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978-0-521-59405-9 - Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of Social Pathology in  
Early Modern England

Jonathan Gil Harris

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Jonathan Gil Harris examines the origins of modern discourses of social pathology in Elizabethan and Jacobean medical and political writing. Plays, pamphlets, and political treatises of this period display an increasingly xenophobic tendency to attribute England's ills to "foreign bodies" such as Jews, Catholics, and witches; at the same time, however, they assume that such groups' allegedly "poisonous" features might also be made to serve a medicinal function within the body politic. Harris shows that both ideas share common ground with Paracelsus's pharmacy, which includes the notion that poison has a medicinal power. The emergence of these paradigms in early modern English political thought signals a decisive shift from Galenic humoral tradition and anticipates twentieth-century politico-medical discourses of "infection" and "containment", which, like their early modern predecessors, mystify the domestic origins of social conflict and the operations of political authority.

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# Foreign bodies and the body politic

*Discourses of social pathology  
in early modern England*

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Jonathan Gil Harris

*Ithaca College*



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## Illustrations

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- 1 The enemies of the church attacking the faith; from Alphonsus de Spina, *Fortalitium Fidei* (Lyons, 1487), sig. a2. Reprinted by permission of the Division of Rare & Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, New York. 30
- 2 “Hostilis Munimenti Salutis Invadendi Typus”; frontispiece to Robert Fludd, *Integrum Morborum Mysterium, Sive Medicinae Catholicae* (Frankfort, 1631). Reprinted by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC. 31

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## Acknowledgments

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## Note on the text

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Throughout this study, all references to Shakespeare's plays and poems are taken from *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington, 4th edn. (New York: Harper Collins, 1991); all references to the Bible are taken from the 1560 Geneva edition.