

Shared Perspectives: The Common Language of Body Politic and Political Therapy in Sixteenth-Century English and French Political Discourse

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Abstract: The metaphor of the body politic and its subsidiaries, those of political disease and of the king as symbolic physician of his realm, have been extensively used in medieval political literature, usually with the purpose of providing models of governance for the rulers of the day. The sixteenth century though, due to the effects of the Reformation and the religious struggles it caused, marked a transition from this pattern to works of a much more polemical character, which aimed not just to provide advice to the political establishment, but sometimes to radically alter it – and this shift was also reflected in the manner corporal analogies were used. France and England represent the geographical area chosen for this study, two countries which underwent significantly different political evolutions during the sixteenth century. The metaphor of the body politic is employed by both English and French writers and pamphleteers and common features can be identified, but, at the same time, many and important divergences occur between its uses in England and France. This paper aims to provide an analysis of this transition, while identifying and explaining the differences between the rhetorical expressions of the metaphor in both countries.

Keywords: France, England, body politic, political disease, royal power