterizes its own effects, as well as the misbegotten public account of the king’s murder, as bodily abuses for Hamlet and for the greater body politic that bind the fate of the two as one. Hamlet’s ear and the ear of the body politic alike are “rankly abused”: the ghost’s story pollutes the psychosomatic structures of Prince Hamlet’s very being, as the narrative digs into him like the tunneling mole of nature that corrupts the lives of the Danes. The prince’s life thus plays dialectical subject to the objective life of the state, but through this circuit both appear to be “rotten” and “disjointed,” bound to issue nothing more than tragic repetitions of the king’s death and the rank state of his encrypted corpse (I.iv.90).

These instances replay the affective and physiological dimensions of the king’s death by implanting qualities of his poisoned, sleeping body in the bodies of the prince and the kingdom. But such moments are perhaps more than simple allusions to the doubled or twinned aspects of the king’s identity, or cautionary wisdom against the divisive effects of monarchical slumber upon the King’s Two Bodies. They also call attention to the peculiar metaphysiology of sovereign sleep: just as sleep exposes the body natural in its most bare and fragile condition, sleep in a sovereign body cripples the spectacle of sovereign power that depends upon the animated presence of the monarch. That manner of public spectacle, to which English Renaissance theater is intimately linked, has long been a focus for new historicist inquiry concerned with the display of political authority and the representation of the sovereign’s body. By such measures, the king conveys a doubleness of presence and unavailability: he is always to be seen, and his will is always to be known, but the king’s will is also always his own, al-

ways the prerogative of the monarch and therefore opaque to his subjects.<sup>37</sup> And a sleeping sovereign of course loses the capacity to exercise that key prerogative whenever he sleeps in public. But *Hamlet* also imagines the potentially ill effects of sovereign sleep taking hold within a space we would now call private, when its sanctity and integrity are compromised by a brother’s poisonous treason.

These public and private aspects of the sovereign’s life can be further tied to the play’s visions of King Hamlet’s ghost. The ghost first appears in his suit of armor, and then in his bedclothes, and each form of attire marks his absent body by situating its image in two spheres that constitute relative degrees of “public”: the king’s life is never entirely private since sovereign power must be present to someone, somewhere, at all times. Social rank and privilege would determine access to the privy chambers of the queen or king, so it is not exactly right to say that the vision of King Hamlet’s ghost in his bedclothes as opposed to his armor constitutes an instance of the private leaking into the public.<sup>38</sup> But Shakespeare does suggest two vaguely distinct forms of life that tend towards different roles played by the king. One is the shared and relatively “public” vision of his warlike majesty seen by the soldiers, by Horatio, and by Prince Hamlet alike; the other is a more “private” instance of the king as *pater familias* and sexual creature, intervening between his enraged son and his former queen. Together, these fictions constitute an identity as head of state that expresses the king’s task as one of holding or binding together opposed constructions of selfhood, just as the king unifies the bodies of the everlasting polity and the natural-born sovereign in his double body. Yet in *Hamlet*, these visions are specifically incorporeal and phantasmatic, and thus return us to the grounding power of the sovereign body in its physical form, which is strikingly absent.

*Hamlet* would seem to point, then, to Queen Elizabeth—and, perhaps, to a failure to fulfill these roles of fatherhood in their classical senses, thereby laying out the political territory upon which James would construct his brand of sovereign power. The new king figured himself both as metaphysical father of the state, and reproductive father of the royal line of Stuart sovereignty.<sup>39</sup> While this may be true, it is a perspective that affords only a partial view of the significant political implications of *Hamlet*, which emphasizes the grounding force of the sovereign’s corporeal life, made all the more apparent by its sudden absence. The “life” of which King Hamlet

is robbed is a form of natural life that his ghost's story places alongside, but in distinction from, the images of crown and queen. After the sleeping sovereign is killed, his ghost's numinous presence splits into incorporeal images of public and private life, which designate aspects of sovereignty in its visual appearance. Hamlet is robbed, indeed, of "life, crown, and queen" at once, but the king's sacred life appears to have fallen into a metaphysical void, opened up by King Hamlet's death in sleep.

The homologies between the Danish subjects' corrupting "mole of nature," the dram of "cursed hebona," and the story that feeds on Prince Hamlet's conscience, all reconnect the figure of the sleeping sovereign to the psychosomatic life of his son and to the life of the body politic. If, as the ghost maintains, this murder is most foul and unnatural, one reason may be that the poison manipulates the tenuous distinctions between the sacred and the accursed, by transforming humoral substances that flow through nature and circulate in the sovereign's blood. Just as Hamlet construes Denmark's flaw as a natural presence subject to unnatural growth, the "Cursed hebona" dramatically alters the holiness of sovereign sleep. Claudius's poison infuses the king's bodily life and its sanctified environs with a corrupting presence, and by this means he seems both to expose and kill the bare life of the sovereign. But the play goes on to show that Claudius has not taken on the sacred form of life that should attend the king, either as a metaphysical presence or a right to exercise the sovereign exception. The sudden exposure and killing of the king's bare life in sleep thus generates a gap, an emptiness that submerges the king's sacred life and blocks his unworthy successor from its investiture. While Claudius's decision to kill the king may formally resonate with the sovereign capacity to name and eradicate bare life, the aftershock of King Hamlet's death shows that Claudius has failed to take on the form of sacred life that sanctions such a decision. The sleeping sovereign's death spills outward and into the bodies of son and polity alike, taking hold as a palpable but phantasmatic rehearsal of the state's tragic dissolution.

### III

Sovereignty only rules over what it is capable of interiorizing.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*<sup>40</sup>

As in *Hamlet*, the crisis of sovereignty in *Macbeth* stems from the death of a sleeping king. But *Macbeth*'s insomnia more emphati-

cally punctuates the self-annihilating consequences of an assault on sovereign sleep. The centrality of sleep in *Macbeth* thus elaborates key premises of *Hamlet*, as Macbeth finds himself guilty of having “murdered sleep” itself—which is how the disembodied voice of judgment names his transgression (II.ii.41). If sleep can be murdered, then the play suggests it has, or better yet *is*, a body with a strange life of its own, which carries a holy valence in the case of sovereign sleep. Macbeth’s aggression against that body results in a punishing state of insomnia, which tyrannizes Macbeth’s supposedly sovereign body, and corresponds directly to the loss of political authority that culminates in his death. Macbeth is denied sleep, and moreover denied the investiture of sacred life that ostensibly secures sovereign power. His situation thus affirms an intimacy between holiness and sovereign sleep that is grounded in the physical restoration of the body natural, while it also underscores the heinous character of Macbeth’s actions. The guilt of Duncan’s murder takes on the substantial character of a bodily humour that fuses to Macbeth, becoming an insistent presence that surges and swells like “multitudinous seas” stained red with blood (II.ii.66).

Killing the king in his sleep also aligns Macbeth with Scotland’s barbaric, bloody past, and with the popular English image of Scotland as a “primitive” polity from which James Stuart sought to sever himself, while also promoting “union” between the kingdoms. Shakespeare uses the horrors of hallucinatory insomnia in *Macbeth* to connect him with James I and his struggles with sleep, as if to underscore the perilous task of managing England’s body politic as it demands the reconstruction of its legitimating political doctrine. And Shakespeare uses a certain term in the play that captures a sense of the impossible desire to break cleanly with the past, even as it clings to the present, a word that speaks to the conceptual enigmas posed by the King’s Two Bodies doctrine: “cleave” held the same conflicted meanings for Shakespeare as it does in modern usage, signifying both a splitting apart and a clinging together.<sup>41</sup> And the King’s Two Bodies is a cleft—a union of disjunction, upon which rests the well being of the state and the authority of its sovereign. Moreover, the form of the cleft speaks to a most basic experience of sleep—sleep divides an otherwise continuous stream of waking consciousness in life, by plunging the soul’s mindful presence into a temporary void. But when insomnia denies the soul access to that replenishing power, its self-presence is fractured and dislocated by hallucinatory effects of the sort that characterize

Macbeth's short-lived experience as king. In *Tamburlaine*, Mycetes even uses the term "cleave" to encapsulate the very condition of kingliness and the many threats of undoing it faces: "For Kings are clouts that every man shoots at, / Our crown the pin that thousands seek to cleave."<sup>42</sup> Marlowe's lines apply to Macbeth in two respects: initially one who seeks to cleave the crown from its rightful bearer, he soon becomes a king whose capacity to manage the cleft defining kingship radically erodes.

*The Tragedy of Macbeth* constantly represents Macbeth's presence as both divided and as having the power to divide. Early on, Macbeth slices through lines of troops and individual bodies on the battlefield: the wounded sergeant tells King Duncan that at first the battle stood doubtful "As two spent swimmers, that do cling together / And choke their art" (I.ii.8–9)—until Macbeth "like valor's minion carved out his passage" (1.19). The sergeant goes on to tell how Macbeth, cutting through the field, arrived face to face with the rebel Macdonwald, "unseamed him from the nave to th'chops, / And fixed his head upon our battlements" (1.22–23). But when he is not on the battlefield, Macbeth's divided self-presence only foregrounds his inadequacy to the role of king. For instance, when Ross delivers news to Macbeth that he shall inherit Cawdor's title, that message carries with it an encryption of the weird sisters' second prognostication: the unspoken but latent confirmation that Macbeth will become Scotland's sovereign, will soon take upon himself the altered case of kingship and the crown that "thousands" are bent to cleave. Yet upon the delivery of Ross's news, Macbeth describes its effect in terms that nearly replicate Gertrude's description of Hamlet's appearance upon the second visitation of his father's ghost:

Two truths are told,  
As happy prologues to the swelling act  
Of the imperial theme.—I thank you, gentlemen.—  
[*Aside*] This supernatural soliciting  
Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,  
Why hath it given me earnest of success,  
Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor:  
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion  
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair  
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,  
Against the use of nature? Present fears  
Are less than horrible imaginings.

My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
Shakes so my single state of man that function  
Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is  
But what is not.

(I.iii.127–42)

Macbeth attributes his shaken condition to the heaviness of “Two truths,” and the unspoken implication that he will be king. But he cannot imagine the truth of this event unless it involves the murder of King Duncan, which is consistent with Macbeth’s assumption that titular authority must change hands through acts of war and physical aggression. And Banquo remarks upon this state of rapture by likening it to an altered case that doesn’t quite fit, foreshadowing Macbeth’s ill-suited role as king: “New honors come upon him, / Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mold / But with the aid of use” (l.144–46). These new titles appear not to cleave properly to the body inheriting them; rather than investing Macbeth’s “single state of man” with an honor that balances metaphysical and physical ontologies in one formation, the phantasmatic image of “surmise” reduces ontology itself to a gap of nothing. This imagining of the wound that will cleave King Duncan from his life and his crown, so disturbs Macbeth that he feels it smother his very sense of being.

Other signs point to this metaphysical determination of Macbeth’s fate, and return us to the volatile power of corporeal mixtures that, in *Hamlet*, limn the sovereign’s violent death in sleep. Lady Macbeth, for instance, questions her husband’s capacity to go through with killing King Duncan by associating Macbeth with feminine tendencies—he is “too full o’th’ milk of human kindness” (I.v.18)—while she figures herself as a bulwark to Duncan’s murder by identifying with masculine fortitude: “Hie thee hither, / That I may pour my spirits in thine ear, / And chastise with the valor of my tongue / All that impedes thee from the golden round” (l.26–29). The poisonous “spirits” of her tongue recall the poison Claudius pours into King Hamlet’s ear, but Lady Macbeth’s speech seems to wall in and lull to sleep Macbeth’s conscience, encouraging him to kill King Duncan. Her words both call upon and manifest spirits that infuse humoral substance, which Lady Macbeth identifies with acts of making and unmaking alike: in this case being too full of the “milk of human kindness” is to be unable to make one’s self into king, just as the overstuffed milkiness of King

Hamlet's poisoned blood prevents Prince Hamlet's accession to sovereignty. But Lady Macbeth also looks to the surrounding night for the presence of a perverted nature *within* nature, among the eldritch flows of darkness that will cloak and refract the murder of the king, while honing the couple's evil intention:

Come, you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,  
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full  
Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood,  
Stop up th'access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
Th'effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,  
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,  
Wherever in your sightless substances  
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,  
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,  
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,  
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,  
To cry "Hold, hold!"

(I.v.41–55)

Lady Macbeth's lines summon forces to steel her to the deed of murder. But because she also calls upon these agents as a way of *blocking out* or isolating her from the flows of "remorse," we should pause over her exact meaning. On the one hand, she looks to the circulating substances of nocturnal life to reshape her and to sharpen her purpose; yet she also aims to separate or cleave from those elemental passions any tinge of remorse, any "compunctious visitings" that might misdirect her aim. In other words, she looks to designate and divide the substances of nocturnal life—holy and accursed, sacred and bare—in order to occlude the presence of the sacred within herself, her vision of the king, and even in the air that surrounds his sleep.

Echoes here of the ghost's speech describing King Hamlet's death can confer new sense upon Claudius's treachery. Such semantic overlap between *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* might be read as instances of literary "cleaving" in which the qualities of language, mental impressions, and critical events from one play cling to or inhabit the other. Unlike King Hamlet's ghost, however, Lady Macbeth embraces the processes of thickening and transformation associated

with night and the humoral environs of sleep. She actively seeks these accursed, “sightless substances” as agents to whet her purpose and her knife’s edge, while weaving a fabric of darkness dipped in the “dunest smoke of hell” to obscure the image of murder. These are the swirling spirits from which bodily humors take on shaping temperaments, and at night they pool into thick and foggy deposits of melancholy, lethargy, and forgetfulness.<sup>43</sup> Polluted sleep and the radical forms of undoing that the play imagines thus imply spaces of ungendered chaos, sodomitical ruptures of rebellion and self-destruction first alluded to as the “multiplying villainies of nature / [that] swarm upon” Macdonwald and his forces (I.ii.11–12).

Banquo, meanwhile, speaks to the ideal sanctity of sovereign sleep when he and King Duncan first arrive at Inverness:

*King.* This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air  
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself  
Unto our gentle senses.

*Banquo.* This guest of summer,  
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve  
By his loved mansionry that the heaven’s breath  
Smells wooingly here. No jutty, frieze,  
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird  
Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle.  
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed  
The air is delicate.

(I.vi.1–10)

Banquo gives an image of Inverness as it ought to be: a safe haven in which the king can open himself to the recuperative powers of sleep, breathing air that is “delicate” and refreshing rather than thickened with evil intention. Duncan and Banquo alike recall King Hamlet’s allusions to sleep in his orchard as a pastoral escape from the cares and strains of waking life, a relished removal from the public eye that renews the sovereign’s body natural. And just as King Hamlet’s blood is ideally “thin and wholesome,” the air enfolding and infusing the sovereign’s sleep at Inverness should be unpolluted and pure. The comparison thus underscores the atrocity of their action—an assault on sovereign sleep that saturates the surrounding darkness with Lady and Lord Macbeth’s evil will.

The opportunity to kill Duncan while he sleeps also gives the

couple a tantalizing vision of the perfect crime: they decide that culpability can be easily plastered onto the chamberlains sleeping near the “sticking-place,” and thus the ambitious pair will avoid any implication of guilt:

*Macbeth.* If we should fail?

*Lady Macbeth.*

We fail?

But screw your courage to the sticking-place,  
 And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep—  
 Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey  
 Soundly invite him—his two chamberlains  
 Will I with wine and wassail so convince,  
 That memory, the warder of the brain,  
 Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason  
 A limbeck only: when in swinish sleep  
 Their drenched natures lie as in a death,  
 What cannot you and I perform upon  
 Th'unguarded Duncan, what not put upon  
 His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt  
 Of our great quell?

(I.vii.59–72)

Lady Macbeth's wassail will transform the slumber of Duncan's servants into a “swinish sleep” that erases their memory, and make the “receipt of reason” into nothing but an empty “limbeck.” It is an image of the brute, animal aspect of bodily life succumbing to its most basic need, as if the sleeping human soul temporarily descends from the lofty heights of reason to feed from the earthly trough. But in keeping with Shakespeare's alchemical conceit, it also appears that the receptive, spongy powers of the brain's ward are not simply lost or suspended. Rather, these qualities are relocated to the body's surface, such that the “inside” becomes the “outside” in a saturated mess of humoral flux. The officers' sleeping bodies thus serve as sponges to which the guilt of the murder will stick, just as their shirts and daggers shall be stained with the king's blood, and just as Duncan's thickening natural life rises to the surface of his sleeping body. By summoning spirits of malcontent and violent nature, Lady Macbeth and her Lord have crafted a kind of artisanal evil, a wicked alchemy that perverts the sanctified substances of life and sleep that course through the body natural of the sovereign, only to annihilate them all.

Immediately upon killing the sovereign, however, Macbeth is visited by a voice that condemns his act *not* as an act of homicide, but rather as a metaphysical violation that murders sleep itself:

*Macbeth.* Methought I heard a voice cry “Sleep no more!  
Macbeth does murder sleep”—the innocent sleep,  
Sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care,  
The death of each day’s life, sore labor’s bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature’s second course,  
Chief nourisher in life’s feast—

*Lady Macbeth.* What do you mean?

*Macbeth.* Still it cried “Sleep no more!” to all the house:  
“Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor  
Shall sleep no more: Macbeth shall sleep no more.”

(II.ii.34–42)

Innocent sleep, Macbeth muses, is a rejuvenating bath, a psychic balm, and a nourishing power—yet it is also a form of death that ends “each day’s life,” and so the strange nature of sleep is divided against itself. Accordingly, the voice Macbeth hears splits his judgment in two: *Glamis* murders sleep, yet *Cawdor* shall sleep no more. Macbeth’s identity is again cloven, this time between the title he once held—the Thane of Glamis, looking backward to a time before the play—and the title conferred upon him by King Duncan—the Thane of Cawdor, who looks ahead to be king, but in becoming so shall never sleep again. And by being divided from the sanctified, life-sustaining properties of sleep, Macbeth’s fate comes to taste of a bitter humor. He exemplifies divided selfhood in so many respects save the one he most desires: the cleft of sovereignty successfully binding bodies natural and politic. It is fitting retribution for a man who has attacked the King’s Two Bodies in its most fragile state of exposure, using sleep’s wedge as a killing tool. Macbeth’s doom is to be denied the sleep that renews natural life and magisterial presence, in a series of paranoid and debilitating bouts with sleeplessness that consume his conscience. Macbeth is forced to watch events unfold beyond his control, spiraling into hallucinatory paranoia while he “lack[s] the season of all natures, sleep” (III.v.142). While Lady Macbeth’s evil summonings pollute the sacredness of Duncan’s sleep and facilitate his death, her nefarious incantations also help to isolate Macbeth from the solace of sover-

eign sleep, and to divide him from the sacred life of sovereign power.

Macbeth's act of aggression and its punishment furthermore suggest that he adheres to an Elizabethan stereotype of antiquated Scottish barbarity, and that he imagines sovereign authority to be decided by acts of violent usurpation. When visited by Banquo's ghost, Macbeth laments the fact that his theft of Duncan's throne has seemingly rendered his claim to power illegitimate, and he displays a kind of nostalgia for an outmoded idea of sovereignty and its investiture:

*Macbeth*: Blood hath been shed ere now, i'th'olden time,  
 Ere humane statute purged the gentle weal;  
 Ay, and since too, murders have been performed  
 Too terrible for the ear. The times has been  
 That, when the brains were out, the man would die,  
 And there an end; but now they rise again,  
 With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,  
 And push us from our stools. This is more strange  
 Than such a murder is.

(III.iv.76–82)

Macbeth recalls a time when the continuity of the state and its legitimating force were not located in the body of the sovereign—when the spilling of royal blood was simply an instance of raw aggression, rather than a crime against the polity. A time “when the brains were out, [and] the man would die, / And there an end” suggests a time when killing a man meant he was truly dead and gone, and one did not risk the haunting guilt or spectral visitations that now cripple Macbeth. But his phrasing also reckons the end result of physical conflict as the legitimating factor of political authority, giving the usurping victor right of rule based on strength and the capacity to take power.<sup>44</sup> Macbeth's remembrance of a time when pure force determined the course of political power implies that his position as monarch of Scotland both clings to an absent, antiquated tradition, and is immediately cut off from any imagined future of kingship.<sup>45</sup> That verdict may obliquely connect Macbeth with King James, through their battles with insomnia, even though the play's official stance is one that separates the two, and ties James to the line of Stuart sovereignty through Banquo—a line which is itself a fiction originated by Stuart genealogists in an attempt to mythologize the Stuart claim to the Scottish throne.<sup>46</sup>

Macbeth imagines the grounding force of blood in simpler terms than does the play, since the latter indicates that sovereign blood encrypts a presence that is always more than natural life, yet always bound to it. The metaphysical stain that neither Macbeth nor Lady Macbeth can flush from their souls further affirms Macbeth’s mistaken sense of sovereignty’s relationship to a symbolics of blood. Hence, only too late does Macbeth come to the Senecan realization that not even “great Neptune’s ocean” can “wash this blood” clean from his hand: “No, this my hand will rather / The multitudinous seas incarnadine, / Making the green one red” (II.ii.63–66).<sup>47</sup> This surging body of guilt clings to Macbeth’s soul, a swelling presence of psychosomatic anxiety that keeps him from sleep. He anticipates such a fate immediately after killing Duncan, though only by mistakenly believing he can purge any sense of guilty paranoia from the routines of his bodily life:

but let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds  
suffer,  
Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep  
In the affliction of these terrible dreams  
That shake us nightly. Better be with the dead,  
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,  
Than on the torture of the mind to lie  
In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave;  
After life’s fitful fever he sleeps well.

(III.ii.17–24)

The “fitful fever” of life in fact becomes Macbeth’s burden, since he is unable to eat at his banquet, and unable to sleep at all. A “restless ecstasy” consumes him, like that which Gertrude sees overtaking her son, and Macbeth’s only peace can be the peace that comes with the sleep of death.

Lady Macbeth, however, anxiously rehearses the event of Duncan’s murder in her sleep, as an unconscious actor replaying her sin. In a sense, these characters form a cleft of opposing extremes: insomniac visions and sleepwalking trauma. Their self-presence twists the axis of sleep against its natural bent, as when Lady Macbeth’s servant describes her sleepwalking fits to the Doctor:

Since his Majesty went into the field, I have seen her rise from her bed,  
throw her nightgown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold

it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep.

(V.i.4–9)

And of course, walking, talking, reading and writing while one sleeps are, like the murderous violation of sleep's sanctity, marked as most unnatural: "A great perturbation in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep and do the effects of watching!" (l.10–12). Meanwhile, Macbeth watches while sorely missing the effects of sleep—he is enthralled by the visitation of Banquo's ghost, by the series of three apparitions that fixate his gaze in the witches' haunt, and later by the phantasmatic procession of Banquo's heirs. Ultimately, Macduff confirms the latent truth of all these insomniac visions, and seems to Macbeth to speak with a tongue that cleaves his spirit:

*Macduff.* Despair thy charm,  
And let the angel whom thou still hast served  
Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb  
Untimely ripped.

*Macbeth.* Accursed be that tongue that tells me so,  
For it hath cowed my better part of man!  
And be these juggling fiends no more believed,  
That palter with us in a double sense;  
That keep the word of promise to our ear,  
And break it to our hope.

(V.viii.13–22)

Macbeth sees, too late, that he is undone by the double sense of cloven tongues, and his words align the prognostications of the weird sisters with the wicked thoughts earlier whispered into his ear by Lady Macbeth. The operations of the cleft work to undo the false king; Macbeth can be nothing more than a cloven mockery of kingship itself, isolated from both the waking presence and the sleeping life of sovereignty, in all its doubled dimensions.

#### IV

The founding act of the modern State—that is, not the first act but the one it repeats over and over—is the institution of the fictitious split between public and private, between political and

moral. This is how it manages to crack bodies open, how it grinds up forms-of-life. The move to divide internal freedom and external submission, moral interiority and political conduct, corresponds to the institution *as such* of bare life.

—Tiqqun, Thesis 40, *Introduction to Civil War*<sup>48</sup>

Shakespeare’s interweaving of sleep and sovereignty in *Macbeth* may obliquely refer to James I’s struggles with insomnia and his sleeping in public, which helps to account for the play’s interest in these extreme states of the sovereign body natural. Having made such topical suggestions, however, I would leave them simply as that. For the longer arc of Shakespeare’s interest in sleep, insomnia, and the challenges of sovereign vigilance encourages us to situate *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* not only with respect to the Tudor-Stuart succession crisis, but also vis-à-vis a certain aporia at the heart of the King’s Two Bodies doctrine: the altered case of sovereign sleep. To the extent that sleep suspends the sovereign’s self-awareness, it opens a gap in lived experience as perceived by the waking body natural, and thus cuts into the metaphysical investiture of continuity supposedly guaranteed by the vigilant presence of the body politic. But sleep also brings into relief the bodily flows of life, those physiological and vulnerable dimensions of the sovereign body natural, whose appearance facilitates the murders of sleeping kings in both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.

As I have been suggesting, in these plays the altered case of sleep exposes a form of life in the sovereign body that is somewhat consistent with Giorgio Agamben’s concept of “bare life” and the mechanisms of the sovereign exception.<sup>49</sup> For Agamben, the body of the sovereign contains two forms of life, sacred and bare, that are enigmatically tied to a single body: the king does not have two bodies, but two *lives* that are bound together by a single *corpus*. The status of the sovereign’s life thus reflects a complementary opposition to the life of the *homo sacer*—the contradictory figure of Roman law who can be killed but not sacrificed:

Here the structural analogy between the sovereign exception and *sacratio* shows its full sense. At the two extreme limits of the order, the sovereign and *homo sacer* present two symmetrical figures that have the same structure and are correlative: the sovereign is the one with respect to whom all men are potentially *homines sacri*, and *homo sacer* is the one with respect to whom all men act as sovereigns.<sup>50</sup>

Agamben goes on to revise Kantorowicz’s claim that the metaphysical body politic grounds the continuity of the state, by arguing that

“at the moment of the sovereign’s death, it is the sacred life grounding sovereign authority that invests the person of the sovereign’s successor.”<sup>51</sup> This form of sacred life is passed from the body of one sovereign to the next, not in the form of a metaphysical or political body that infuses the body natural of the monarch, but rather as the capacity to designate life that can be killed but not sacrificed—to identify the *homo sacer* potentially “encrypted” as bare life in the body of every subject. But *homo sacer* is not the same man in Roman society as he is in early modern England; bare life shifts in its forms of appearance, along with the particular religious, political and juridical institutions that determine it at a given historical conjuncture. Sleep and insomnia may direct our attention to the biological aspects of bare life, because these conditions show the body natural *in extremis*; but it is specifically through the altered case of sovereign sleep that Shakespeare fleshes out a historical dimension to this biopolitical paradigm, thereby locating it in the genealogy of early modern sovereignty. If a vision of bare life emerges through his theatrical depictions of sovereign sleep and insomnia, it is because those conditions of natural frailty map the biological becoming political, amidst a crisis of monarchical succession at the end of Elizabeth’s reign.

Still, Shakespeare’s depictions of a sovereign’s death in sleep do not neatly reflect the structural symmetries between bare and sacred life that Agamben’s account of sovereign power presumes. Rather, he seems to imagine forms of life in the sovereign body natural being disturbingly metamorphosed, repositioned, and even evacuated through the metaphysiological flux of sleep. Hence, in both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, while the immediate successor to the throne appears to kill the bare life of the sleeping sovereign, he is clearly *not* invested with the form of sacred life that, in Agamben’s account, conditions sovereign power and assures its continuity. When King Hamlet and King Duncan are killed in their sleep, the terms of sovereignty’s double exclusion are inverted. In their altered case, the sleeping kings’ bodies manifest the quality of bare life that defines the *homo sacer* in its *capacity to be killed* outside of law, but the sacred life bound to them can neither be killed nor taken on by Claudius or Macbeth.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, the sleeping sovereign body is incapable of decision *per se*, while Claudius and Macbeth appear to exercise a sovereign decision to designate and kill bare life—though neither of them is sovereign when they commit that act.

In “The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words,” Sigmund Freud cites the Latin *sacratio*—both “sacred” and “accursed”—as psychic-linguistic evidence of the sacred’s historical interweaving with the taboo.<sup>53</sup> For Freud, the proximity of primal oppositions in language reveal the origins of meaning, and so the double sense of *sacratio* suggests a lingering, unconscious residue of the civilizing process that has been retained in the linguistic order. Agamben cites Freud’s essay, but claims that it falls prey to a modern mythologeme that in turn obscures the specificity of the *homo sacer*. The latter is outside of Roman juridical *and* divine law, and thus occupies a form of life irreducible to the double meaning of *sacratio*, which only oscillates between two essentially religious designations of life.<sup>54</sup> The essence of sacred life, in Agamben’s view, is precisely its capacity to articulate the caesura of life from which sovereign power draws its inexorable strength: in other words, to decide on the line that demarcates bare life, and which cuts across juridico-political *and* theological categories. However one views the strengths or limitations of Agamben’s theory, it formally reduces sovereign power to an apparatus of conscious decision.

For Shakespeare, meanwhile, such vexed dualities animate actions, words, *and* substances, and he suggests that the latter quite precariously infuse the sovereign’s sleeping life. The unconscious force of sovereign sleep in Shakespeare’s drama thus suggests a metaphysiology of the sacred and accursed operates in the sovereign body natural and the body politic, but it is one that neither Freud’s nor Agamben’s accounts of *sacratio* can entirely comprehend. Holy and accursed, sanctified and bare, the sovereign body in sleep not only betrays the antitheses of doubled life that it encrypts—it also opens the sleeping body to the volatile humoral flows and cosmological forces animating living substance at large. The radical potential of sleep is both to amplify and to undo the fragile underpinnings of life that infuse the King’s Two Bodies—to pull the bare life of the sovereign to the surface, and thus to facilitate its being taken. *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* suggest that this killing of the sovereign in sleep creates, as it were, an exception to the exception. The metaphysical perpetuity of the state supposed by the King’s Two Bodies doctrine, as well as the chain of power affirmed by the sovereign decision, are thus acknowledged precisely as juridical, metaphysical, and political fictions under Shakespeare’s pen. The crisis of kingship in Shakespearean tragedy stems not from a common truth of human frailty in the king, but rather from

the problematic knot entangling biological and cosmological forms of life with the long duration and eventual collapse of political institutions.

We can glimpse in both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* nascent though troubled visions of human self-sovereignty, emerging tenuously from the metaphysiological circuits that connect the sovereign's body with the bodies of his subjects, and which are thrown into crisis when sleeping kings are killed. Hence, these plays remain relevant to contemporary impasses, and to the social repetitions that have edified modern states and civil societies—repetitions that continue to shape our thinking about ethico-political life. The French collective Tiqqun, in their *Introduction to Civil War*, assert the “founding act of the modern State—that is, not the first act but the one it repeats over and over—is the institution of the fictitious split between public and private, between political and moral.” The insipid rehearsal of this event, which severs ethical life from political life along lines of public and private, is the “institution *as such* of bare life.”<sup>55</sup> If that is indeed the case, then Shakespeare's tragic visions of sovereign sleep are prolegomena to a nightmare from which we have yet to awaken.

## Notes

For their careful reading, criticism, and advice, I am grateful to Elisha Cohn, Drew Daniel, and Garrett Sullivan, Jr.. Special thanks goes to Richard Halpern, whose patience and generosity made this essay possible.

1. King James VI and I, *Political Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 239.

2. *Representations* 106 (Spring 2009) features a special forum on *The King's Two Bodies* with essays by Stephen Greenblatt, Richard Halpern, Victoria Kahn, Bernhard Jussen, and Lorna Hutson. Works on Shakespeare and questions of sovereignty relative to biopolitics include: Meredith Evans, “Rumor, the Breath of Kings, and the Body of Law in *2 Henry IV*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 1–24; James Kuzner, “Unbuilding the City: *Coriolanus* and the Birth of Republican Rome,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 58, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 174–99; Ken Jackson, “‘Is it God or the Sovereign Exception?': Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* and Shakespeare's *King John*,” *Religion and Literature* (Autumn 2006): 85–100; Julia-Reinhard Lupton, *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) Debora Kuller Shuger, *Political Theologies in Shakespeare's England: The Sacred and the State in “Measure for Measure”* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave, 2001).

3. Agamben's discussion of Kantorowicz is found in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 91–103. On

Schmitt and the State of Exception as paradigmatic, see *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

4. All Shakespeare references in this chapter are from William Shakespeare, *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Orgel and A. R. Braunmuller (New York: Penguin Books, 2002). The quotation is from *2 Henry IV*, 1080–1122.

5. Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Richard III*, ed. Orgel and Braunmuller, 904–57.

6. Here I mean to recall Agamben’s formulation of bare life from *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, although the alignment of the body of the sovereign with the body of the *homo sacer* is one of complementary opposition rather than symmetry: while the king’s being killed is not a juridically sanctioned act, it does articulate a distinction between the sacred life and the biological life of the sovereign, or a dimension of bare life in the body natural of the king that is distinct from his sacred life.

7. Christopher Hibbert, *The Virgin Queen* (London: Viking, 1990), 231.

8. *Correspondence of King James VI of Scotland with Sir Robert Cecil and Others in England, During the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*. (Westminster: J. B. Nichols and Sons for the Camden Society, 1861), 72.

9. Refer to the entry for “evil” from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

10. *Correspondence of King James VI of Scotland*, 72.

11. On the cultural misogyny prevalent during Elizabeth’s final years, see Steven Mullaney, “Mourning and Misogyny: *Hamlet*, *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, and the Final Progress of Elizabeth I, 1600–1607,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (Summer, 1994): 139–62.

12. In a provocative discussion of Plowden, Kantorowicz, and the phrase “the case is altered,” Lorna Hutson maintains that its significance in Plowden and at large has more to do with an emerging sense of Tudor jurisprudence than with the mystical or legal continuity of the sovereign body politic. Hutson argues that Plowden and his contemporaries were responding to the increasing need for interpretive juridical action, aiming to shape a jurisprudence that could rule upon cases in which the strict letter of the law did not apply, or in other words, instances of the legal exception construed through an Aristotelian model of *epieikeia*. While I find Hutson’s argument compelling in both its archival ingenuity and its thorough readings of Plowden’s *Reports*, she seems ultimately to regard the juridical sphere as prime mover of the changing conception of the King’s mystical body. Thus, in her reading of *Richard II*, she argues that Shakespeare employs “the idea of trial by battle, with its emphasis on the unity of word and body . . . not to represent the always already lost unity of the body politic and the body of the king, but to suggest an impasse in the judicial system” (186). See her chapter “Not the King’s Two Bodies: Reading the ‘Body Politic’ in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*, Parts I and II,” in *Rhetoric and Law in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Lorna Hutson and Victoria Kahn. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 166–98. I differ with Hutson in that my account of Shakespeare and political theology holds that no single institution—juridical, religious, or political—along with its corresponding doctrines of legitimation can account for the presence of such complicated knots entangling the metaphysical, ontological, and political status of the King’s Two Bodies in early modern England. Moreover, such exclusive emphasis upon the juridical sphere risks isolating jurisprudence and theories of sovereignty from an

analysis of the biopolitical aspects of power and early modern subjectivation, areas that my account of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* investigates.

13. Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), 29. Although the earliest publication date of Jonson's play is 1609, Nashe's pamphlet dates back at least to 1597, when Jonson was imprisoned in the Marshalsea and Nashe had fled to Yarmouth after the performance of their seditious play *The Isle Of Dogs*. See William Selin, Introduction in Ben Jonson, *The Case Is Altered* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1917).

14. From Plowden's *Reports* quoted in Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies* 28.

15. Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies*, 28.

16. As Axton was writing in the 1970s, this tract had only recently been discovered in manuscript form, and it was therefore not considered by Ernst Kantorowicz in his study of the King's Two Bodies. Axton sees the tract as evidence that Plowden's theory was developed in direct response to the Tudor/Stuart succession crisis. See Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies*, 18–25.

17. According to the Stonyhurst manuscript "The relation of the Lady Southwell of late Q. death, primo Aprilis, 1607," Elizabeth Southwell heard the queen say "I am tied with a chaine of iron about my feet . . . I am tied, I am tied, and the case is altered with me" during Nottingham's visit. See Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies*, 30.

18. There are multiple references to Elizabeth's final days being characterized by a strangely meditative state, including sources that claim she actively refused to sleep, and others indicating that she was a victim of extreme insomnia, sitting upon a pile of cushions, staring blankly into space and sucking intermittently on her finger (from which her coronation ring had been removed by filing, since it had grown into her skin). In the roughly three to four hours immediately before her death, however, she apparently fell into bed and moved in and out of consciousness until her final breath. See Hibbert, *The Virgin Queen* 258–60, Nichols, *Correspondence of King James VI of Scotland*, li–liiii, and Caroline Levine, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994, 168.

19. See G. P. V. Akrigg, ed., *Letters of King James VI and I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 13, for references to de Mayarne's memoir and James's many health problems, especially insomnia. See also Mayarne's manuscript note on the health of James I, reproduced in the original Latin in Norman Moore, M.D. *The History of the Study of Medicine in the British Isles* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1908), 164.

20. The mutuality of James I's political authority and the court masque, especially those penned by Ben Jonson, is well documented. So are Elizabeth's attachments to theater and her enjoyment of elaborate, lengthy performance. On James I and the masque, the essential work is Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); see also Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983). On Elizabeth, see historical biographies such as Caroline Levine, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), and Hibbert, *The Virgin Queen*. For an account of Elizabeth and the politics of theater, see Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and The Cultural Politics of Elizabethan Theater* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).

21. See the firsthand account of the king’s visit to Oxford for three days’ worth of plays performed in his honor during which he fell asleep from apparent boredom and distaste, in Henry Paul, *The Royal Play of Macbeth* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 22.

22. James himself seems to have shared with Shakespeare and indeed, with the literary landscape at large, a personal interest in sleep’s mysterious and potentially troubling effects. In April 1605, King James entertained a visitor to court by the name of Richard Haydocke, a physician trained at Oxford and living in Salisbury. Arthur Wilson’s *History of England*, penned in 1653, recounts Haydocke’s visit:

In the beginning of James’s reign Richard Haydock of New Colledg in Oxford, practised Physick in the day, and Preached in the night in his Bed. His Practice came by his Profession, and his Preaching (as he pretended) by Revelation: For he would take a Text in his sleep, and deliver a good Sermon upon it, and though his Auditory were willing to silence him, by pulling, haling, and pinching, yet would he pertinaciously persist to the end, and sleep still.

While Wilson’s account comes a half-century after the fact, Frederick Hard has found multiple references to Haydocke in other works including John Stow’s *Annals* (1615), Sir Richard Baker’s *A Chronicle of the Kings of England* (1643), and within letters from various aristocrats, all of which indicate that the case was familiar to members of James’s court and to those in its immediate environs. Because of James’s interest and professed background in assessing instances of supernatural activity and “spiritual revelation,” he brought Haydocke to London, and James sat up observing him sleep for two consecutive nights, hoping to see this strange phenomenon of automatic preaching take place. After these observations, the king contemplated the matter for nearly three weeks before finally deciding that Haydocke was a fraud, at which point he confronted the physician and obtained a confession. James then granted him clemency, provided that Haydocke make a full and public confession of his deceitful crimes. See Fredrick Hard, “Richard Haydocke and Alexander Browne: Two Half-Forgotten Writers on the Art of Painting,” *PMLA* 55, no. 3 (September, 1940): 727–41 for the above quotation from Wilson. For a recent account of these events, see Carole Levin, *Dreaming the English Renaissance: Politics and Desire in Court and Culture*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), chapter 1.

23. Significant Biblical passages tying sleep to death often figure sleep as an anticipatory, earthly form of temporary death before the rebirth of eternal salvation at the hand of God. Examples include Ps. 3:5, Ps. 13:3, Ps. 121:3–4, Proverbs 4: 14–16, Proverbs 19:15, John 11:14, and I Cor. 15:20. In terms of literary representations, Sir Phillip Sidney, for instance, names sleep the “Brother of quiet death” in *Astrophil and Stella* as well as the *Arcadia* (“and so of all sides they went to recommend themselves to the elder brother of death”) and Robert Southwell’s *St. Peter’s Complaint* calls “Sleepe, deathes allye: oblivion of tears.” For these and further Elizabethan poetic references tying sleep to death, as well as classical precedents ranging from Homer to Seneca, see Jean Robertson, “Macbeth on Sleep.” *Notes and Queries* 14 (1967): , 139–41. A striking Jacobean dramatic example of the close proximity between sleep and death is found in John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*, and is discussed at length in Garret Sullivan’s *Memory*

and *Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chapter 5.

24. Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 27.

25. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 24 and 19.

26. From Plowden's *Reports*, quoted in Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 13.

27. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 25.

28. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 131.

29. See Rebecca Totaro, "Securing Sleep in *Hamlet*," *SEL* 50, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 407–26.

30. *Ibid.*, 420–21.

31. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Orgel and Braunnmuller, 1337–91.

32. On this point particularly in relationship to politics and the passions, see Garrett Sullivan's essay "Romance, Sleep, and the Passions in Sir Phillip Sidney's *The Old Arcadia*," *ELH* 74 (2007): 735–57.

33. For a series of contemporary poetic and dramatic references to sleep in its more idyllic senses, see Albert S. Cook, "The Elizabethan Invocations to Sleep," *Modern Language Notes* 4, no. 8 (Dec. 1889), 229–31. Cook locates the phrase "care-charmer" describing sleep in works from Samuel Daniel, Bartholomew Griffin, Beaumont and Fletcher, and suggests that multiple Elizabethan references to sleep and its figurations can be traced to Seneca and Ovid, in particular Book XI of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

34. Henry Bradley, "Cursed Hebenon (Or "Hebona")," *The Modern Language Review* 15, no. 1 (Jan., 1920): 85–87.

35. Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 231.

36. On this point, refer to the 1559 Book of Common Prayer, which attempted to balance competing ideas of the sacrament and the doctrine of transubstantiation. See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation in England, 1547–1603* (New York: Palgrave, 1990), 26–27.

37. On mystification with respect to James I's body, visual representation, and public display, see Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature*. On Jacobean spectacle linked to theater and the centrality of the king's physical position particularly in the court masque, see Orgel. For psychoanalytic readings of the politics of spectacle and sovereign power in early modern England, see Christopher Pye, *The Regal Phantasm* (London: Routledge, 1990) and Christopher Pye, *The Vanishing* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

38. In his chapter on Plowden, Kantorowicz emphasizes the unique situation of English sovereignty precisely because of its ties to the physiological character of the King's Two Bodies and an extreme reduction of the king's privacy. Continental kingship construed sovereignty as divided between the people and the king, such that the king was both a "public" king of the people and a "private" king himself. English sovereignty, however, was vested in the "King in parliament" bound to the king in his natural body, and furthermore "English custom apparently tried to reduce the king's 'privacy' so far as possible by recording all royal actions once the body natural 'has the Estate royal united to it, which can do nothing without record'" (Kantorowicz, 20).

39. See Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature*, chapter 2, especially the sections *Arcana Imperii* and *Fatherly Authority: Politics of the Family* for a discussion of James’s paternal technologies.

40. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 360.

41. Refer to the entry for “cleave” in the *OED*. Also, see Sigmund Freud’s essay, “The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words” in *Complete Works Vol. XI*, ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1910), 155–61. Freud compares the double, antithetical senses of words to the combinatory process of dreams, which indicates “a particular preference for combining contraries into a unity or for representing them as one and the same thing” (155). His discussion takes examples from Egyptian, Arabic, and Indo-Germanic languages and includes both the English “cleave” and the Latin “sacratio.”

42. Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine*, II.iv.8–9 in *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe, Vol. One*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

43. For a discussion of sleep and its ties to forgetting, dissociation, and self-undoing in *The Duchess of Malfi*, see Sullivan, *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama*.

44. Macbeth’s understanding of sovereignty appears to constitute an instance of the despotic form of “a commonwealth by *acquisition*” rather than a “political commonwealth, or commonwealth by *institution*,” according to Hobbes. This is the “natural force” route of attaining sovereignty that Hobbes says takes place by act of “conquest, or victory in war” but the transference of sovereignty actually takes place not as an effect of the *victory* itself but through the *consent* of the vanquished. Macbeth’s act of conquest in sleep elides the possibility of a vanquished Duncan conferring consent, so Shakespeare both anticipates and problematizes this facet of the Hobbesian theory of sovereignty. See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), chaps. 17–20.

45. The associations between outmoded barbarity and Scottish royalty were rampant in Elizabethan London. As Geoffrey Bullough notes, “That some Englishmen not only disliked the Scots but regarded Scottish history as a chronicle of violence was shown in the 1606 Parliament, when Sir Christopher Piggot . . . rose in the House during a discussion on 23 February about the Union of the two countries.” Piggot, according to a contemporary account, delivered a caustic “invective against the Scots and Scottish nation; using words of scandal and obloquy, ill be- seeming such an audience, and not pertinent to the matter in hand.” In particular, Piggot’s speech was controversial because it claimed that the Scottish nation “had not suffered above two kings to die in their beds [i.e., sleeping peacefully and dying of natural causes], these 200 years. Our king hath hardly escaped them; they have attempted him.” Upon referring directly to the Gowrie conspiracy that had plotted against James’s life and, more broadly, to the widespread opinion that Scottish kings were highly subject to the violent tendencies of murderous revolt that their countrymen exemplified, Piggot was arrested and detained in the Tower of London, banned from ever serving in Parliament again. See Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, Vol. VII*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 428–29.

46. The fabricated Stuart genealogy is one that James I endorsed, and it is found in Holinshed’s *Chronicles*. This fact makes it difficult, if not impossible, to determine if Shakespeare had any knowledge of its historical accuracy. Holinshed’s

error reproduces an error from his primary source, William Harrison's English translation of John Bellenden's *Croniklis of Scotland with the cosmography and dyscription thairof*, 1535. The *Croniklis* of Bellenden "are themselves a translation into the Scots vernacular from Hector Boece's Latin *Scotorum Historiae*, 1526, which in its turn drew on various still earlier sources," including John Fordun's Latin *Scotichronicon* and Andrew of Wyntoun's *The Orygynale Cronykil*. See Arthur Melville Clark, *Murder Under Trust: or, The Topcial Macbeth and other Jacobean Matters*. (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1981), 12–14.

47. Macbeth's language at this moment very likely draws from John Studley's translation of Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus*. For a reading of Macbeth as a Herculean figure based on Seneca's tragedy, see Robert Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 92–121.

48. Tiqqun, *Introduction to Civil War*, trans. Alexander R. Galloway and Jason E. Smith (Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2010), 88.

49. While my use of the term "bare life" draws from the argument of Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), my discussion of the sovereign's life in sleep is also influenced by Agamben's reading of Heidegger in *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004). For Agamben, Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* is an act of awakening from captivity that allows the human to recognize itself: "*Dasein* is simply an animal that has learned to become bored; it has awakened from its own captivity to its own captivity. This awakening of the living being to its own being-captivated, this anxious and resolute opening to a not-open, is the human." When Shakespeare depicts the killing of the sovereign body natural in sleep, he shows a body that is "captivated" by sleep in the sense of an animal captivity unaware of its captive status, but that also buries or encrypts the form of sacred life animating the awareness of a uniquely sovereign captivity in waking life. Killing the sovereign in sleep kills life in its animal, captive state, and therefore cannot account for the remainder of sacred, ceremonial life in the body of the King that grounds his identity as the sovereign.

50. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 85. "*Sacratio*" comes from the Latin *sacro*, meaning to consecrate or dedicate. Agamben's use emphasizes the duality of sacred life as that which is both outside of human law because it is given to the gods (consecrated), and capable of being killed (accursed), because it has no legal standing or recognition. On the double meaning of this word, see Freud, "The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words," 159.

51. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 101.

52. To clarify this complicated point: the killing of King Hamlet (and of King Duncan) is not exactly an act of "killing without sacrificing," since their sovereign bodies are not consecrated as the body of a *homo sacer*. Nonetheless, neither of these actions is recognized in the respective plays according to a juridico-political order that would define the killing of the sovereign as homicide—in fact, the killing of both kings remains not only outside the juridical purview of homicide, but also outside the orders of common and public knowledge. As Agamben puts it, "It does not matter, from our perspective, that the killing of *homo sacer* can be considered as less than homicide, and the killing of the sovereign as more than homicide; what is essential is that in neither case does the killing of a man constitute an offense of homicide" (Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 102).

53. Freud, "The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words," 155.

54. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 75–86.

55. Tiqqun, *Introduction to Civil War*, 88.

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