From the holdings of the Department of Special Collections , Princeton University Library, Princeton, NJ

These documents are either in the public domain, or can only be used for educational and research purposes (Fair use) as per U.S. Copyright law (text below). By accessing this file, all users agree that their use falls in the public domain or within fair use as defined by the copyrightlaw. We do not charge any permission or usage fees for the publication of images of material inour collections, including those provided by Princeton University Library, via our website, catalog, or directly from staff.For more information regarding copyright, credit, and citation please review the information onthe Copyright, Credit and Citation Guidelines page of our website.
https://library.princeton.edu/special-collections/policies/copyright-credit-and-citation-guidelines. If you have any questions, including how to order higher-quality images from the collection, contact Special Collections Public Services via our Ask Us! Form. https://library.princeton.edu/special-collections/ask-us

---

Doctoral Dissertations, 2011-2026 Comparative Literature

2014

Feeling Faint: Exposing Consciousness in the Renaissance

Pertile, Giulio

Princeton, NJ : Princeton University

---

http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/dsp01q524jn91h

U.S. Copyright law: The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, §108, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of fair use that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve a violation of copyright law. https://www.copyright.gov/title17/title17.pdf

FEELING FAINT: EXPOSING CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE RENAISSANCE

Giulio Pertile

A DISSERTATION

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY

OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE

BY THE DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Adviser: Leonard Barkan

June 2014

© Copyright by Giulio Pertile, 2014. All rights reserved.

Abstract

A study of swooning in theatrical and narrative works from the Renaissance, "Feeling Faint: Exposing Consciousness in the Renaissance" situates the Renaissance swoon in the context of the history of consciousness. On the one hand it reads the Renaissance swoon against medieval and neo-Platonic trances, in which loss of consciousness is a portal to divine vision. On the other, it sees the swoon as a proleptic challenge to the conception of consciousness in terms of clear and distinct awareness which emerges from Protestant notions of interiority and inner conviction to become a pillar of the modern rational and ethical self. The swoon opens up a vista onto a different mode of feeling—a self-experience identifiable with consciousness only in the measure that the latter can turn away from the world of objects and intuit nothing but itself. Such self-intuition is shown to be inseparable from threshold experiences where consciousness is disrupted or lost; consciousness itself is thereby revealed to be a form of vulnerability and exposure. The first chapter considers several moments of intense stupefaction in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and argues that, in a world where sensation invariably gives rise to error, knowledge is available only when sensation is suspended. The second chapter turns to Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and in particular to the recurrent motif of the "stound," a state of intensified temporality in which the senses apprehend nothing but their own activity; the chapter unfolds both the physiological and the theological ramifications of this state. The third chapter discusses Montaigne's description of his swoon on falling from a horse in Book II of the *Essais*; it argues that this moment at once facilitates and undercuts the encounter with death which lies at the heart of Montaigne's concept of *expérience.* The fourth chapter argues for a convergence of radical skepticism and reflexive affectivity in Othello's swoon at the beginning of Act 4 of *Othello*. The final chapter traces "specters of insentience" throughout the *Winter's Tale*, showing how those specters always emerge in situations where one character's surplus of sensory power leads to another's loss of it.

Table of Contents

Abstract ii

Acknowledgments iv

Introduction
Experiencing Non-Experience: The Trance's Moment 1

Chapter 1
Immanent Trances: Ariosto and the Skeptical Sublime 32

Chapter 2
Allegory, Consciousness, and Self-Feeling in the Spenserian "Stound" 76

Chapter 3
Learning How to Die in the *Essais* 127

Chapter 4
Othello's Monstrous Thinking 161

Chapter 5
"Bequeathing Numbness": Specters of Insentience in *The Winter's Tale* 198

Bibliography 229

Acknowledgments

This dissertation was completed with support from the Graduate School of Princeton University, the Department of Comparative Literature at Princeton University, a Mary Cross Fellowship, an Erich Kahler Fellowship, a PIIRS Grant from Princeton University, and an ACLS/Mellon Foundation Dissertation Completion Fellowship.

Introduction
Experiencing Non-Experience: The Trance's Moment

"Locke sank into a swoon"
– W.B. Yeats

At the beginning of *Euphues and his England*, Euphues and Philautus, having completed the European tour described in *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit*, are sailing back to England. Shortly after their return they find themselves in the house of an old courtier called Fidus, who, stirred by their talk of love, wistfully recalls his own youth: "It may be when I was as young as you, I was as idle as you (though in my opinion there is none less idle than a lover)."[1] He now embarks on a long story of his youthful passion for the tellingly named Iffida, culminating in his declaration of love to her. When Iffida explains to him that she already has a lover abroad, Fidus is thrown into a profound stupor:

> I was stricken into such a maze that for the space almost of half an hour I lay as it had been in a trance, mine eyes almost standing in my head without motion, my face without colour, my mouth without breath ; insomuch that Ifida began to screech out and call company. Which called me also to myself.[2]

The moment is no doubt intended as a humorous one, part of the lover's hyperbolic repertoire; it is a climactic version of the "maze" and the "trance" he has already suffered.[3] Yet the symptoms of this condition, described here at greater length, now seem fairly alarming. All of the vital signs, the indicators of normal functioning, are markedly absent: Fidus lies there "without motion," "without colour," "without breath." He remains in a trance until Iffida's call for help, for "company," calls Fidus back to himself as well, as if summoning him back not from a void but from a form of isolation deeper than consciousness itself.

---

[1] John Lyly, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* and *Euphues and his England,* ed. Scragg, 197.
[2] Ibid., 221-222.
[3] Ibid., 208, 214.

Readers and theatergoers of the period were not unfamiliar with such scenes, often though not always staged or described in the context of love-melancholy. According to *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama,* in stage directions from 1580 to the shuttering of the theaters in 1642 "*swoon* and its variant spelling *sound* each occur about a dozen times, often combined with *fall*"; the entry lists instances ranging from Shakespeare's *2 Henry VI* to Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy* and Fletcher's *The Humorous Lieutenant*.[4] As for stage directions calling for a "faint," at least seventeen are recorded, usually "without embellishment."[5] In Shakespeare alone there are, according to one recent count, eighteen instances of "faints, fits, and fatalities from emotion," from Julia's swoon on being offered to Proteus by her lover Valentine in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, to Imogen's on discovering a headless body wearing her husband's clothes in *Cymbeline*.[6] Prose examples include, beside Lyly, Gascoigne's *Adventures of Master F.J.*, in which F.J. swoons under his lady's arm and reawakens to a pleasant surprise: "returning to life, the first thing which he felt, was that his good Mistres lay pressing his brest with the whole weight of hir body, and biting his lips with hir friendly teeth." As he goes on to explain, she was just trying to revive him; for his part, being a gentleman he "could no lesse do, than of his courteous nature receive his Mistresse into bed."[7]

When not humorous, most of these cases are straightforwardly melodramatic: a character is so overcome by emotion that he or she swoons. Yet sometimes, as in Fidus' trance, we glimpse something beyond the melodrama, an underlying fascination with this corpse-like state into which the character is temporarily thrust. For while it is not hard to see how discovering a headless body could cause someone to faint, or how an overexcited lover might sink, or at least

[4] *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama 1580-1642*, ed. Alan Dessen and Leslie Thomson, 223.
[5] Ibid, 87.
[6] See Kenneth W. Heaton, "Faints, fits, and fatalities."
[7] George Gascoigne, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowers,* 196-197.

claim to sink, into a swoon, other cases are more complex, suggesting a variety of less obvious motivations, as well as a range of intermediary conditions. Before going mad, Ariosto's Orlando falls into a trance brought on by his inability to accept Angelica's betrayal. Guyon's faint on exiting the Cave of Mammon in Book Two of *The Faerie Queene* has long elicited ethical and religious readings in terms of the Book's main virtue, Temperance. Montaigne's description of his faint in "De l'Exercitation" emerges from a meditation on death and pity. Othello's trance in Act 4 of *Othello* is attributed by Iago to epilepsy, yet on closer inspection it seems to be generated solely by Othello's own overpowering thoughts, revealed in a disjointed monologue immediately preceding it. Reflecting on the nature of the swoon in these cases means reflecting on the nature of morality, of mortality, and, especially in this last case, of thought itself.

What does it mean when the intensity of thought has the power to render someone unconscious? How, in Montaigne's evocative phrase, could a "spiritual impression …. cut such a swath [*une telle faucée*] in a massive and solid object"[8]? Could it be that, in the total absence of thought and of self such as it is experienced by Guyon, Montaigne, and Othello, a remoter plane of consciousness is reached? Or are these states merely privative, moments of stony insentience with no further import? While we may feel, when viewing or reading, that these moments are somehow significant, it proves difficult to say exactly how. Even when they occupy a central place in their works, for example, they are not in any obvious way moments of revelation or of learning. In the classical *anagnorisis,* experience is subsumed by knowledge (re-cognition): Oedipus' *anagnorisis* comes when he realizes that it is his father he has killed and his mother he has wedded. It is hard to see, however, what kind of knowledge is attained when Othello or

[8] *Essays,* ed. and trans. Frame, 402. All subsequent citations will refer to this edition; text in the original French refers to *Les Essais*, ed. Balsamo, Magnien, and Simonin-Magnien.

Guyon faints. On the contrary, the purpose of these moments seems to be a climactic emptying out of the mind, the voiding of any knowledge the character felt he possessed.

Both the medieval dream-vision as well as the neo-Platonic trance are relevant precursors; both are states in which the stimulation and alteration of consciousness are closely linked. Yet in most of these cases the trance is described relatively briefly, a portal to the world of the dream—often if not always a vision of the next life.[9] The character's waking state is replaced by a higher, but fundamentally analogous form of consciousness which opens onto a sensory content of its own (perhaps allegorically veiling a non-sensory truth); it is, to put it briefly, an experience of presence. This cannot be said of the faints that I will examine. With no particular kind of content, neither a moral nor metaphysical truth, nor even a sensory object, they also cannot be said to resemble the trance described in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians: "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven." What they all instead disclose is a fundamental absence—of self, of mind, and of consciousness. Compared to the "visions and revelations of the Lord," their interest seems to lie in the empty state itself rather than what it leads to, in the relation of continuity and rupture (hence the word syncope, derived from the Greek and meaning "a cutting short') between consciousness and its absence rather than in the revelatory potential of a purportedly higher consciousness.

[9] The classic study is A.C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*. See also Stephen Greenblatt's examples in the second chapter of *Hamlet in Purgatory*, in particular his discussion of *The Vision of Tondal* (62-63): "Tondal, a model of elegance in his peach-colored velvet robe and his gold chain, reaches out for some food at the dinner table, when he suddenly suffers a seizure. We next see him laid out on the floor, as if dead, surrounded by a crowd of grieving witnesses while in the air, visible to us but not to those witnesses, winged demons are coming for his soul. In the following miniature, everything has changed: the room has disappeared, along with all of the young man's rich clothes, from his soft cap to his pointed-toe shoes, and Tondal's soul stands completely naked before the approaching fiends."

If the medieval dream-vision is more transcendent than the Renaissance swoon, more readily oriented towards a higher plane of existence, medieval swooning is, on the other hand, a "seemingly unremarkable phenomenon," part of a convention and not a singular event in need of interpretation. In the only article-length study of swooning in pre-modern literature, Barry Windeatt surveys a wide range of medieval swoons and concludes that the swoon is "one among prevalent conventions for representing powerful feelings," part of a "more emotionally demonstrative medieval culture."[10] When characters pause and "make a swoon's larger implications a focus for contention," this is unusual; so is "Chaucer's physiological explanation of the process that Trevisa terms 'swowenyngs for defaute of spirits'" in accounting for Troilus's swoon, and so, too, are "avowedly pretended swoons."[11] In the Renaissance all of these exceptions will at various points become the rule, precisely because the swoon—as it befalls Orlando, Guyon, Montaigne, and Othello—itself now has the quality of an exceptional event. Renaissance swoons, as we will see, come closer to reflecting "modern assumptions that swooning is something extreme and exceptional" in need of an interpretation or at least an explanation, while the swoon as a simple gesture of sorrow, with no need of further comment, is much less prevalent.

In a striking passage from *De Rerum Natura,* Lucretius suggests why violent loss of consciousness might have more to it than pathos, more even than pathology—why it might tell us something fundamental about consciousness itself:

> Next, I say that mind and spirit are held in conjunction together and compound one nature in common …. [W]hen the intelligence is moved by more vehement fear, we see the whole spirit throughout the frame share in the feeling: sweatings and pallor hence arise over the whole body, the speech falters, a sounding is in the ears, the limbs give way beneath; in a word we often see men fall to the ground for mental terror; so that everyone may easily recognize from this that the

[10] Barry Windeatt, "The Art of Swooning in Middle English," 230.
[11] Ibid., 224, 227.

> spirit is conjoined with the mind, and when this has been smitten by the mind's power, straightway it strikes and drives forward the body.[12]

Lucretius' overarching purpose in this section is to demonstrate the materiality and hence the mortality of the human soul; fits such as these are conclusive evidence. Yet his resorting to extreme cases such as those described in this passage suggests that this materiality is not self-evident. Instead it is almost as though thought *were,* at first glance, immaterial in nature, and only in these moments of breakdown is its true, embodied nature revealed. Hence the roundabout approach of studying mind or consciousness from its absence—still practiced in neuroscience today. Much later, William James would point out the difficulty of grasping the operation of our own consciousness, comparing it to "seizing a spinning top to catch its motion, or trying to turn up the gas quickly enough to see how the darkness looks."[13] His analogy suggests that, as the constitutive condition of our apprehending anything in time, consciousness itself may be impervious to such apprehension under normal circumstances. It may require a threshold experience—such as waking up, or falling into a faint—in order to be turned upon itself and grasped in its dark essence. With the activities of the senses shut down and no higher object to turn to, we might well say that what is grasped in fainting is nothing other than consciousness itself.

In fact as Lucretius suggests, the brush with unconsciousness that such experiences uniquely permit may also alter our notion of what consciousness itself may be. Bringing into view something whose solidity we normally take for granted, it suddenly casts that solidity into doubt—much as looking out of the window of a tall building makes us physically, vertiginously aware that we are not really standing on the ground. In the following chapters I want to show how the possibility of losing consciousness means acknowledging consciousness's essential

[12] *De Rerum Natura* 3.136-160*,* trans W.H.D. Rouse, 199-201.
[13] William James, *Essays in Psychology*, 144.

vulnerability, and consequently seeing it as fragile organic tissue rather than disembodied function. Or rather: how the depiction of lost consciousness implicitly raises and interrogates that distinction. Loss of consciousness will allow us, indeed force us to understand consciousness as much in terms of the constitutive vulnerability and exposure of a material self as in those of a bounded and rational *cogito*, and yet its exceptional nature renders it difficult to decide between these models. But if consciousness itself is revealed to be a form, even *the* form of vulnerability, this will mean that loss of consciousness is not only a privative state, but rather a significant mode of consciousness in its own right—even an extension of consciousness' powers.

In readings of faints and trances from Ariosto to Shakespeare, I will, then, be attempting to depict a notion of consciousness quite distinct from the Enlightenment version that is still with us today, in which consciousness is above all *self*-consciousness, awareness of a self who is always implicated in acts of knowing.[14] Consciousness and selfhood may be coterminous, yet while the boundaries of the self are those of a durable object, thick and impenetrable, those of consciousness, as is shown in the faint, are worryingly capable of being pierced. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* Freud describes the formation of consciousness from the "undifferentiated vesicle of a substance that is susceptible to stimulation"[15] For Freud, consciousness is the constant management and mitigation of this formative state of vulnerability, a vulnerability

[14] I will try to flesh out this account in the next two sections. While the philosophical and scientific problem of consciousness has now become its own field, relatively little has been written on the topic from a historical or etymological perspective. C.S. Lewis's chapter on "Conscience and Conscious" in *Studies in Words*, 181-213, is still very helpful. For a speculative but informative account of "The Birth of Consciousness out of Conscience" in the Early Modern period, see Cristina Serverius.

[15] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 28. He explains: "this little fragment of living substance is suspended in the middle of an external world charged with the most powerful energies; and it would be killed by the stimulation emanating from these if it were not provided with a protective shield against stimuli. It acquires the shield in this way: its outermost surface ceases to have the structure proper to living matter, becomes to some degree inorganic and thenceforward functions as a special envelope or membrane resistant to stimuli. In consequence, the energies of the external world are able to pass into the next underlying layers, which have remained living, with only a fragment of their original intensity; and these layers can devote themselves, behind the protective shield, to the reception of the amounts of stimulus which have been allowed through it" (30).

which can be shielded and lessened but never simply dispelled. If we think of Michael Schoenfeldt's account of temperance in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* as the ability "to police these necessary thresholds between the outside world and the inner self," Freud's account need not seem entirely alien to the Renaissance.[16] As both Freud and Spenser are acutely aware, no matter how strong the shield consciousness remains susceptible to events which may overwhelm its defenses: "We describe as 'traumatic' any excitations which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield."[17]

As we turn to a series of Renaissance faints, I want us to keep in mind one of the most startling consequences of Freud's account of consciousness, namely the fact that those same stimuli which give rise to consciousness in the first place, and which keep it active throughout an organism's life, are also constantly threatening to destroy it. In my readings I will be trying to tease out the ways in which the very fragility which gives rise consciousness in the first place allows it access to a register of experience which lies outside the bounds of strong self, hidden as long as that self is secure. Not directly apprehended in the manner of perception, such a register would instead involve a kind of peripheral vision, taking place at the margins of consciousness and before the formation of what Descartes calls a "clear and distinct idea." The faint and the trance would then be valuable not for some higher knowledge to which they ostensibly give access, but rather for the threshold state they cause us to inhabit, however briefly—a state in which clear, conceptual knowledge is suspended. I will interpret loss of consciousness, in various guises, as a form of self-reflexiveness very different from the self-consciousness of the Enlightenment—an auto-affection which I will try to describe as a feeling of our own vulnerability.

---

[16] See Michael Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 50.
[17] Freud, 33.

Consciousness, Sensation, Cognition

At this moment often described in terms of the discovery of subjectivity, what does it mean that faints and trances should figure so prominently on stage and in romance narratives?[18] The Renaissance swoon might simply be seen as a holdover, a medievalism which, if anything, retards the emergence of modern subjectivity. Even in this case, however, it would be significant that the swoon persists into an era in which, at least in works of imaginative literature, deliberation and calculation are beginning to take precedence over pathos (in my chapter on *Othello* I will explore further the consequences of the swoon's potential outmodedness). But in fact, as I have already suggested, there is more to what we might call the "high swoon" of the Renaissance than emotion. It is a moment in which human cognition is somehow at stake, in which both thought's nature (whether it is a matter of body or mind) and its limits (its internal caesuras as well as its external bounds) are exposed to intense scrutiny. It is a moment which dwells on the mystery of the fact that we can become unconscious, and which probes the consequences of this fact for our definition as "speaking" or "rational animals"—or, in the formula which will soon overtake Aristotle's in importance, as "res cogitans." What might it mean to define a human being in terms of consciousness, and what is left out in that definition?

It is Descartes who, writing shortly after most of the authors I consider here, first puts consciousness at the center of the picture. And yet he does so in terms that are much less clear-

[18] For recent accounts of the Early Modern period in terms of the genesis of individuality and the rise of modern selfhood, see Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self*, and Kathy Eden, "Conclusion: Rediscovering Individuality," in *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Intimacy*. For a thorough and wide-ranging exposition of Burckhardt's thesis, see Gordon Braden and William Kerrigan, *The Idea of the Renaissance*, 10-14. For a call to "undo the narrative we have been telling ourselves over and over again: the rise of subjectivity, the complexity of subjectivity, the instability of subjectivity," see Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass, "Introduction," in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, 12.

cut than we often assume. In the *Principles of Philosophy,* Descartes defines "thought" in terms of the ability to make mental states fully conscious to ourselves:

> By the term 'thought' [*cogitationis nomine*], I understand everything which we are aware of as happening within us [*illa omnia, quae nobis consciis in nobis sunt*], insofar as we have awareness [*conscientia*] of it. Hence, *thinking* is to be identified here not merely with understanding, willing, and imagining, but also with sensory awareness [*sentire*].[19]

Descartes explicitly departs from the medieval model of mind, with its Aristotelian partition between intellection and sensation, adding to a list which includes the soul's traditional powers of understanding, will, and imagination, a fourth power, a *conscientia* somewhat problematically identified with "sensory awareness" or *sentire*.[20] He proceeds with an example of how this *conscientia* works:

> For if I say 'I am seeing, or I am walking, therefore I exist', and take this as applying to vision or walking as bodily activities, then the conclusion is not absolutely certain…But if I take 'seeing' or 'walking' to apply to the actual sense or awareness of seeing or walking [*de ipso sensu sive conscientia videndi aut ambulandi*], then the conclusion is quite certain, since it relates to the mind, which alone has the sensation or thought [*sentit sive cogitat*] that it is seeing or walking.[21]

The faculty of thought, as Descartes defines it here, clearly stands over and above sensation—seeing alone is not enough to confirm that we exist. What is required is a reflexive cognition of our own seeing; since such a cognition "relates to the mind" alone and does not depend on fallible senses, it can provide the certainty we seek. And yet the precise nature of this reflexivity, and in particular the question of whether it consists of sensation or thought (*sentit sive cogitat*), remains surprisingly unclear from this passage. In fact the slippage between sense, consciousness, and cogitation in this "definition" of thought indicates not merely that Descartes does not quite have the exact word for the reflexive form of thought he wishes to describe; it tells

[19] *Philosophical Writings*, Vol. 1, 195.
[20] "Understanding, will, and imagination" represents just a selection of those "inward" powers which were variously attributed by different authorities to either the intellectual or sensitive souls. For a full account of the medieval schema and its variations, see Ruth Harvey, *The Inward Wits.* For a late Aristotelian account of the faculties, written just before Descartes' *Meditations* and notably containing no mention of "consciousness" or "conscious," see Daniel Sennert, *Thirteen Books*.
[21] *Philosophical Writings*, Vol. 1, 195.

us that the nature of this thought itself is somewhat undetermined in Descartes' philosophy, partaking both of sense and cogitation and yet identifiable with neither. To speak simply of "consciousness" or "awareness" simply reduplicates the problem of definition that he himself faces here; thus while we have tended to think of Descartes as the first to articulate a theory of disembodied consciousness, in doing so we have simply elided a problem which he himself never resolves. To judge from John Searle's tautological definition of consciousness, the problem is still with us today: "'Consciousness' refers to those states of *sentience and awareness* that typically begin when we awake from a dreamless sleep and continue until we go to sleep again, or fall into a coma or die or otherwise become 'unconscious'" (my emphasis).[22]

The *Meditations* similarly rely on the possibility of a reflexive act of cognition whose exact nature is left unclear:

> But what am I to say about this mind, or about myself? (So far, remember, I am not admitting that there is anything else in me except a mind.) What, I ask, is this "I" which seems to perceive [*videor…percipere; semble concevoir*] the wax so distinctly? Surely my knowledge of my own self is not merely much truer and more certain than my knowledge of the wax, but also much more distinct and evident. For if I judge that the wax exists from the fact that I see it, clearly this same fact entails much more evidently that I myself also exist.[23]

Descartes makes several leaps here, not only from a state of (apparent) perception of an object to a subject who is conscious of that object, but also from perceptual clarity ("nettetté et distinction") to epistemological certainty.[24] That leap is premised on the self-reference of the act of perception we have just seen in the *Principles*: it is not merely that he perceives the wax clearly and distinctly, it is that he sees that he does so. The mixture of passive ("videor") and active ("percipere") voices in the Latin captures perfectly the reflexivity of this perceptual act of

[22] See "The Mystery of Consciousness."
[23] See *Philosophical Writings*, Vol. 2, 22; translation slightly modified.
[24] See the *Principles of Philosophy* for an account of these terms: "I call a perception "clear" when it is present and accessible to the attentive mind. … I call a perception "distinct" if, as well as being clear, it is so sharply separated from all other perceptions that it contains within itself only what is clear." See *Philosophical Writings*, Vol. 1, 207-208.

which he is both subject and object, and from which he extrapolates a self who sees as well as a thing that is seen. That reflexive act lines up with what, in the *Principles*, he calls consciousness or *conscientia,* but again its nature is not really specified; is it a form of thought completely distinct from sensation, or is it a form of sensation itself, as *videor* implies?[25] Our modern definition of consciousness—"the faculty or capacity from which awareness of thought, feeling, and volition and of the external world arises" (*OED* 2a)—suggests a reflexive perception *of* perception which belongs to its own, non-sensory faculty. Yet that definition merely hypostatizes the reflexive acts which Descartes himself is somewhat more reluctant to bundle together as the activity of a single "faculty or capacity." Instead, he emphasizes our capacity to render all of our mental states "clear and distinct" to ourselves," in the hope that, by making the object of perception clear and distinct, those qualities will transfer to the reflexive act of perception itself.

Over the course of the following chapters I will have occasion to consider those states which most forcefully resist reduction to the "clear and distinct"—feelings such as pain, hunger, shock, distraction, and intoxication. The swoon, I will suggest, is a culminating and exemplary instance of these states, one which renders insurmountable that resistance to consciousness which all of them exhibit. For all of these states can in principle be classified, as per Descartes' technique in the *Meditations,* as modifications of first-person consciousness, but to do so is to deprive them of what we might think are their essential qualities—for example their immediacy, their physicality, or their vagueness. And yet as the passages I have just quoted might suggest to us, none of these states are harder to make "clear and distinct" than the feeling of feeling itself, the reflexive awareness of perception to which Descartes constantly returned. We can perhaps agree with Descartes that such awareness is *implied* in many if not all of our cognitive acts, and

[25] It is Michel Henry who has most richly drawn on the ambiguity of Descartes' formulation here, using it to ground a Heideggerian account of Cartesian consciousness in terms of a self-reflexive "affectivity." See his chapter on the "'Videre Videor'" in *Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 11-40.

yet we can see from his own efforts that it is actually very difficult to make it clear and distinct, to differentiate it from seeing, from sensing, or from knowing, for example. Indeed that reflexivity, while often presupposed, is rarely present in itself, so that it is in some ways the best example of that range of sensations which we may only slowly become aware of, or on the other hand which we tend automatically to tune out, and which therefore cannot be translated into "clear and distinct ideas" without losing their essential features.

The swoon, I suggest, stands as a limit-case for this whole spectrum of experiences, marking the point at which it is no longer possible to transform the "imperfect and confused" into the "clear and distinct." Feelings such as pain, hunger, shock, and drunkenness, may all precede, follow, or even cause a swoon; we swoon when these feelings become overpowering, displacing all other sensations or thoughts. The swoon forces to a crisis the loss of detachment and clarity which all of these feelings involve; standing at the opposite pole to the "clear and distinct," it marks the threshold at which the "imperfect and confused" becomes totalizing. But these feelings may also be accompanied by a particularly intense feeling *of* feeling—what is it we desire more when we are nauseous, for example, than not to feel that we feel? The swoon thus also brings into focus, as far as such a thing is possible, the problem of reflexivity which attends those experiences which are unclear and indistinct. It marks the limit, we might suppose, at which we can no longer feel the activity of our senses—at which our mind can no longer keep up, as it were, with our sensory receptivity. And yet precisely in this respect it may serve to isolate that sense of sensing—whether we call it consciousness or something different—from the more local and concrete, object-bound activity of the senses themselves. For Michel Henry, Descartes' reflexive formulations lead to the conclusion that thought's "ultimate possibility" is

"affectivity," a "self-affection in which thought reveals itself immediately to itself and senses itself in itself as it is":

> It is the original sensing, the self-sensing of sensing, the *videor* in which *videre* experiences itself and hence arrives as the affectivity of its reality as experience of vision.[26]

It is affectivity in this sense, "the self-sensing of sensing"—which, in James' words, is as difficult to capture as "seizing a spinning top to catch its motion"—to which the swoon may bring us closer.

Virtually from the moment that Descartes defined the cogito in terms of "clear and distinct ideas," his critics drew attention to the "many things in our mind of which the mind is not aware." In the fourth set of *Objections and Replies*, published along with the first editions of the *Meditations* in 1641, the Jansenist theologian and logician Antoine Arnauld made the following point:

> The author lays it down as certain that there can be nothing in him, in so far as he is a thinking thing, of which he is not aware [*conscius*], but it seems to me that this is false. For by 'himself, in so far as he is a thinking thing,' he means simply his mind, in so far as it is distinct from his body. But all of us can surely see that there may be many things in our mind of which the mind is not aware [*conscius*]. The mind of an infant in its mother's womb has the power of thought, but is not aware [*conscius*] of it. And there are countless similar examples, which I will pass over.[27]

Arnauld seems much less concerned about the meaning of the Latin *conscius* than Descartes himself; he uses it in a sense indistinguishable from our modern "conscious," and thus suppresses a problem of which, as I have suggested, Descartes was at least aware. Having restricted consciousness in this way, Arnauld can point out that the mind alone contains a great deal more than would fall under its rubric, though he leaves us to fill it out with "countless similar examples." Writing in English a few decades later, Ralph Cudworth did provide some further instances, listing "profound sleeps, lethargies, and apoplexies" as examples of "Vital

[26] *Genealogy of Psychoanlaysis*, 29. For a comprehensive history of the sense of sensing, see Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch*.
[27] *Philosophical Writings*, Vol. 2, 150.

Energies Without Express Consciousness." Such states, he argued, undermine Cartesianism with its dependence on "clear and express consciousness," and in particular its identification of such consciousness with "cogitation":

> For first, those Philosophers themselves, who make the *Essence* of the *Soul* to consist in *Cogitation*, and again the *Essence* of *Cogitation* in Clear and Express *Consciousness*, cannot render it any way probable, that the Souls of Men in all profound Sleeps, Lethargies and Apoplexies, as also of Embryo's in the Womb, from their very first arrival thither, are never so much as one moment without Expresly Conscious Cogitations; which if they were, according to the Principles of their Philosophy, they must, *ipso facto*, cease to have any Being. Now if the Souls of Men and Animals be at any time without *Consciousness* and *Self-perception*, then it must needs be granted, that Clear and Express *Consciousness* is not Essential to *Life*.[28]

For Cudworth, too, the Cartesian cogito is equivalent to "clear and express consciousness"; indeed he is cited by the *OED* as the first to use the English word consciousness in its modern sense. But if we make the *essence* of our soul consist in such consciousness, Cudworth points out, what are we to say happens when we are unconscious? Are we to say that we are dead? That we lose our humanity, or even our rationality? Elsewhere he develops the notion of a "plastic power" to account for states such as dreams, but here his focus is on those more extreme states, such as "profound sleeps, lethargies, and apoplexies," in which even dreaming is absent.

For John Locke, consciousness—which he defines as the "perception of what passes in a man's mind"[29]—is so obviously stable and continuous that it can ground personal identity. In his famous example, a prince who wakes up in the body of a cobbler will still be a prince due to the continuous presence of "consciousness of the prince's past life":

> For should the soul of a prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the prince's past life, enter and inform the body of a cobbler, as soon as deserted by his own soul, every one sees he would be the same person with the prince, accountable only for the prince's actions.[30]

[28] Ralph Cudworth, *True Intellectual System,* 160.
[29] See *Essay*, Vol. 1, 138.
[30] Ibid., 457.

For Locke, then, consciousness is clearly independent of the body, and its persistence across bodily change is what assures us of always being ourselves. It is specifically the *continuity* of consciousness, its ability to extend to the past and the future, that "makes personal identity":

> For it is by the consciousness it has of its present thoughts and actions, that it is self to itself now, and so will be the same self, as far as the same consciousness can extend to actions past or to come, and would be by distance of time, or change of substance, no more two persons, than a man be two men by wearing other clothes to-day than he did yesterday, with a long or a short sleep between: the same consciousness uniting those distant actions into the same person, whatever substances contributed to their production.[31]

On Locke's account, consciousness is defined by its unique prerogative over its past and future states—in keeping with his thought more generally, his view of consciousness is almost a literal application of the idea of self-possession, a form of property in which the self delimits a sphere that belongs exclusively to it.

The possibility of falling into a swoon or a trance creates even more serious problems for Locke than it does for Descartes, since it so conspicuously abrogates the continuity which Locke sees as consciousness' essential feature. Locke himself must acknowledge here the possibility of a "long or a short sleep between" our past and our present or our present and our future. Though he takes it for granted that we are the same before, during, and after our sleep, there are many cases—from sleepwalking to acts committed in states of madness—which raise clearly the possibility that, in fact, disruptions in consciousness may also disrupt our sense of identity and so complicate, as well, the issue of our accountability for our actions. Elsewhere in the *Essay,* Locke does indeed suggest that, if dreams cannot be subordinated to consciousness, we do somehow "become" other people when we dream—"if a sleeping man thinks without knowing it, the sleeping and waking man are two persons."[32] For Locke this absurd conclusion means we must reject the premise: the idea that it is possible to think without knowing it. But it seems

[31] Ibid., 450.
[32] Ibid., 131.

much more straightforward to modify the rigid notion of continuous personal identity, grounded on continuous consciousness, which leads Locke to this absurdity in the first place.

Descartes' problematic definition of thought as consciousness forced successive thinkers into one of two opposed paths. They could either, like Arnauld, Cudworth, and also Leibniz, call attention to a range of cognitive states which take place without "express consciousness," and on this ground critique Descartes for his ostensible reliance on such a notion. Or, like Locke and later Kant, they could double down on consciousness, insisting on its continuity, integrity, and primacy in acts of cognition even while increasingly acknowledging the limits that cognition, so defined, might face. But as Michel Henry has suggested, both of these streams represent a simplification (one which many of our own narratives have inherited) of what Descartes was really pursuing, not simply a disembodied "clear and distinct consciousness" but rather an act of reflexive self-experience, partaking of both sensation and cognition and yet adhering clearly to neither, in which consciousness grasps nothing but itself. The swoon, I will suggest, is just such an act.

Experience, Non-Experience, and the Problem of Skepticism

That last claim might seem counterintuitive—how could a Cartesian effort to think thinking, or to sense sensing, lead to a loss of both thinking and sentience? As Descartes' critics suggest, the possibility of a swoon might seem like an objection to the Cartesian program rather than a part of it. And yet in attempting to understand how we process sensation into knowledge, we have often had recourse to a faculty or capacity over and above sensation—most notably, consciousness. On such a view we can see why consciousness would have to be disrupted in order to sense sensing

immanently to itself. If, as Freud suggests, an unqualified influx of sensation is more than an organism can handle, so that consciousness is actually a protective barrier *against* sensation, then to sense sensing itself might require a traumatic disruption. As long as consciousness is understood to be something distinct from sensation, the attempt to sense sensing immanently to itself first requires that consciousness be suspended, so that an experience of experience itself becomes inseparable from an experience of the limits of experience. And that might be one way of understanding the problem of skepticism: to sense *only* that we sense might in fact be to sense the limits on the kind of knowledge of which we are capable; it might even be to lose our grip on *what* it is that we sense (I will return to this thought shortly).

Thus in discussing the swoon I will be speaking not of experience as such, but rather of a limit of experience, even while suggesting that, in the various works I consider, this limit itself becomes, paradoxically, the object of an experience that is at least glimpsed.[33] As Freud's account suggests, a completely unbounded experience would be an experience of death; as a more recent critic has put it: "if only moments of sinking below self-consciousness, and soaring beyond self-concern, did not mean death."[34] And yet in studying each case we will find it very difficult to avoid the impression that, somehow, the characters *do* experience non-experience,

[33] The literature on the problem of experience is, needless to say, too large to summarize here. In the twentieth century the problem is most powerfully addressed in the work of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno; Giorgio Agamben takes their ideas further in *Infancy and History*. For an account of Benjamin and Adorno's writings on experience in the context of a broad a survey of notions of experience from the Greeks to the present day, see Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience*. For the different senses of experience in Renaissance England, see Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction*, 69-75, and Adam Rzepka, "Rich eyes and poor hands." Dolven notes that "'experience' as the sixteenth century had it could be active or passive, present or past, first or third person" (69): in the present tense it is active or passive, "the moment in which the self may be asserted in action, or overcome by suffering or pleasure," while in the past it is "experience mediated or constituted by memory, habit, or even writing" (71). Along similar lines, Rzepka identifies three principal uses of the term in Shakespeare: "a somber wisdom that accrues over the course of a long life and manifests in old age" (157), "the turbulent *process* that ultimately results in old, sad experience" (158), and "an affectively intensified, unfolding present whose translation into knowledge is acutely in question" (159). It is largely the second and third senses that I am concerned with here.

[34] See James Kuzner, *Open Subjects*, 63.

that they are somehow aware of an experience that they are not having. As Giorgio Agamben and Martin Jay have argued, Montaigne's whole notion of *expérience* paradoxically culminates in death, in its own annihilation, so that any experience short of death itself is authentic only in the measure that it senses its own limits, the line at which it verges on death and insentience. Today we tend to think of the "limit-experience" as an experience that tests and surpasses limits. But for Montaigne and for most of the literary characters that I consider here, the limit-experience is above all an experience *of* limits, the intuition of a line beyond which human sensibilities cannot pass, and which itself can only be grasped as an absence of feeling.

Recent work on the Renaissance has sought to identify forms of subjectivity and embodiment that exceed the bounds of the "Cartesian" (i.e. disembodied) subject. In sleep and the passions, for example, Garrett Sullivan has located forms of Early Modern vitality that blur the boundaries of the closed subject by "generating fields of affective energy that both envelop and re- or de-constitute the human subject."[35] Meanwhile Timothy Harrison reads Adam's account of his awakening as depicting "a prelapsarian feeling that Milton's readers cannot experience for themselves," a feeling of feeling itself which, Harrison suggests, should be distinguished from the "dissonance, detachment, pain, and cessation" that characterize that feeling after the Fall.[36] Sullivan, Harrison, and others have uncovered a powerful strain in the Early Modern imaginary, a register of non-subjective experience to which we have not paid enough attention, and I hope that the swoons I consider can contribute to this effort. At the same time, insofar as the swoons are also moments of stupor and *in*sentience, of deadened or absent affect, they are moments in which a character comes up against the limits of his power to feel himself feel, in Harrison's terms (borrowed from Heller-Roazen), or, in Sullivan's, to feel his

[35] *Sleep, Romance, and Human Embodiment*, 47.
[36] "Adamic Awakening," 51.

own vitality. Reminding us that Adam's awakening takes place before the Fall, both Sullivan and Harrison corroborate the notion that, at least under fallen conditions, experience can experience itself only in an experience of non-experience. When Red Crosse is about to be defeated by Orgoglio, Spenser writes: "His chaunged powres at first them selves not felt" (1.7.6).[37] The line certainly speaks to a feeling of feeling, but it does so only in negative terms, suggesting that we can approach such a feeling only from the other side of a threshold, from a state where that feeling still lies dormant or dead. A similar threshold is straddled by Sidney's "forsaken Knight"—"who had fainted so long till he had lost the feeling of faintnesse"—in the third book of the *Arcadia*.[38] Like all of the characters I consider, Red Crosse and the forsaken Knight come close to a feeling of their own vitality, but they do so only by means of a passage through insentience, only, in other words, under the shadow of death.

Montaigne, too, will sense his own sensing only in the course of a swoon where sensation seems to be absent, and if that swoon emblematizes his notion of *expérience* more broadly—as many readers have suggested[39] —then that notion turns out to be inseparable from a non-experience which is by no means simply its opposite or absence. Very much the corollary of Montaigne's skepticism, what experience ultimately teaches him is just the futility of all human endeavors to know: "It is from my experience," he writes, "that I affirm human ignorance, which is, in my opinion, the most certain fact in the school of the world" (824). And yet as Montaigne's Pyrrhonism constantly reminds him, such a conclusion cannot be a matter of doctrine confirmed on the basis of experience without being self-contradictory; rather it must be affirmed in a way that is immanent to experience itself, through experiences in their happening and before their

[37] See *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton. Subsequent references will be given in text.
[38] *Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed. Feuillerat, vol. 2, 463.
[39] Jean Starobinski, for example, writes: "For a good example of Montaigne's ability to articulate the singular uniqueness of physical experience, the reader would do well to consult the account of his fall from a horse and subsequent fainting." See *Montaigne in Motion*, 165.

translation into examples or concepts. We can see, then, why the swoon, as well as a range of other limit-states, would be particularly relevant to him, as well as to the culture of skepticism, with its central contradiction (how can I say: "I do not know"?), more broadly; they serve as synecdoches for an experience which, precisely because it eludes knowledge, can *only* be experienced, cannot be known or even be made "conscious."

Indeed each swoon I will consider, and not only Montaigne's, marks a crisis of knowledge, and a crisis which happens not because consciousness breaks down, but rather because in that breakdown knowledge is usurped by something like *mere* consciousness, a consciousness with no object except itself. The swoon thus marks a crisis in the understanding of how experience and knowledge are related. And as such it bespeaks, in the manner of an emblem or symptom, a broader historical crisis. For though Descartes was writing a few decades after the authors I consider, the skeptical problems to which he addressed himself had been brewing for some time, an effect, as Richard Popkin showed, of the rediscovery of Greek skeptical texts in combination with the Reformation's rethinking of certainty and its criteria.[40] The swoon represents this crisis in several degrees of severity. It may reflect the inconstancy of knowledge when it is tested against the world of experience, arising at moments where characters are forced to reevaluate a truth they had previously believed, and replace one belief with another (Ariosto). It may, more dramatically, represent the total absence of knowledge, an emptying out of the mind in expectation of a perpetually deferred moment of theological revelation (Spenser). And it may, finally, represent a crisis in our very understanding of how and whether sentience and knowledge are related in the first place, marking the limit of our ability to turn sentience into knowledge and forcing us to confront the problem of whether there is any such thing as knowledge at all (Montaigne and Shakespeare). In the *Essais* as well as in *Othello* and *The*

[40] See Richard Popkin, *The History of Skepticism*.

Winter's Tale, the swoon marks a climax of doubt as well as feeling, an *epoché* at once skeptical and phenomenological; Montaigne, Othello and Leontes, all become intensely aware of the *fact* that they feel, but by the very same measure become profoundly destabilized in understanding how that feeling relates to the world around them. Hence their condition paradoxically borders on one of apparent *in*sentience. And where Montaigne himself is able to take his condition in the swoon as a metonymy for the "natural drunkenness" of life as a whole, Shakespeare's characters are less capable of lingering in that unstable threshold where experience outpaces knowledge. Yet in the course of their passage through the threshold they nevertheless have much to teach us about *what it is like*, a question which, where third-person knowledge is unavailable, becomes pressing indeed. At the same time, where we have perhaps been too willing to credit forms of embodied or phenomenal cognition, they also speak to just how difficult it can be *not* to turn such cognition into knowledge more conventionally understood, validated in the certainty of an objective judgment.

The claim that literary swoons are emblems of the crisis of skepticism will, inevitably, remain a somewhat speculative one. But it is a claim to which I hope my readings will give at least some tentative credence. And it is perhaps more important, in any case, to show how two critical problems which at least in Early Modern literary studies have run on parallel but separate paths—the reception of skepticism and the practice of "historical phenomenology"—may actually amount to different perspectives on one and the same issue. Much attention has now been devoted to the body and the senses in their Early Modern forms; a methodology sometimes referred to as "historical phenomenology" would seek to reconstitute those forms by working from the moral, medical, and theological contexts of the period. Yet within the confines of that project, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the implications of the revival of Greek

skepticism. Instead, in working on the senses and the body our temptation has been towards acts of recovery, reconstituting historical forms of experience through their sedimentation in a range of literary and non-literary texts—a recovery which implicitly takes such experience as either a form of knowledge unto itself or as an attractive alternative to knowledge. And yet what is more poignant in Othello's predicament than the fact that he is unable to understand the workings of his own passions? His swoon represents at once the climax of his own passions, and the climax of his own incomprehension in the face of them. Likewise for Montaigne, whose greatest task is to know himself, the swoon marks the existence of death as something like a regulative ideal and limit of that task, a vanishing point towards which experience tends and yet which it is impossible to encounter within the spectrum of experience itself. In these and other texts, then, the Cartesian search for a moment of truth-bestowing reflexivity either culminates or collapses in a swoon.

In its Enlightenment definition ("the perception of what passes in a man's mind"), "consciousness" may well be seen as nothing other than an effort to reduce, to circumscribe, and to standardize experience in its many different senses. Above all it seeks, on this account, to turn experience to use, in resolving the skeptical crisis, by always treating it as embryonic knowledge. Such a narrative is the burden of Martin Jay's sweeping account in *Songs of Experience.* As Jay has it, the unerring scientific instrument is the ideal form of Enlightenment subjectivity: "a transcendental, disembodied, immortal species subject located more in impartial instruments than fallible bodies."[41] And yet where Jay sees "experience" as an embodied being-in-the-world subsequently curtailed by an instrumental and dematerialized subjectivity, I wish instead to suggest that "experience" represents an imagined state in which consciousness grasps only itself, at once an emblem and an end of the skeptical crisis: both a recognition of the gap between

[41] *Songs of Experience*, 38.

experience and knowledge and an acquiescence in that gap. As I see it, then, the swoon is not merely a relic from a lost regime of embodied subjectivity, but rather a manifestation of "experience" in the sense of that impossible act of self-apprehension.

Self-Experience from Ariosto to Shakespeare

The turn to embodiment has in some ways only rendered the question of experience more pressing. Gail Kern Paster defines "humoral subjectivity….as a form of consciousness that is open, penetrable, fluid, and extended outward to the higher animals with which it shared affective workings,"[42] and she urges us accordingly to "locate Pyrrhus's inwardness elsewhere … to name Pyrrhus in action or inaction as an embodied subject spilling beyond the boundaries of organized subjecthood, a subject more like a material site, an intensity of desiring matter or its vacuous absence."[43] Paster presents this claim as a "means of investigating the possibility of historical differences in modes of self-experience," part of a larger project of "historical phenomenology"[44]; in similar terms, Michael Schoenfeldt speaks of "a near-poetic vocabulary of felt corporeal experience," aruing that Renaissance texts "describe not so much the actual workings of the body as the experience of the body."[45] And yet just as in contemporary debates on the nature of consciousness, it remains hard to understand how a "material site" can give rise to anything that we would meaningfully call experience. The whole wager of Paster's work is that if you conceive of emotions as embodied and pneumatic rather than mental, experience itself is qualitatively different—at least it has what she calls a "heightened texture."[46] But since she never explores what might be meant by "self-experience," we are still left vaguely imagining a detached Cartesian consciousness helplessly awash in its own humors. What, after all, does it

[42] *Humoring the Body*, 137.
[43] Ibid., 43
[44] Ibid.,11
[45] *Bodies and Selves*, 3.
[46] *Humoring the Body*, 146.

mean to have "self-experience" if the locus of such experience has been as radically displaced as Paster would wish? What space is there, in the humoral subject, for some minimal threshold of perception without which it is difficult to understand what self-experience could mean to begin with? It is just such a space, I would propose, which is glimpsed in loss of consciousness.

My first chapter, on Ariosto, looks at three evolutions of cognitive blankness in his *Orlando Furioso*: Sacripante's "stupor" in Canto 1, Bradamante's trances in Cantos 2 and 4, and Orlando's madness in Canto 23. Reading these states against the context of the visionary trances described by Marsilio Ficino, I argue that Ariosto develops a notion of an "immanent trance" in which false assumptions are dispelled without being replaced by a higher form of knowledge. Knowledge, in the poem, consists only in the characters' vulnerability to limit-states emptied of cognition. And yet Bradamante's trance also adumbrates a form of quasi-erotic experience which, precisely in inhibiting knowledge, the trance makes available. By reading Orlando's madness as a form of trance along these lines, I suggest that it is not merely that "bestial" form of madness anxiously distinguished by the neo-Platonists from divine inspiration, but rather a limit-experience based on a vision of man as lacking cognition altogether. Catherine Malabou has recently argued that "the only possible subjective experience of cerebral auto-affection is that of the suffering that follows its damage or interruption,"[47] and it is just such an experience, I argue, which Orlando is vouchsafed. Given the fallibility of all knowledge, Ariosto wonders what it would be like not to have a mind at all.

In my second chapter I turn to Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and to the Spenserian "stound," a state of stupefaction and amazement. Looking first at the complex background of the word stound, I argue that Red Crosse's stound in Book One, and Guyon's trance in Book Two, reveal an experience of self-affection occurring at the margins of consciousness as this is typically

[47] *The New Wounded*, 45.

understood. In Red Crosse's case it is a question of sensory powers that, though unconscious, are still able to "feel themselves"; I relate this condition to the theological concept of grace and see it as implying a model of Protestant subjectivity very different, indeed almost opposed, to interiority and inner conviction. Guyon's trance, meanwhile, I analyze in the context of Montainge's theory (if we can call it that) of *expérience,* arguing that the trance should be seen not merely as a crucial moment in a story about the vicissitudes of self-regulation, but rather as a form of self-experience opening onto a mysterious, embodied being that regulates itself. Spenserian allegory, I conclude, is couched not in a gap between embodied senses and a world of immaterial forms, but rather in the discontinuities attendant on consciousness when it attempts to apprehend itself in an entirely immanent experience.

In my third chapter, Montaigne's description of a swoon in Book Two of the *Essais* allows us for the first time to think directly about the swoon's phenomenology—the question of *what it is like* to lose consciousness. That question lies at the heart of the problem of experience more broadly—of the fact that each of us have, or believe we have, a unique point-of-view from which we apprehend the world.[48] In my chapter, then, I reflect on a central question which Montaigne's account raises, and which I believe has broader implications: what does it mean that he first addresses himself to such a question only from the perspective of a moment where consciousness is lost? In fact this question approached only by way of a problem which weighs much more heavily on Montaigne's mind: what is it like to die? Since it is, however, impossible to answer that question until it is too late to be of any relevance, the swoon serves in this essay as a substitute. Montaigne uses the swoon to argue that death itself will be painless and unpleasant, indeed perhaps even somewhat pleasant. And yet what really happens in this essay—or so I

[48] This point-of-view is what John Searle calls the "subjective ontology" of consciousness, which is always "an inner, first-person, qualitative phenomenon." See "The Mystery of Consciousness."

contend in the chapter—is that Montaigne comes up against the limit of his own capacity to know his subjective states, so that his condition during the swoon, this seemingly most intimate of physical moments, finally becomes a matter for conjecture, imagination, and literary allusion even to Montaigne himself. Montaigne's concept of *expérience*, I conclude, is an extended flowering of this moment, a newfound attunement to a "natural drunkenness" which extends throughout all of his life. But if it remains difficult to capture the nature of such experience in a "clear and distinct" cognition, it is all but impossible to *feel* it in its "natural drunkenness," for to do so would be, as we see in the swoon, to feel nothing other than experience's "ebbing away."

I proceed in Chapter Four to Othello's trance, whose violence is in some ways an abrupt counterpoint to the pacific experience of Montaigne's swoon; at the same time it similarly serves as a focal point for the play's concern with skepticism. I read Othello's trance as the culmination of the cognitive distortions attendant upon jealousy, a process in which subjective passions and fears gradually become objective things-in the-world—in which, in other words, the subject becomes its own object. That process, I argue, is not merely or predominantly epistemological; rather it is phenomenological, giving rise to a distinctive experience of passion in which passion no longer seems to be an emanation of the self, but rather takes on the quality of an impersonal affectivity irreducible to clear and distinct consciousness. The trance thus forces us to further develop a model of embodied thinking quite different from the interiority several recent critics have attributed to Othello. Epilepsy proves a powerful metaphor for cognition in this sense, even as it reveals the limits of attempts—both the audience's and Iago's—to "read" Othello's mind. Instead of guessing at motives and interpreting signs, the audience, I conclude, is urged by the play to share in the actor's representation of passion, itself a kind of trance which blurs emergent lines between the "monstrous" and the natural, the histrionic and the restrained.

In my fifth and final chapter, on *The Winter's Tale,* I consider more broadly the intersubjectivity of consciousness when it is conceived not in terms of "clear and distinct ideas" but rather in terms of an affectivity which can never be made fully present to the isolated mind. Shakespeare's late pastoral is also structured around a central loss of consciousness—Hermione's "death," from which she awakes sixteen years later at the instigation of Paulina. But instead of confronting the question of whether she is actually dead, in this chapter I posit the existence of a state, defined by the absence of sentience, between life and death. I refer to this state as the "specter of insentience" and find several traces of it throughout the play, a recurrent counterpoint to its many local intensities of sensation. I suggest that sentience is always embedded in situations of social exchange, in particular in economies in which one figure's heightened sentience induces a state of *in*sentience in another. Art exploits this instability inherent in human sentience, but in doing so it manages to impose some balance. Taking us beyond the senses by means of the senses, art redresses and redistributes the imbalance inherent in the concept of consciousness as the encounter of a sentient subject with a lifeless object.

Orlando's madness, Guyon's faint, Montaigne's swoon, Othello's trance, and Hermione's coma: all of these are moments which we have usually thought of in terms of reason and passion, excess and self-control, madness and sanity, mind and body, for the good reason that this is, more often than not, how they might have been described in the Renaissance itself. In the following chapters, however, I want to see what happens if we put this dualistic terminology temporarily aside, and instead consider these moments merely as mental states. What kind of detail do they then unveil? What picture of human consciousness, and of subjectivity more broadly, emerges? If one does, then its terms will be not moral, medical, or even philosophical, but rather distinctly literary in nature.

Beyond Soliloquy

Through these chapters I will be arguing that in the Renaissance the faint has the following paradoxical role: to make vividly present, whether on stage or simply to the reader's imagination, the possibility of the absence of consciousness. And I will suggest that in doing so it poses a proleptic challenge to the conception of consciousness in terms of clear and distinct awareness which will become a pillar of the modern, rational and ethical self; consciousness conceived in this sense proves to be a circumscription of both the experiences and the ethics of which we are capable. At the same time, I will suggest, the faint opens up a vista onto a different mode of feeling—a self-experience identifiable with consciousness only in the measure that the latter can turn away from the world of objects and intuit nothing but itself. These two ways of seeing the faint—as both a destruction of consciousness and an aperture onto an "inner touch"—may be seen as complementary aspects of consciousness-as-vulnerability, a constitutive susceptibility to states which are at once stimulating and disarticulating. As I suggest in my last two chapters—and this will be in a sense the final piece of the puzzle—aesthetic response allows us to experience that susceptibility without either total dissolution on the one hand or violent self-consolidation on the other.

I will be urging, then, that we look beyond the Hamletian soliloquy when it comes to thinking about forms of subjectivity and consciousness in the Renaissance. What is striking in monologues such as Hamlet's is the sense of intimacy, the sense that we are being given a glimpse into the inner workings of a private soul—workings which are invisible to everyone except the character and the audience. Yet the monologue is depersonalizing for the speaker precisely to the extent that it is revelatory for the audience. For it restricts inner experience to

that which can be said in language, to that which is at least implicitly or potentially communicable, so that in its very articulacy Hamlet's self-awareness always threatens to betray itself. By contrast, in moments such as Othello's faint or Leontes' "*tremor cordis*," language is put under immense strain, a strain which, at least within the illusionism of theatrical representation, comes much closer to conveying the immediacy of felt experience. At the limit of that strain, consciousness itself gives way, but while on the threshold Othello and Leontes no longer simply mimic the inward reality of conscious subjects; rather they each become what Fredric Jameson calls "a registering apparatus for transformed states of being," lightning rods for states of felt experience in which both actor and audience participate.[49]

Unlike the monologue, then, a phenomenon such as loss of consciousness may serve to distinguish that which is in one sense truly subjective in our experience, that which remains at once unmediated by the shared tropes and conventions of a common language and culture, and at the same time unshaped by the forms of objective knowledge. More than any other experience except death—with which it is closely allied—loss of consciousness brings home to us the sheer subjectivity of experience itself, a subjectivity which may be, paradoxically, profoundly depersonalizing. In an era intensely aware of the divergences between inner reality and outer appearance—and, increasingly, of selfhood as an effect of the latter—the swoon may add a measure of apparent authenticity to works of art which, by their very nature, might otherwise collude in the regime of illusion.[50] An entirely non-verbal event, the swoon substantiates the impression that the actor, or the character described on the page, is a real, flesh-and-blood being and not merely a hollow rhetorical performance. But in doing so—or so I will argue in my *Othello* chapter—it does not merely take theatrical illusionism to a higher level; rather it realizes

[49] *Political Unconscious*, 112.
[50] For the "Sincerity of Rapture," see Andrew Escobedo.

a notion of theater as a non-mimetic, affective substance in which individual consciousness no longer obtains.[51] What the authors describe is something that they simultaneously solicit from their readers or viewers, a self-forgetting which at the same time opens up the possibility of self-awareness on a deeper register, a register at once intimate and interpersonal.

A running theme, then, will be the way in which literature inserts itself into that space that is opened up when the limits of consciousness are breached: the way in which the trance's moment is also the moment of aesthesis. And of discovery as well. For in this era of global exploration and expansion, all of my authors quietly insist that the real voyage of discovery remains an inner one, that man's interior regions remain more exotic than those of, in Spenser's words, "th'Indian Peru." Such a claim need not be understood as chauvinistic or provincial. By addressing ourselves specifically to loss of consciousness, we will not simply be pitting a metaphorical realm of "inner experience" against an outer world of discovery, for the object of our inquiry will, as James' simile suggests, resist direct illumination. The attempt to shed light on that dimension of human experience which extends to trances, sleep, and fainting—turning up the gas to see how the darkness looks—may come to seem like the most quixotic quest of all.

[51] Echoing Jameson's account of character as a "registering apparatus," Michael Witmore writes: "Actors are, in an odd way, the reflexive sense organs of the theater, creatures who manifest certain feelings but also register those feelings in the vast sensorium of the play. What is happening in spectatorship, then, is a kind of structural mimesis of this process that is occurring in the actor, as well." See "Shakespeare and Phenomenology," 421.

Chapter One
Immanent Trances: Ariosto and the Skeptical Sublime

Though they appeared within a few years each other, Dürer's *Melencolia I* (1514) and the first edition of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516) seem to have little in common. Dürer's figure is in a state of deep absorption, an "intense visionary trance" in which the mind is as it were out of the body. On Frances Yates' reading, her state represents the power of melancholy to penetrate beyond the deceptions of the senses to the higher level of a purely intelligible (as opposed to sensible) reality.[1] In the world of the *Furioso*, by contrast, such insight is out of the question, almost against the rules. "Ecco il giudicio uman come spesso erra" (1.7; "Behold how often human judgment errs"), Ariosto announces early in the poem, and the line governs much of what will follow, all but banishing true insight.[2] If the *Furioso* can be described in terms of melancholy at all, it is in this consistent resignation to the finitude of our knowledge, to, in other words, the impossibility of the kind of insight Dürer appears to represent. Indeed the detached self-consciousness of the narrator is quite opposite—presumably almost crippling—to the state of absorbed contemplation represented in Dürer's engraving.

Thus it is hardly surprising that, although several recent critics of the *Furioso* have sought to reevaluate the poem's relationship to Ficinian neo-Platonism, they have focused on the neo-Platonic theory of love to the exclusion of the theory of knowledge which is allied to it. Marion Wells sees Orlando's condition, worsening as the poem progresses until it spirals into madness on discovering Angelica's elopement with Medoro in Canto 23, in terms of a tense

[1] For *Melencolia* I in terms of inspired melancholy see Frances Yates, *Occult Philosophy*, 49-67. Where Panofsky reads the engraving as a representation of the "frustration of the inspired genius" (54), Yates argues that "Dürer's Melancholy is not in a state of depressed inactivity. She is in an intense visionary trance, a state guaranteed against demonic intervention by angelic guidance" (56).
[2] Quotations of Ariosto follow *Orlando Furioso*, ed. Lanfranco Caretti. Translations are my own. Marco Santoro reads this line as capturing the epistemology of the poem as a whole, and indeed of the human condition as Ariosto sees it. See Santoro, *Ariosto e il Rinascimento*, 92-110. For a more recent account of Ariosto's skepticism, see Jo Ann Cavallo, "The Pathways of Knowledge."

fusion of neo-Platonic and pathological conceptions of love—two conceptions which Ficino himself, in his commentary on Plato's *Symposium* (the *De Amore*), had been anxious to keep separate.[3] For Marina Beer, instead, Orlando's madness represents the medical conception of love to the exclusion of the idealizing, neo-Platonic one.[4] Peter Marinelli has argued that Orlando's madness represents one pole of a neo-Platonic binary, bestial as opposed to divine love.[5] For all of these readers, different as they are, a neo-Platonizing Ariosto means an Ariosto above all attendant to the vicissitudes and varieties of human love.

Sensible as this focus seems with respect to Ariosto, it is worth recalling that for Ficino himself (if not for Italian neo-Platonism more generally), love is in some respects merely a ladder to knowledge of God. And the Renaissance reevaluation of melancholy, of which Dürer's engraving represents the high watermark, depends on its being conceived in intellectual rather than erotic terms.[6] Indeed Ariosto's own well-documented youthful interest in Platonism seems to have gravitated towards its hermetic and intellectual dimension rather than its erotic one. The neo-Platonic poem he wrote for Ercole d'Este was entitled "De Laudibus Sophiae"—not

[3] See Marion Wells, *Secret Wound*, 7: "In a sense this tension within love-melancholy between a 'mad and beastly passion' and a 'noble love' highlights a contradiction within Platonic love itself, which, though it advocates a move beyond the mortal body, always begins there and may pull the lover back down toward the body. The tension implicit in the medical notion of "heroic love" frequently subtends the central crises of romance. The 'rage' of an Orlando or a Tancredi or even a Britomart to 'unite with the beautiful object' threatens to become a potentially deadly madness that can (in Du Laurens's words) 'tyrannize in commanding both minde and bodie.'"

[4] See Marina Beer, *Romanzi di Cavalleria*, 100: "L'adesione dell'Ariosto, anche nelle cose d'amore, a una tradizione che é diversa, non neoplatonica e mondana, ma dei medici" ("Ariosto's adhesion, even in matters of love, to a different tradition, not neo-Platonic and worldly, but medical.")

[5] See his *Boiardo and Ariosto*, 119: "Orlando is very patently the embodiment, propelled here into richly significant emblematic action, of the lowest form of love in the Neoplatonic hierarchy, and he incarnates the merely appetitive flesh-hunger with whose description the contemporaneous love-treatises are positively saturated." For other reflections on Ariosto and neo-Platonism (also focusing on its amatory aspect), see Rocco Montano, "La Follia di Orlando," in *Saggi di Cultura Umanistica*, 163-192, and Alfredo Bonadeo, "Note Sulla Pazzia di Orlando."

[6] See Raymond Klibansky, Fritz Saxl, and Erwin Panofsky, *Saturn and Melancholy*.

"Amoris."[7] Thus if we are to look for continuities between the young, neo-Platonist Ariosto and the author of the *Furioso,* it is as much in the epistemological as in the erotic domain that we ought to be searching. While the poem's skeptical and comic qualities have made readers understandably reluctant to do so, at the very least we ought to be asking what has happened to the more intellectualized concepts of melancholy and of madness, so central to Florentine neo-Platonism, in Ariosto's masterpiece. If Ariosto became skeptical of ideas he was attracted to in his youth, does he offer us anything in their place? Are vestiges of those ideas still present in the poem?

To turn things around for a moment, let us recall that while Ariosto's skepticism may seem more thoroughgoing than Ficino's, for Ficino, too, knowledge derived from the senses is illusory.[8] Divine knowledge is by no means a given in Ficino's system; rather it has to be attained precisely by emancipating ourselves from the influence of the deceptive bodily senses. Hence the importance, in Ficino's philosophy, of the visionary trance, in which the mind is released from the shackles of the body and ascends to knowledge of the intelligible forms.[9] Such

---

[7] For the young Ariosto's interest in Platonism, see Marinelli, *Boiardo and Ariosto*, 109-118. Marinelli writes: "it can easily be demonstrated that the experience of Neoplatonism in his young manhood was the turning point of the poet's life" (109); however he focuses only on the influence of the Neoplatonic theory of love. For an overview of differing critical perspectives on Ariosto's Platonism, see Albert Ascoli, *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony*, 98-107. While acknowledging anti-Platonic readings such as Montano's, Ascoli notes that "in point of fact, a positive reading of Ariosto as Platonist is beginning to emerge explicitly" (100); see also 338-342.

[8] As Ascoli puts it: "whatever its position in regard to the positive program(s) of neo-Platonism, the *Furioso* does seem to embrace the negative side of the perspective—its critique of the physical world of blindness and delusion and man's attachments to it" (101). See *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony*, 101.

[9] For an account of the "Hermetic trance" as "the supreme Hermetic experience, as described in *Pimander*, in which the soul was transformed into the light of the divine *mens*, in the likeness of which it was created, [and] the body "slept" during the whole vision, the senses being bound whilst the soul left the body to become divine," see Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno*, 280-281. For an overview of its position in Ficino's neo-Platonism (as well as a good selection of relevant quotations), see Paul Oskar Kristeller's chapter on "Internal Experience" in *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, 205-230. In a sense the Ficinian trance, as Kristeller sees it, is already immanent: Kristeller argues that "the fact that the highest act of contemplation can be achieved at all during earthly life is of decisive important for the inner content of Ficino's metaphysics. For if the doctrine of the knowledge of God constitutes the real center of his whole

a trance is exemplified (at least according to Yates) in Dürer's engraving; Ficino describes it in the following terms, in the course of a proof of the soul's immortality in the *Theologia Platonica*:

> Contra, quando corporalia despicit et, sopitis sensibus expulsisque phantasmatum nubibus, animus per se aliquid speculatur, tunc intellectus sincere discernet claretque maxime. Quod etiam in his apparet qui aut per somni quietem aut quamuis alienationem a corpore vaticinantur.
>
> Contrariwise, when the soul despises corporeals and when the senses have been allayed and the clouds of phantasmata dissipated, and it perceives something on its own, then the intellect discerns truly and is at its brightest. We see this in the case of those who prophesy during the quiet of sleep or some other alienation from the body. [10]

"Sopitis sensibus": in order to attain a purely intellectual vision, the senses must be put to sleep. A similar notion is proposed by Pico della Mirandola in the eleventh of his 77 Cabalistic Conclusions, the final sequence of the *Conclusiones Nongentae* which he proposed for debate in Rome in 1486, and to which his more famous *Oration on the Dignity of Man* was a preface:

> Modus quo rationabiles animae per archangelum Deo sacrificantur, qui a Cabalistis non exprimitur, non est nisi per separationem animae a corpore.
>
> The way in which rational souls are sacrificed by the Archangel to God, which is not explained by the Cabalists, only occurs through the separation of the soul from the body.[11]

For both Ficino and Pico, the mind must be fully liberated from the senses before it can become capable of intellectual vision. Though this notion would later be ridiculed by Montaigne and Burton, and though it fades in importance when neo-Platonism is conceived primarily in terms of

---

speculation, we can now affirm with certainty from the standpoint actually reached, that it is not merely an abstract conceptual postulate but a concrete conception based on experience" (226). See also Michael J.B. Allen's chapter on "Poetic Madness" in *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino*, 41-67: "Whether Ficino experienced such mystical flights himself is difficult to ascertain, but he certainly believed in the absoluteness of their reality and in the possibility of a few men truly attaining them during this life for however brief a time. He customarily sought and, according to eyewitness accounts, effectively achieved trancelike, enraptured states during his Orphic lyre recitals when he intoned Platonic hymns apparently to the sun" (60). For a more recent, and more skeptical, account, see Raphael Falco, "Marsilio Ficino and the Vatic Myth."

[10] Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, vol. 3, 12-15.

[11] For the text and translation see *Syncretism in the West,* ed. and trans. S.A. Farmer.

love, it is absolutely central to Ficino himself and to neo-Platonism as an epistemology.[12] Whether we conceive of it as an ecstatic vision, or simply as the condition of deep study or contemplation, the trance, in which the senses are temporarily inactive, is an indispensable step on the way to the higher knowledge to which the Platonist aspires.

However as Paul Kristeller argued, that higher knowledge may itself be a form of experience, not different in kind from those which lead to it: "the knowledge of God is therefore not radically separated from the other acts of internal experience; in other words the sphere of contemplation is not really transcended in it."[13] Ficino himself describes the knowledge of God as a "substantial touching":

> And all the Platonists support the view that, in the contemplation of rational principles, the divine reason is "touched" by a substantial, not just by an imaginary, touching of the mind [*tactu quodam mentis substantiali potius quam imaginario tangi*]; and that the unity proper to the mind is joined to God, the unity of all things, in a manner beyond our conception.[14]

The Ficinian trance is not simply a state of disembodiment, but rather an experience of "substantial touching" which subsumes not only the senses but also any knowledge that might be derived from them. The language of touch here deserves its own analysis, but it seems to be functioning metaphorically to express an ideal or desired counterpoint to the rejection of the senses the trance at first seems to require. We might go so far as to suggest that divine

---

[12] Both Montaigne and Burton attribute such a state to the "imagination" rather than the "mind," that is precisely to such *phantasmata* as Ficino would exclude from it. In his chapter on the "Force of the Imagination" Montaigne attributes to this force the story "of a priest who used to fly with his soul into such ecstasy that his body would remain a long time without breath and without sensation," as well as "the principal credit of miracles, visions, enchantments"; see *Essays,* trans. Frame, 69. Burton makes the same point in a chapter of the same title, presumably derived from Florio's Montaigne; See the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 250-251. Elsewhere he classes neo-Platonic "fury" with various less reputable forms of entrancement: "Of this fury there be diverse kindes, *Extasie*, which is familiar with some persons, as *Cardan* saith of himself, he could be in one when he list, in which the *Indian* priests deliver their Oracles, and the witches in *Laplande*, as *Olaus Magnus* writeth *lib. 3. cap. 18. Extasi omnia praedicere …* The other *species* of this Fury are *Enthusiasmes, Revelations, & Visions*, so often mentioned by *Gregory* and *Beda* in their works; Obsession of Possession of divels, *Sybilline Prophets*, and Poeticall *Furies*" (133).
[13] See *Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, 229.
[14] Marsilio Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, Vol. 4, 29.

knowledge is the third term in a dialectic beginning with external or sensory experience, passing through a middle phase in which the senses are rejected in favor of detached inner consciousness, and culminating in a synthesis of knowledge and experience in which the senses return in a purified and transcendent form. The neo-Platonic trance is thus oriented towards a moment in which experience is indistinguishable from knowledge, in which our ecstatic, quasi-erotic assimilation into divine love replaces worldly knowledge of things with an intuitive "touching" of God.

If the intellectual side of this process is, as I have suggested, out of the question in the *Furioso*, on the other hand the experience that, on both Ficino and Pico's account, leads to it—and from which it may, after all, be difficult to distinguish—is at least in some form quite a frequent occurrence in the poem. According to Lewis and Short, *sopio* means "to deprive of feeling or sense," which may mean "to put or lull to sleep"; however, especially in the passive voice, its meaning extends to more violent forms of sensory deprivation: "become unconscious or senseless," "was stunned." From Sacripante's repeated stupefaction in Canto 1, to Bradamante's faint on falling into Merlin's Cave and her wonder on seeing Ruggiero carried away by the Hippogriff, to Orlando's madness itself, the *Furioso* abounds in moments of "sensis sopitibus." As in Ficino's account, such moments are at once privative, suspending the activity of the senses, and at the same time expansive, providing in their place a form of experience which is more difficult to define and yet somehow more complete. Here, perhaps, is Ariosto's connection, oblique though it may be, to one of the predominant intellectual currents of his time. In the following chapter I want to argue that Ariosto takes up the form of the visionary trance from neo-Platonism, and yet adapts it to fit a critical epistemology—perhaps influenced by a

nascent awareness of Greek skepticism—in which transcendent acts of intellection are impossible.

Could we imagine something like a "skeptical trance," an involuntary version of the Skeptic's *epoché*? In this chapter I will argue for the importance in the *Furioso* of what we might call the "immanent trance"; I will suggest that, where all knowledge is based on the senses and illusion (as in the *Furioso*), and yet no other source is available, the mere suspension of sensory perception itself constitutes a form of knowledge. Where all knowledge is belief and all belief is error, it is the suspension of knowledge, as it takes place in the trance, which constitutes the only possible form that knowledge can take.[15] The trance involves, as we will see, not so much the elevation of the mind as, more simply, its separation from the senses in a way which enables of a kind of ascetic and negative knowledge, a knowledge which is only attainable, however, as a repeated form of lived experience. I will make this argument not only by focusing on scenes of stupefaction and their function in the poem, but also by contrasting them with, for example, the prophetic vision summoned by Merlin and Melissa in Canto 3. In such a scene, as in Orlando's madness later on, the idea of an ecstatic separation from the senses is evoked and yet clearly made unavailable, in its "higher" form, to the poem's human characters. Instead they are thrown back on their own sensorium in a moment of suspension which might itself constitute a form of sentience.

[15] This argument could perhaps be seen as a phenomenological version of the tradition of "wise folly" or "wise ignorance" associated in the Renaissance with Rabelais, Erasmus, and others, and in particular of the chiasmic reversal which is at its core: if all wisdom is ultimately folly, then folly itself is actually a form of wisdom. For such an argument in relation to the *Furioso*, see Elizabeth A. Chesney, *The Countervoyage of Rabelais and Ariosto,* 191: "Within an irrational universe," she writes, "blindness doubles as illumination, lunatic ravings as truth, and temporal regression as transcendence." Albert Ascoli has powerfully argued that the *Furioso* actually inscribes and deconstructs this chiasmus. See 337-351 and in particular 350: "the text too is caught in a structure *en abyme* where reason contains folly contains reason contains….and no final resting place is available." On my reading such reversals can be located at specific moments in the *Furioso*—moments of stupor and stupefaction—and by temporalizing them in this way I hope to account for something of the dialectical lability which Ascoli finds in the poem.

To argue for the intellectual function of stupefaction in the *Orlando Furioso* is to question some of the basic assumptions that have governed criticism of the poem since the nineteenth century. It is usually the narrator who is taken to embody what wisdom the poem possesses; since Francesco de Sanctis the wry voice presiding over the *Furioso* as been seen as incarnating the skeptical intelligence and detached self-awareness, the "piena chiarezza della visione,"[16] that his characters so obviously lack. The famous "riso" which de Sanctis finds in the poem is, he suggests, indicative of a nascent modern consciousness:

> È il riso dello spirito moderno, diffuso sul soprannaturale di ogni qualità; è, se non ancora la scienza, il buon senso, generato da un sentimento già sviluppato del reale e del possibile, è il riso precursore della scienza.[17]
>
> It is the smile of the modern spirit, presiding over every kind of supernatural appearance; and, if it is not yet itself scientific, the "common sense," the result of an already developed sense for the real and the possible, is a smile which is a precursor to science.

This proto-modern smile, he continued, simply *is* the poem's inner life: "Questo momento dello spirito moderno …. è la vita interiore del mondo ariostesco."[18]

The idea has been rearticulated more recently by Robert Durling, who devotes extensive attention to the presence of the narrator in the poem and argues for "the domination of the world of the poem by the intellect of the poet."[19] Though qualifying this view by noting some resemblances between the poet and his protagonist, he concludes that while the poet too suffers from Orlando's love madness, "he knows it, and he is not as mad as Orlando"; "the poet does see, in this lucid interval."[20]

---

[16] Francesco de Sanctis, *Storia della Letteratura Italiana*, 480.
[17] Ibid., 488.
[18] Ibid., 489
[19] Robert Durling, *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic,* 176.
[20] Durling, 168, 169. Chesney instead sees the narrator as championing madness: "It is from the vantage of a third dementia, creative and conceptual in nature, that the authors transcend contradictions—not in the unity of a single artistic furor but rather through the espousal of madness (and hence multiplicity) as the ultimate cognitive structure." See *Countervoyage*, 173.

De Sanctis' view, however intuitive it may be, depends on a post-Renaissance concept of knowledge in terms of detached scientific observation and skepticism which explicitly locates Ariosto many years ahead of his time. But rather than thinking of Ariosto, as so many readers have, as somehow anticipating our own time, it is perhaps more productive to see him as creatively out of sync with his own. If we approach the poem looking for a post-Cartesian or even post-Enlightenment model of the mind, then like de Sanctis and Durling we will have to turn to the narrator, whose *buon senso* can be clearly separated from the supernatural world over which he presides. If, on the other hand, we keep in mind such accounts of intellectual activity as we find in Ficino and Pico, that picture becomes more complicated. While Ariosto by no means simply imports such accounts wholesale into his poem, he can nevertheless be seen, if we turn to the experience of the characters, as playfully altering them in ways which make for a distinctive Ariostan phenomenology of knowledge. He offers us an account of mental "alienation" which takes it in a different direction from the same premises.

In this chapter I will be focusing on the experience of the characters in the poem and arguing for that distinctive form of consciousness I am calling an "immanent trance." For Ariosto such consciousness borrows the trappings of the neo-Platonic trance—in particular the idea that the senses are suspended—and yet takes hold not in moments of positive knowing, nor in contemplative ascents to a world beyond the senses, but rather in moments where a delusion is dispelled and, at least for a moment, nothing rushes in to fill the void. Such a void, I will suggest—and not the narrator's *buon senso*—is the poem's most complex and "modern" version of consciousness, a consciousness which is, however, inseparable from an experience of its own disruption. Thus if, conversely, the characters' experiences are seen to be not so far removed from "consciousness" as we know it today, then this may mean not that Ariosto is ahead of his

time, but rather that our modern notion of consciousness has more in common with the idea of mystical experience than we generally like to believe.

"Stupor" between Medicine and Philosophy

Ariosto's word for these states of sensory disruption is the Italian *stupore* or *stupor*. In the early modern period the Latin equivalent—spelled the same way as in both Italian and English—in fact had a technical medical meaning. In his *Consultationes Medicae,* the Paduan physician Giovanni Battista da Monte, who was roughly contemporaneous with Ariosto, defines "stupor" as a specific physiological condition, affecting the senses in particular:

> Stupor est potius imbecillitas sensus quam motus, qui a frigida dispositione non solum venarum, verum nervorum, membrarum, &c. oritur.[21]
>
> Stupor is a crippling of the senses rather than of the movements, which arises from the freezing not just of the veins, but indeed of the nerves, of the limbs, and of everything else.

Though Ariosto was probably not interested in the details of the diagnosis, it is nevertheless significant for our purposes that the word *stupor* could be located so clearly in a medical context. Its definition, in terms of the suspension of sensory activity, may seem to liken it to the kinds of visionary states described by Ficino and Pico. Yet what for the Platonists allows the "intellectus sincere discernet," for the doctor is instead a case of *imbecillitas*, with little room for melancholy genius and the visionary trance such as that ascribed to Durer's *Melencolia I*. Stupor, in this sense, is also quite different from the wonder or *meraviglia* often associated with Ariosto and the Renaissance epic—more purely physical in nature and more deeply disruptive in effect.[22]

---

[21] Giovanni Battista da Monte, *Consultationes Medicae*, 167.

[22] For wonder in the Renaissance in terms of "intellectual and epistemological destabilization" see in particular Peter Platt, *Reason Diminished*. While Ariosto's poem has been understood in terms of *meraviglia* almost since it first appeared, to my knowledge only Marco Santoro has noticed how, in the poem itself, *maragivlia* is usually a function of a character's error and shortsightedness, typically leaving him "stupito ed incredulo." See *Ariosto e il Rinascimento*, 104.

Such "imbecillitas sensus"—what Spenser will call a "stound" and what, in discussing *The Winter's Tale*, I will describe as "the specter of insentience"—is a frequent occurrence in Ariosto. Ariosto uses the word *stupor* (or *stupore*) nine times in the poem; forms of the verb *stupire*, meanwhile, are used four times, and the participle *stupefatto* is used twelve times. Though *stupor,* in Ariosto and elsewhere, will appear to be torn between *imbecillitas* and *intellectus*, at first, in reference to the hapless pagan knight Sacripante, it seems to be clearly aligned with the former. We meet Sacripante about halfway through the first Canto. He is in a state of deep dejection, pining for Angelica—who, it happens, is hiding nearby in a bush, and hears his whole lament. Alone in the forest and with several other knights pursuing her, she decides to take advantage of Sacripante's devotion by using him for protection. To his amazement, the woman he has been longing for now leaps out of the woods right before his eyes:

> Non mai con tanto gaudio o stupor tanto
> levò gli occhi al figliuolo alcuna madre,
> ch'avea per morto sospirato e pianto,
> poi che senza esso udi tornar le squadre;
> con quanto gaudio il Saracin, con quanto
> stupor l'alta presenza e le leggiadre
> maniere e il vero angelico sembiante,
> improviso apparir si vide inante. (1.53)
>
> Such stupor and such joy a mother feels
> Who sees her son returning from the wars
> Whom she had given up and mourned for dead
> When she had seen his troop return before—
> Are far exceeded by the pagan's joy
> And stupor when the presence he adores,
> The angelic visage and the courtly ways
> All suddenly appear before his gaze.

It is a stanza both witty and deft, of which *stupor* is the keynote. In the inverted grammar of the second half, Angelica's attributes—"l'alta presenza e le leggiadre / maniere e il vero angelico sembiante," a series of familiar Petrarchan idioms hastily trotted out—hang in visionary

suspension; the deferral of "apparir" allows her to linger, just like an apparition, without being definitively either present or absent. The phrase "vero angelico sembiante" encapsulates this sense of a visionary presence transcending the concrete; there is a pun not only on Angelica's name, but also on such angels as might well be the subject of a religious or neo-Platonic ecstasy. More specifically it is a send-up of that synthesis of neo-Platonism and Petrarchism in which the beloved's "vero angelico sembiante" is treated as an immanent manifestation of the divine. Its humor arises from the contrast between this language and the underlying awareness that Angelica too is, after all, a creature of flesh and blood, in reference to whom "vero angelico sembiante" represents the hyperbole of infatuation. Sacripante will very shortly be restored to that awareness, which he expresses in verses borrowed from Catullus 62: "Corrò la fresca e matutina rosa, / che, tardando, stagion perder potria" (1.58; "The freshest rose of morning I shall pluck / For it shall wilt if I too long delay"). The visionary quality of Angelica's appearing, invoking neo-Platonic and Petrarchan tradition, is quickly undercut by a Roman worldliness; at least for Sacripante, behind the shimmering vision is a flesh-and-blood Angelica. It is that Angelica who really counts, and in the contrast the idealizing sonnet-language is shown up as so much hollow rhetoric.

The humor of that deflation, however, relies on our sharing, if only for a moment, Sacripante's initial sense of overpowering amazement, and in particular his feeling of an almost supersensory vision which interrupts his melancholy and leaves him temporarily incapable of either thought or action. The stanza gives his *stupor* a pivotal position: by repeating simile "gaudio" and "stupor" in the fifth line, but enjambing "stupor" the second time, it puts the emphasis on this word as if it were the more accurate of the two; Sacripante, it suggests, has not even been able to register his happiness yet, so overwhelming and incredible is his vision. If,

from our perspective, we see the trance here as a kind of *imbecillitas,* for Sacripante it is, at least for a moment, the opposite of that: a kind of divine vision. Though, as we have seen, the poem goes on to register the misapplication of "angelico" and the displacement of the content of the religious or neo-Platonic vision to the world of flesh and blood, in doing so it articulates a "realistic" or immanent version of the visionary experience whose rhetoric is otherwise missing from the poem. The stanza at once invokes the precedent of ecstatic vision and at the same time brings consciousness firmly down to the level of the material and the sensory; this is to suggest that it is not merely satirizing the neo-Platonic precedent, but rather gradually carving out the distinctive phenomenological space that I am calling an "immanent trance" and that Ariosto refers to in terms of *stupore*.

As soon as Sacripante has shaken off his trance, and determined to pluck his rose before it becomes too late, another knight appears, and within a matter of stanzas Sacripante finds himself pinned to the ground beneath his horse with Angelica looking pitifully on.[23] Ariosto compares Sacripante's state to that of a farmer stunned by a lightning bolt in another stanza-long simile, in which *stupido*, the past participle of *stupire,* and the similar *istordito* are again given a prominent place:

> Qual istordito e stupido aratore,
> poi ch'è passato il fulmine, si leva
> di là dove l'altissimo fragore
> appresso ai morti buoi steso l'aveva;
> che mira senza fronde e senza onore
> il pin che di lontan veder soleva:
> tal si levò il pagano a piè rimaso,
> Angelica presente al duro caso. (1.65)
>
> Just as a ploughman who is dazed and stunned
> Arises when the lightning has passed by
> From where the shattering thunderbolt had thrown

[23] For readings of the comic and erotic elements in this encounter, see Peter Marinelli, "Shaping the Ore," esp. 46ff., and Lauren Silberman, "Spenser and Ariosto," esp. 27-28.

> Him, and the bodies of his oxen lie,
> And beholds the lofty tree barren of leaves
> The pine that from afar he used to espy:
> So now arose the knight, without his horse;
> Angelica had witnessed the whole mess.

Once more, Sacripante is bewildered by a new presence whose arrival, welcome or not, exceeds his powers of apprehension and temporarily stuns the senses; once more, this bewilderment is conveyed by means of a stanza-long simile which interrupts the action and conveys to the reader something of stupor's disruptive temporality. The decision to describe this experience from what is implicitly Sacripante's perspective interpolates a moment in which the senses are interrupted and time seems to stop, a moment immanent to time and action and yet briefly insulated from their momentum. Ariosto's attention to such moments implies a strong interest in states of reaction and perception more generally. For it is only in Sacripante's perceptual world that such a moment arises, and Ariosto's interest in depicting it should certainly not be taken for granted, as we can see if we contrast Sacripante to Bradamante, who is already some distance away by the time Sacripante comes to his senses, as well as to the falling Hector in the stanza from the *Iliad* to which Ariosto alludes:

> As when an oak is uprooted and falls beneath the blast of father Zeus, and a terrible smell of brimstone arises—and truly courage no longer possesses him that sees it, standing near by, for the bolt of great Zeus is terrifying—even so fell mighty Hector immediately to the ground in the dust.[24]

Ariosto's version conspicuously alters the temporality and the perspective of Homer's simile. He shifts its focus forward from the moment of the lightning strike and the tree falling to the period immediately after, and its subject from the falling warrior to the onlooker, who is merely mentioned as an aside in Homer. What the perspective shift emphasizes is that Sacripante has been effectively reduced from the position of Hector, the falling warrior still endowed with tragic

[24] Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. A.T. Murray, slightly modified.

grandeur, to the far less exalted position of the timorous bystander. The heroic combat has been pushed outside the frame of the simile, and replaced with a detailed focus on the dazed reaction of the onlooker—in Ariosto's case a farmer, to whose bewilderment Sacripante's stupor is likened. Ariosto's revision of the stanza thus rewrites action in terms of consciousness.

The "immanent trance" is, one might speculate, part of a broader turn towards perceptual states more generally in a genre unaccustomed to them. Such a turn is fundamentally at odds with the kind of action that usually governs chivalric epic—thus it is not surprising that they should be brief, inadvertent, and painful, arising in the spaces where action is stymied or defeated, rather than in the leisurely manner of say, Marvell's *Upon Appleton House.* The disappointment of desire and the exposure of illusion go hand in hand, and indeed Sacripante's second trance works almost as a corrective to the delusion to which the first gave rise, the notion that he could "possess" Angelica.[25] Bradamante comes between him and his desire, and he responds with a kind of "rude awakening" from the dream of her availability. His plan is disrupted and his illusion dispelled with the force of a lesson being taught, but that lesson is transmitted not in a moment of enlightenment but rather in one of stupefaction.

In his very stupidity, Sacripante serves as a model of how, throughout the *Orlando Furioso*, knowledge is always initiated through a preliminary debilitation of the senses, an "immanent trance" which, in a world defined and energized by error, is the only form which revelation can take—not access to truth, but simply the dispelling of illusion. Much more powerfully disorienting than the summary defeat to which Sacripante has just been subjected is the discovery that a woman was responsible for it, as a messenger shortly announces:

[25] Marco Santoro notes as much: "L'esperienza di Sacripante nel suo breve e illusorio incontro con Angelica è scandita su un registro di contrasti tra progetti ed effetti, audaci disegni e umilianti delusioni; ed è inutile osservare che progetti e disegni risultano sempre fondati su fallaci opinioni." See *Ariosto e il Rinascimento*, 105-6

> tu déi saper che ti levò di sella
> l'alto valor d'una gentil donzella. (1.69)
>
> The blow that left you on the ground was paid
> By the high valor of a gentle maid.

This revelation throws Sacripante into his deepest *stupore* thus far, a stupor characterized precisely by the effort to think, to make sense of the world:

> Poi che gran pezzo al caso intervenuto
> ebbe pensato invano, e finalmente
> si trovò da una femina abbatuto (1.70)
>
> He thought about what happened for a spell
> In vain, but in the end had to concede
> Himself defeated by a woman's skill.

Sacripante's thinking is "invano" in the face of what has happened—it is as if the idea of being defeated by a woman simply exceeds the most strenuous efforts of his mind. But beyond its humor, the stanza has a surprising doubling effect. We have seen Sacripante's defeat. We have heard the messenger's report. But Ariosto does not—as most other romance authors would—simply leave things at that. Instead he makes us see how Sacripante himself must come, or fail to come to grips with what happened, how finally, and only after further thought, "si trovò da una femina abbatuto." It is as if what is really interesting to Ariosto in all of this (as we saw with his reconfiguration of the Homeric simile) is not the narrative situation per se, but rather how Sacripante processes it, and how difficult it is for him to do so. And while Sacripante's thought-processes seem above all comical, they are comical precisely insofar as they show him attempting, and failing, to make sense of the frustration of his desires and the exposure of his errors and assumptions. In that respect Sacripante models the way in which knowledge will be transmitted elsewhere in the poem too, in moments and for characters who are apparently to be taken more seriously. Never given time to recover from one blow before being hurled into the

next, Sacripante is constantly thrown back into the bewildered blankness of stupor in a way which recalls Bergson's definition of slapstick as "mechanical inelasticity."[26] But throughout the *Furioso*, no character will be exempt from such states.

Prophetic Moments

For all their humor, Sacripante's repeated stupors in the first Canto are actually prototypical for how knowledge is acquired in the poem—not by being consciously pursued or divinely imparted, but rather through unexpected moments of disruption and surprise, often involving the temporary stunning of the senses and judgment. They are moments of "experience" in the sense of "an affectively intensified, unfolding present whose translation into knowledge is acutely in question"[27]; Sacripante's stupor on being unhorsed by Bradamante leads—or should lead—to his recognition that he was defeated by a woman, not a man. But where we can write off Sacripante as a mere "registering apparatus" for states which obviously do not sink in, the other figures in the poem, and especially Bradamante, ought, in principle, to be able to convert "experiences" in Sacripante's sense into "experience" in the sense of wisdom or maturity—*erlebnis* into *erfahrung*. Under the tutelage of Melissa, she is expected to rise above the fray that consumes the other characters and establish the dynasty that will culminate in the family of Ariosto's patrons; she herself ought to embody proleptically the authority-from-experience which the Estes will claim ancestrally—actually something of a temporal bind. In fact if we now follow Bradamante for a while, we will see that, even though she is the one who delivers the stupefying blow to

[26] See Henri Bergson, *Le Rire,* 8: "Ce qu'il ya de risible dans un cas comme dans l'autre, c'est une certaine *raideur de mécanique* là où l'on voudrait trouver la souplesse attentive et la vivante flexibilité d'une personne." It is worth noting here that not all readers of this Canto share the comic view of Sacripante that is clearly taken, for example, in Marinelli and Silberman; see especially D.S. Carne-Ross "The One and the Many, esp. 208: he is "apparently a more serious and certainly a more sentimental lover than either Rinaldo or Ferraú."

[27] See Adam Rzepka, "Rich eyes and poor hands," 159.

Sacripante at 1.70, she is equally if not more susceptible to such states herself; in the course of the Cantos that follow she suffers, at two crucial points, short but significant trances. And their conversion into *erfahrung* is anything but guaranteed.

Bradamante's swoons are closely related to the theme of her imperial destiny, a major theme of the poem as a whole. Though she does not know it at first, Bradamante is destined to marry Ruggiero; together they are the progenitors of the Este dynasty, which will eventually produce the audience and patrons of Ariosto's poem. Yet while the trances serve to reveal this dynastic dimension of her story, they at the same time make visible the discrepancy between the fictional world of the *Furioso*'s narrative and the historical and genealogical aims of its ideological commitment, a gap between action in the present and knowledge of the future which, as with Sacripante, is registered in a moment of cognitive blankness. Even as her destiny is clarified, her trances point to an unbridgeable gulf between action—necessarily based on incomplete knowledge of the future—and knowledge, here represented by prophecy, which is shown to be largely removed from human circumstances. But in the very exposure of Bradamante's finitude, in their very lack of any positive content, these trances constitute a form of cognition of their own, one grounded in human phenomenology and temporality rather than in transcendence and timelessness. Bradamante's fits of stupefaction thus work as an alternative to the tradition of the prophetic trance in which past, present, and future are brought together in a unified moment of vision, the prophetic *furor* which Plato ranks in the *Phaedrus* as the highest kind of madness.[28]

[28] Eleonora Stoppino has recently focused on the "gender shift" entailed in Ariosto's choice of Bradamante as the recipient of prophecy and of Melissa as prophet, arguing that it "builds an alternative, potentially liberating mode of knowledge transmission" and a "new space for prophecy." See *Genealogies of Fiction*, 117, 135. She writes that "Bradamante is completely involved in the prophetic discourse, to the point that it becomes a defining element of her identity" (120), noting that in contrast Ruggiero is "consistently represented as lacking knowledge about his future and the destiny awaiting his progeny"

Riding away from her encounter with Sacripante, Bradamante encounters the figure of Pinabello, who deceives her into trusting him and following his lead to a cave where, he says, a maiden has been unjustly imprisoned. Pinabello is much more guileful than Sacripante, and where Sacripante had made the mistake of engaging Bradamante on a purely physical level, Pinabello is able to win her trust by appealing to her emotions and her judgments, first by speaking to her of Ruggiero, then by fabricating a story about a maiden stranded in a cave. Their exchange gives us a chance to discover who Bradamante's family is, which will shortly become very important; for now, it prompts Pinabello, whose family has long been hostile to hers, to attempt to cut off one branch of it. Offering to lower Bradamante down into the cave, he drops her at the last moment, thinking she will die. She doesn't, but "giacque stordita altanto" ("she lies there stupefied awhile"), and there the Canto ends.

The new Canto opens with an epic invocation of the muse and a turn to a higher register:

> Chi mi darà la voce e le parole
> convenienti a sí nobil suggetto? (3.1)
>
> Who will endow me with the voice and words
> Appropriate to this loftiest of themes?

We turn to a serious theme, the imperial destiny of the Estense dynasty, heretofore submerged in the rather inglorious tumult of the first two Cantos; Bradamante now enters Merlin's cave and is granted a vision of her progeny. The swoon, then, would seem to have a relatively clear meaning when read in light of this transition. If on the one hand it results from her gullibility and her vulnerability, on the other—since it has the unpredicted consequence of leading her to Merlin—it has a providential aspect; it is all, as it were, part of the plan. Bradamante's swoon would thus

---

(123). Stoppino does not, however, consider prophecy from a cognitive and epistemological point-of-view, from which, on my reading, it is threatened much earlier in the poem than she claims. See also Eric MacPhail, "Ariosto and the Prophetic Moment."

signify the workings of the very destiny she is about to discover; it is the benign and foresighted intervention of a providence either divine or authorial.

Yet such a reading becomes difficult to sustain as we proceed. Ariosto's desire for a "voce" adequate to his new, noble subject is now fulfilled by the disembodied voice of Merlin, which will reveal to Bradamante her imperial destiny as progenitor of the Este dynasty. "Vive la voce; e come chiara emerge / udir potrai da la marmoreal tomba" (3.11; "The voice however lives, and you shall hear / It clearly sounding from the marble tomb"). Human characters such as Sacripante and even, in her gullibility, Bradamante, have proven disastrously short-sighted in their judgments; to such finite forms of knowledge and decision, the prophetic strain of Canto 3 could not be more opposed. Indeed in his representation of prophecy Ariosto taps into a tradition which would rank it very highly indeed. Plato in the *Phaedrus* had described prophecy as the highest kind of the four *furores*, an eminence which Ficino, in his commentary on that dialogue, attributes to prophecy's independence of sensory mediation:

> Why did Socrates put poetry third in the degrees of frenzy—for he reminded us that prophecy was first, the hieratic art second, poetry third, and love fourth. It's because prophecy pertains mainly to knowing, the hieratic art to affect and volition (so it succeeds prophecy), but poetry already declines to hearing besides.[29]

Ficino explains the prestige of prophecy by pointing out its particularly close association with knowledge, *cognitio.* To us such a connection is, to say the least, surprising. But one can reconstruct the logic: since knowledge of the future necessarily cannot be derived from the senses or even from reason, it is completely dependent on divine inspiration. Thus unlike other forms of knowledge it has an unadulterated connection to divinity, and even among the four *furores* it best exemplifies the idea of the close link between divinity and knowledge which is so central to Ficinian neo-Platonism. Prophecy all but *requires* a supersensory trance, which in

[29] Marsilio Ficino, *Commentaries on Plato*, vol. 1, 51.

turns endows it with a higher status than the other forms of *furor*.[30] In the *Furioso*, Bradamante is given a prophetic vision in which she sees her descendants walk past in a visionary manner. "Non sa s'ella dorme o s'ella è desta" ("She knows not if she sleeps or is awake"), Ariosto writes, as if this state were an extension of her state at the end of the last Canto.

But is it? Is it really possible to have a prophetic trance by falling and knocking oneself out? To put it differently: is the prophetic vision a dream she beholds while she is unconscious from having fallen? Or does she wake up and *then* have the waking dream she describes? The question may seem like an obtuse one. Yet the clever narrative conjunction between her deception and faint at the end of Canto 2 and her vision in Canto 3 conceals a disharmony. Her vision is suggestively continuous with the disturbance of her senses that ensues on her falling into the cave, and her trance, reflected on the formal level by a Canto break, may be seen as functioning to separate her from her senses and from the consciousness of the present, and to induct her into this transhistorical register of things, thus mediating her passage between these orders. Merlin and Melissa will fulfill a sense of possibility already implicit when she is left suspended at the end of a Canto. Yet the trance, we have seen, comes about for the most mundane of reasons; it results from her ingenuousness in the face of Pinabello's snares. In its comic circumstances, it reminds us of how deeply Bradamante is still rooted in the world of the senses and the body, with all their attendant deceptions. At the end of Canto 2, Bradamante emphatically does *not* have a visionary trance herself—she simply falls into a trap. If what follows in Canto 3 is in fact a prophetic vision, it is at best ambiguously or metonmyically connected to her narrative moment of stupor. Thus the poem appears quite clearly to opt for the

[30] For a thorough account of the history and epistemology of prophecy from Plato to Milton, see William Kerrigan's chapter on "Prophets and Poets" in *The Prophetic Milton*, 17-82. Notably, Kerrigan argues that the Church fathers attempted to distinguish the "the true prophet [who] is transported into serenity" from "the pagan oracle [who] thrashed and moaned" (26), to contrast "pagan ecstasy with Hebraic tranquility" (30). He notes that the two were, however, confused in Renaissance (44).

latter of the options I outlined above, yet in doing so it marks precisely the difference between mundane vicissitudes of embodied consciousness on the one hand, and the transcendence of consciousness required by prophecy on the other. It marks, in other words, the distinction between a visionary and an "immanent" one, between a *translation* of consciousness to a world of immaterial forms and a *suspension* of consciousness which remains thoroughly tied up in the senses and in the material world, even as it may point to a sphere beyond it.

Indeed after the vision Melissa must undertake the much more worldly task of making Bradamante a little more savvy in the face of a deceptive world: "mostrando con che astuzia e con qual arte / proceder de', se di Ruggiero è vaga" (3.66; "Revealing what devices and what arts / Are needed to obtain the one she loves"). The turn from prophetic knowledge to "astuzia" reminds us that, despite her exalted new role, Bradamante is still a creature of the world with all its inveiglements. Prophetic knowledge is not sufficient, or even really relevant, to the navigation of the human world, in which a more canny kind of future-directedness is necessary; experience rests on the level of savviness or *savoir-faire.* Melissa thus mediates between Merlin and Bradamante, ensuring that her dynasty will come to fruition by also ensuring, much more mundanely, that she will not get tripped up and dropped into a cave again along the way. There is a kind of division of labor here between the active characters and the figures of mind or intellect, here Merlin with his disembodied voice. Bradamante's stupor in Merlin's cave signifies the discrepancy between the vivid pressures of her individual being and her inchoate awareness of participation in a historical narrative beyond her understanding. Melissa's lesson at the end of Canto 3 implies that the prophetic, dynastic dimension of her story is almost irrelevant to Bradamante in the here and now; much more important is learning how to see through the kinds of deceptions to which Pinabello has just subjected her.

Thus while Bradamante's trances reveal her entanglement in a dynastic, historical line that is beyond her control and understanding, in a sense they also betray her passivity in the face of it. They are markers of the discrepancy between her consciousness of the present and her involvement in a prophetic order that transcends it; they highlight her ignorance rather than elevating her to knowledge, suggesting that if she is the embodiment of her destiny then it is at the expense of her full consent and consciousness of this. They function to sever her connection the present, yet rather than endowing her with a supersensory vision, they simply create a void in a narrative that would otherwise proceed seamlessly from one adventure to the next. And yet such a void, I would suggest, is a moment of cognition unto itself.

Bradamante's second trance occurs very soon hereafter, and in a context which, also bound up with Bradamante's dynastic theme, confirms the existence of a gap between her present, conscious self and her dynastic, unconscious self. Having warded off (with the instruction of Melissa) the wiles of Brunello, defeated Atlante in single combat and rescued Ruggiero from his enchantment, Bradamante suddenly finds herself looking on helplessly as Ruggiero is borne off into the sky on the back of the hippogriff:

> La bella donna, che sì in alto vede
> e con tanto periglio il suo Ruggiero,
> resta attonita in modo, che non riede
> per lungo spazio al sentimento vero.
> Ciò che già inteso avea di Ganimede
> ch'al ciel fu assunto dal paterno impero,
> dubita assai che non accada a quello,
> non men gentil di Ganimede e bello.
>
> Con gli occhi fissi al ciel lo segue quanto
> basta il veder; ma poi che si dilegua
> sì, che la vista non può corer tanto,
> lascia che sempre l'animo lo segua. (4.47-48)
>
> Seeing Ruggiero swept up in the sky
> And so exposed to danger, Bradamant

> Was so completely stupefied that she
> For a long time remained insentient.
> The story she had heard of Ganymede—
> How he was rapt into the firmament—
> She fears has now befallen her dear knight,
> In manners and in beauty no less bright.
>
> Her eyes fixed on the sky, she followed him
> As far as sight permits, and when he passed
> The furthest point which human eyes can reach,
> She let her soul keep following to the last.

Since Ruggiero is her future husband, the moment of stupefaction is again representative of Bradamante's involvement in a destiny that is at the same time shown to exceed her conscious grasp. The stanzas describe her state in some detail: she is "attonita," thunderstruck as Sacripante was, and deprived of her "sentimento vero." "Sentimento vero" means her "true senses"; the basic sense is that the activity of her senses is suspended. As in Merlin's cave, "non sa s'ella dorme o s'ella è desta," and here too she is confronted with an object whose reality appears to be supernatural. Yet here it is clear enough that what she is seeing *is* real and thus that it is her senses which are shaken rather than reality which is altered. There is a "lungo spazio" in which she does not return to her "sentimento vero": this is the sensory "void" I spoke of earlier, the consciousness which is suddenly emptied out, undermined, without anything rushing in to replace it.

That such a sensory void could be at once a negation and at the same time an opening, an experience with its own distinctive phenomenology and significance, is I think the import of the first four lines in the next stanza:

> Con gli occhi fissi al ciel lo segue quanto
> basta il veder; ma poi che si dilegua
> sì, che la vista non può correr tanto,
> lascia che sempre l'animo lo segua.

This is a very significant addition to the stanza that precedes it. Without these lines, Bradamante's reaction would be a fairly conventional moment of uncomprehending stupefaction. Yet by adding this coda, Ariosto endows the moment with an almost Empsonian ambiguity. The previous stanza suggests that she is so stupefied as to be briefly detached from her senses; it offers a picture of Bradamante as stupefied, paralyzed, even defeated. This next stanza either describes the very same moment or the one immediately succeeding it, a temporal uncertainty which gets to the heart of Ariosto's ambiguity here. For these four lines depict a very different response; here Bradamante senses with great intensity indeed, and when sense fails her she turns to a more spiritual mode of apprehension. The stanza rewrites the lack of "sentimento vero" in terms of a gain in spiritual scope, and the line "Non riede per lungo spazio al sentimento vero" suddenly takes on a positive inflection it did not have before—it is her "soul" that doesn't return, since it is following Ruggiero. Sensory blankness is rewritten as spiritual potentiality, but there is an unresolved tension at the basis of that rewriting. Is the suspension of the senses simply the condition, as in neo-Platonism, for a subsequent liberation of the spirit, in which case the stanzas are successive? Or is the suspension of the senses itself a kind of ecstasy, in which case the two stanzas are simultaneous? The ambiguity is identical to that at the end of Canto 2 and the beginning of Canto 3, a tension between physical stupor and immaterial vision, between *imbecillitas* and *intellectus*, articulated successively yet in a relation which is not made entirely clear. The ambiguity of that relation is the ambiguity inherent in the idea of an "immanent trance" itself, in which we are at once confined to the body and yet have an experience of an altered consciousness.

To put this in other words, it is hard to say exactly how literal Ariosto is being when he describes Bradamante's "animo" as leaving her sight (and hence her body) behind and following

Ruggiero. Since the description is fairly offhand, it does not have the obvious comic and allegorical overtones of, for example, Astolfo's trip to the moon in Canto 34. But that episode, precisely with its comical literality, can also serve to remind us that the separation of soul and body in Ariosto is rarely to be taken at face value. And Ariosto's very offhandedness here suggests that it is simply a manner of speaking when he writes that "l'animo lo segua." And if so, then it is all the clearer that her sensory deprivation, in and of itself, has an ecstatic and redeeming dimension even though it does not, unlike the neo-Platonic trance, liberate the soul into a world of true knowledge and pleasure. On this reading the flight of the soul is simply a metaphor for the intensity of Bradamante's reaction, for, that is, the state described in the preceding stanza, however different they may seem. The two accounts are, then, simultaneous, and we could indeed read backwards to suggest that it is precisely and simply the absence of "sentimento vero" which Ariosto is talking about when he says that her soul flies away. Rooted to her body and the ground, Bradamante is undergoing what is an "immanent trance" in every sense.

We should not lose sight of the fact that this is a moment of intense frustration for her, and one which may well seem to her to underscore the futility, or at least the useless abstraction, of what she learned in the cave—it is in a sense a reversal of the recuperation of her betrayal at the hands of Pinabello.[31] Embodied in Ruggiero, the future that has been prophesied for her suddenly flies away from under her very nose, leaving her alone and paralytically rooted to the present and to the earth even though she has followed Melissa's directions unswervingly. If the

[31] Stoppino, reading Melissa's prophecy as a form of gift, argues that "the sweetness of the gift always opens the way for the potentiality of bitter betrayal, as it almost contains betrayal in itself." See *Genealogies,* 138. This moment seems to constitute precisely such a betrayal, and it cuts quite cruelly through the confidence with which Bradamante had defeated and taunted Atlante a few stanzas before (4.35)—not merely Atlante, in fact, but the prophecy of Ruggiero's early death. The surprise of this subsequent moment, and the reassertion of the prophecy of Ruggiero's own fate, undermines Bradamante's apparent mastery of the prophetic mode in the poem.

prophetic vision partially revised her earlier moment of stupefaction at the hands of Pinabello into a "fortunate fall," this next trance completely undoes that revision, opposing to the disembodied logic of prophecy the contingencies of worldly existence, and in particular the realities of physical space. Bradamante is unable fully to convert her prophetic knowledge into purposive action, and what results is a moment of paralyzed blankness, a moment which reflects precisely her groundedness, her inability to realize the future even in the terms that have been passed down from on high. And yet against all odds this very groundedness is suddenly refigured as enabling an almost unnatural jouissance. In her very finitude Bradamante proves capable of an unbounded mode of experience, which, unlike prophetic vision, is fitted to the limits of human action and incorporates a tacit acceptance of them.

As with the *Orlando Furioso* as a whole, it is on some level a matter of personal preference what we select from the sequence involving Bradamante, and what anecdotes we endow with representative significance for our understanding of her and of the work as a whole. Do we focus on her repeated shows of gullibility and read the poem as gently but wryly taking her ingenuousness and unworldliness to task? Or do we focus on the poem's epic strain, and find evidence of Bradamante's involvement in providential schemes that exceed her grasp? These two perspectives which could well go hand-in-hand, of course, and in a sense they are joined in the moment I have just analyzed. Yet in my view that moment has a significance which goes beyond, or beside, both its comic depiction of Bradamante's frustration and its epic intimations of higher conflicts and purposes; it is a moment which, this is to say, neither satirically denigrates the human capacity for knowledge and action nor attempts to redeem it through adumbration of a larger order. Where for Sacripante such moments serve only to reiterate his "stupidity," his inability to make sense of the whirl of action around him, in Bradamante's case

they help to cultivate a distinctly human space of consciousness and cognition, in which we are taken beyond the unreliable evidence of the senses without however acceding to a higher order; it is in moments such as these, I would suggest, that the poem's epistemological thrust can be found. In Bradamante's very inability, at least in the present, to realize the future that prophetic knowledge has laid out for her, a different kind of knowledge is opened up, which is in a way a merely negative knowledge of the discrepancy between the abstract order of prophecy and the uncontrollable and unknowable contingencies of earthly life. Yet this knowledge is not experienced as negation, but rather in a moment of phenomenological intensity paralleling that of the prophetic trance itself. She loses her "sentimento vero" and though nothing—no dream or vision or revelation—comes to replace it, in that very nothingness she can be said to attain a distinctive form of awareness, in which, as we saw, the "lack" of the senses is unexpectedly converted into a positive spiritual potentiality, figured in terms of the soul's capacity to fly.

Orlando Beyond Knowledge

In the seventh and last "Speech" of his commentary on Plato's *Symposium*, the *De Amore*, Ficino distinguishes at length between divine and bestial love. Chapter III, entitled *De amore ferino, quod insanie speties est* ("Of bestial love, which is a kind of insanity"), is dedicated to the second of these. Ficino begins by citing Plato's distinction in in the *Phaedrus* between "two kinds of alienation. One he thinks comes from human illnesses, and the other from God."[32] The latter is a good form of alienation; it is, as Ficino will explain in a later chapter, "an illumination of the rational soul through which, after the soul has fallen from higher things to lower, God draws it back from lower to higher."[33] The topic of Chapter 3, however, is the "bestial love"

[32] See Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*, ed. and trans. Sears Jayne, 158. For the Latin original, see *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon*, ed. Raymond Marcel.
[33] Ibid.,168.

which "comes from human illnesses: "In the sickness of insanity, a man is brought down below the species of man and in some degree is changed from a man into a beast."[34] The sources of such insanity are essentially physical in nature. Not only does it play no part in the elevation of the mind to higher things, it is actually a deeply debasing condition:

> The brain often becomes too much occupied with burned bile, burned blood, or sometimes black bile. Hence men are sometimes rendered insane. Those who are troubled by burned bile, though provoked by no one, are violently enraged, scream loudly, attack those they meet, and kill themselves and others.[35]

The madness to which Orlando falls victim in Canto 23 exhibits precisely these symptoms. Having thrown off his clothes, Orlando rages madly around, killing everyone he encounters. He appears to lose not only his senses but any sense of self whatsoever; he does not even recognize Angelica when he sees her in Canto 29. When Brandimarte, Oliviero, Sansonetto and Dudone attempt to restrain him in Canto 39, he resists their efforts like a raging bull; only by tying him down are they able to restore his wits from the vial Astolfo obtained on the moon.

Again, Ariosto depicts only one side of what neo-Platonism construes as a clearly delineated binary, and indeed here he does so in extraordinarily accurate terms. But is the point, then, that only one half of Ficino's picture is right—that there is only bestial love, and the other, "divine" kind, to which Orlando himself had been attracted, is simply a transcendental illusion? In this final section I want to explore the possibility that Orlando's descent into "bestial" madness attracts to itself some of the functions typically attributed to the intellectual version seemingly left out. These are clearest, I will suggest, in Orlando's version of that "immanent trance" in which the mind leaves the senses without accessing a higher realm. After his trance Orlando descends into madness, but in the course of the trance itself his intellectual gifts are made clearer than ever before; afterwards, moreover, we are told that he is wiser than ever. If

[34] Ibid.,158.
[35] Ibid., 158

bestial madness does not itself lead to knowledge in the way that divine madness is supposed to do, it is nevertheless closely connected to it in a chain of psychological cause-and-effect which it is my purpose here to disentangle.

Orlando's response to the discovery of Angelica's elopement with Bradamante resembles in many ways Sacripante's bewilderment on discovering that he has been defeated by a female knight: "gran pezzo al caso intervenuto / ebbe pensato invano." Orlando, too, will think and think in response to the evidence he discovers, at once fully aware of what it means, and at the same time incapable of accepting it as true. In both cases, thinking takes place only in the face of some unassimilably painful or unprecedented event. In Canto 23 Orlando has been pursuing the pagan Mandricardo through the forest when, pausing to rest by the side of a wooded stream, he catches sight of Angelica and Medoro's names written together on the trees. In the stanzas that follow he attempts to explain this discovery away; even when presented with further evidence, he continues to devise alternative explanations:

> va col pensiero cercando in mille modi
> non creder quel ch'al suo dispetto crede:
> ch'altra Angelica sia, creder si sforza,
> ch'abbia scritto il suo nome in quella scorza. (23.103)

> A thousand ways he thinks not to believe
> That which despite himself he must believe:
> He makes himself believe it isn't his
> Angelica whose name is on the trees.

Perhaps it is another Angelica whose name is written on the bark. But he knows that the handwriting is hers. Perhaps, then, Medoro is really an alibi for himself:

> finger questo Medoro ella si puote:
> forse ch'a me questo cognome mette. (23.104)

> Perhaps she is inventing this Medor?
> Perhaps it is a pseudonym for me.

The irony is that, precisely in his frenzied effort to deceive himself, and right on the brink of succumbing to madness, we should find Orlando thinking much more intensely than any character we have seen in the poem thus far—though it is, of course, a thinking deployed against knowledge, creating the unsustainable tension which leads to his breakdown.

Each piece of evidence Ariosto encounters poses a yet greater challenge to his ingenuity, and the whole episode resembles a series of riddles in reverse. Instead of being presented with an enigma and being asked to resolve it, at each stage Orlando is presented with a fairly plain fact and attempts to turn it into a riddle, or at least into something whose meaning is *more* ambiguous than in fact it is. Orlando now discovers a poem written by Medoro to Angelica in Arabic on the entrance of a nearby cave:

> Era scritto in arabico, che 'l conte
> intendea cosí ben come latino:
> fra molte lingue e molte ch'avea pronte,
> prontissima avea quella il paladino;
> e gli schivò piu volte e danni et onte,
> che si trovò tra il popul saracino:
> ma non si vanti, se già n'ebbe frutto;
> ch'un danno or n'ha, che può scontargli il tutto. (23.110)
>
> In Arabic it was, a language which
> As readily as Latin our count spoke;
> Indeed amidst the many tongues he knew
> Especially in that one he was quick.
> But if ofttimes among the infidels,
> It saved Orlando from untimely wrack,
> For him to boast of that would now be vain:
> The pain it causes nullifies all gain.

It is his knowledge of Arabic that betrays him here, since it enables him to read and understand clearly what would otherwise have remained impenetrable. The irony is that a text which even for even a learned contemporary of Ariosto would have presented an insurmountable riddle, for

Orlando is instantly transparent. And it is that clarity itself that he resists, attempting vainly to make it say something other than what it says:

> Tre volte e quattro e sei lesse lo scritto
> Quello infelice, e pur cercando invano
> Che non vi fosse quel che v'era scritto;
> E sempre lo vedea più chiaro e piano
> Et ogni volta in mezzo il petto afflitto
> Stringersi il cor sentia con fredda mano.
> Rimase al fin con gli occhi e con la mente
> Fissi nel sasso, al sasso indifferente. (23.111)

> Three times and four the wretched Paladin
> Pored over every line of the cruel writ;
> The more he hoped to find that he was wrong
> The clearer and the plainer he saw it,
> And every time he felt his heart grow faint
> By a cold arrow in the center hit.
> At last his mind and eyes no longer bent,
> Fixed on the stone, from it no different.

The neo-Platonist stares at hieroglyphic script and, in his incomprehension, believes he is attaining a deeper level of truth. Orlando stares at an equally difficult script in a state of equally deep stupor, and yet it is precisely his lucid comprehension that he is withstanding. That perspicacity which, in reference to the narrator himself, De Sanctis calls "la piena chiarezza della visione," seems, in Orlando's case, to be the flipside of a trance which leaves him in a state of stone-like insentience. Thus it is not sufficient to point out that, in neo-Platonic terms, this is a "bad" or "bodily" kind of stupefaction, and subsequently of madness as well. For the neo-Platonic hierarchy has been not merely excluded, divided, or parodied—it has been inverted. Precisely through acts of unwillingly lucid intellection—ostensibly the end-points of a

contemplation which takes us out of our body—Orlando instead descends into a material and bodily stupor, the *imbecillitas* described by Monte, and, finally, into Ficino's bestial madness.[36]

Thus Ariosto is not merely satirizing the neo-Platonic theory of *furor*; rather he is showing how closely bound together are the very terms it would keep separate, the bodily and the intellectual. As with Sacripante, it is precisely the effort of thought, in the face of a fact which he cannot change, which induces a trance-like state of stupefaction, though unlike Sacripante Orlando, or at least a significant part of him, is perfectly cognizant of what has happened. The phrase "con gli occhi e con la mente" parses his condition further, suggesting that his eyes, his senses, have been severed from his mind, which refuses to fully register or process what the eyes are seeing. Since sight requires the cooperation of the mind to process what it transmits, without a mind accepting what it sees sight is reduced to a useless, concrete eyeball, "occhi" that are no different, indeed, than a stone. The brute embodiment which, in the theory of divine furor, is the antithesis of contemplation and the freedom from error, here instead seems to go hand-in-hand with such freedom. Indeed insofar as the mind refuses the organs of the body in this scene, far from transcending illusion it is instead seen to be refusing acknowledgment of truth. Clarity and truth, meanwhile, are located precisely in the sphere of the stone-like, intransigent and inescapable body, in the context of which the mind represents a principle of deluded resistance.[37] In its stasis the trance represents an unwilling interruption, rare in the

[36] Or as Ascoli puts it: "the fall into conscious self-knowledge, which travesties the Platonic imperative, leads immediately into a fall out of consciousness into madness or death." See *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony*, 318.

[37] Rocco Montano eloquently describes the *Furioso*'s acknowledgment of corporeality, which he explicitly contrasts to neo-Platonic idealism: "di fronte a questo platonismo che si sperdeva in un vacuo spiritualismo ed in un superficiale estetismo, di fronte all'illusione che attraverso la contemplazione della forma bella ci si elevasse al divino, sorga tragica la coscienza di una realtà corporea che non si può né rinnegare del tutto né superare con un facile idealism ma è destinata a costituire l'insoppromibile premessa della nostra attività morale e di tutta la nostra vita spirituale" ("in the face of this Platonism which lost itself in empty spiritualism and a superficial aestheticism, in the face of the illusion that one

Orlando Furioso, in the restless operations of error and self-delusion; thus if it gives us an idea of what it is like to face the truth about the world and about ourselves, it suggests that such truth is not experienced a final stopping-point of contemplative ascent but rather an involuntary moment of disruption and arrest.

When Sacripante was unhorsed by Bradamante, and when Bradamante herself beheld Ruggiero disappearing into the sky, these characters were hurled into similar states of paralysis and disbelief. Bradamante, we will recall, "non riede per lungo spazio al sentimento vero": she is seeing but cannot fully believe or accept what she sees. That scene is now recalled as Ariosto continues: "fu allor per uscir del sentimento." In Orlando's case the phrase, without the qualifying "vero," suggests the self-loss of madness and not simply sensory stupefaction; on the other hand he is still placed only at the brink of such self-loss. He is still able to keep madness at a distance for a while, but it is only by continuing to seek out deception where, for once, there is none:

> Poi ritorna in sé alquanto, e pensa come
> possa esser che non sia la cosa vera:
> che voglia alcun cosi infamare il nome
> de la sua donna e crede e brama e spera. (23.104)
>
> Regaining some possession of himself
> He tries to think how it might not be true:
> That perhaps someone had wished to slander thus
> His lady's name, he hopes—believes it too.

Such delusion, the next stanza tells us, "sveglia gli spirti e gli rinfranca un poco" ("revives his spirits and gives them new life"). In the next chapter we will see how Spenser conceives of his stounds in terms of a petrification of the Galenic spirits; a similar account is implicit here. But

---

could rise to the divine through the contemplation of the beautiful forms, there emerges the tragic awareness of a corporeal reality that can be neither fully denied nor transcended by a facile idealism, but which is rather destined to become the irrepressible premise of our moral activity and all our spiritual life.") See "La Follia di Orlando," 186.

while Spenser will be more interested than Ariosto in the physiology of stupefaction, Ariosto is more acute about its psychological underpinnings: here it is very clear that, for Orlando, the capacity to think and the capacity to deceive himself are one and the same, and the senses are only functional insofar as they contribute to this self-sustaining circuit. It is for this reason that sensory stupefaction and knowledge—that is, beliefs that are true, and not merely wishful illusions—are so closely related here and throughout the *Orlando Furioso*.

Orlando is thus caught in a double bind, torn between truth and self-control. The nature of that double bind becomes clear as he now decamps wearily to a nearby village, where, as luck would have it, Angelica had tended to the wounded Medoro; once more he finds "Angelica and Medoro" written everywhere. He is tempted to ask but decides to try to ignore it:

> tien le labra chete;
> che teme non si far troppo serena,
> troppo chiara la cosa che di nebbia
> cerca offuscar, perché men nuocer debbia. (23.118)
>
> He keeps quiet,
> Fearing lest he make too clear and plain
> The thing that he would rather have lie low,
> And being too clear it prove a cause of woe.

It is an expressive detail: Orlando himself recognizes the danger in which clarity place his him, and does his best to suppress it, to put it out of mind. The detail serves to preempt the moral criticism often leveled against lovers in the Renaissance, and against victims of psychological malady more generally: Orlando is by no means, like so many other Renaissance lovers, a willing accomplice in his own distraction. But in order to maintain his equilibrium, to stay in possession of his faculties, he must (and he knows it now) lie to himself. And in a typically Ariostan twist of the knife, the shepherd who has put him up, not knowing who he is and seeing that he is suffering, tries to console him by telling him the story of Angelica and Medoro. In

conclusion, the shepherd shows Orlando a ring which he had given her, and which she in turn had given to the shepherd in exchange for his hospitality. It is this piece of evidence which, finally, pushes Orlando over the brink.

Orlando's madness is thus the consequence of too much knowledge, and not of any moral or, certainly, intellectual failings on his part. Despite his valiant efforts to "offuscar," he is repeatedly confronted with fresh evidence of Angelica's elopement, whose final effect is:

> che rimase offuscato in ogni senso. (23.134)
>
> He was eclipsed by darkness in each sense.

What Ariosto contributes to Ficino's account, then, is the idea that, far from bestial love being the result of a pathological disease which clouds the senses and the mind, such disease might, on the contrary, result from too *much* clarity. "Bestial love," on Ficino's account of it, has no place for any kind of mental activity at all; Ariosto, more acutely, shows the intertwining of Orlando's uncontrollable passion with a frenzy of misplaced logical thinking. If such thinking seems only distantly related to any kind of elevating contemplation, it is worth recalling the self-deception that almost everywhere else in the poem is the norm. As Albert Ascoli reminds us: "[w]hat is genuinely astonishing in a poem where self-deception is the rule, and divorce between language and reality its first corollary, is that "poco gli giovar usar fraude a se stesso."[38] Like Plato, like Ficino, Ariosto depicts a sublunary world in which all knowledge is based on opinion and all opinion is mediated by the deceptions of the senses. But when the veil of self-deception is finally broken, it is broken in a trance and in a subsequent *furor* which, far from elevating Orlando above his body and his senses, instead explicitly reduce him to a raging beast.

Madness as Limit-Experience

[38] *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony*, 324. See 323-331 for Ascoli's elaboration of this insight.

Or do they? In my introduction I suggested that loss of consciousness need not merely be seen as a destructive phenomenon, that it could also have a positive or exploratory dimension; we saw both elements in balance with each other when Bradamante lost her "sentimento vero." Of course, as Orlando's knowledge of Arabic serves to remind us—just before he loses his mind—that, like Othello after him, the Count is already knight who "has it all": not only unbeaten and unbeatable in battle, he is also learned, well-spoken, and high-minded.[39] Though it is not too difficult to find, as countless readers have done, flaws and psychological debilities to which we can ascribe his subsequent breakdown, to do so seems in a way to be missing the point of the emphasis on his intellectual acumen. Would such madness be as significant if it happened to, say, Sacripante or Pinabello? What we have just seen is that Orlando's fall into madness comes about at least in part as a result of the inescapability, the completeness even, of his knowledge—beyond Latin and, presumably, all of the European languages he knows Arabic too, as well if not better. But one could therefore hazard that Orlando's madness is, in a sense, not the result of an imperfection but rather of the opposite—a cognitive excess which presupposes, precisely, the attainment of perfection humanistically conceived in terms of martial valor, political ability, courtly grace, and finally letters and languages—and which pushes, ineluctably but inexplicably, beyond such completeness into a cognitive territory altogether unknown.[40]

Perhaps, this is to suggest, the exploration of such territory is more seductive, more of a motivation unto itself, than at first appears—perhaps it is, in other words, as form of "limit-experience" that we should really understand Orlando's madness. Alien as it may seem to the world of Ariosto, Blanchot's account of the "limit-experience" begins with an affirmation very

[39] For Orlando's "exemplary wisdom and "humanistic" linguistic skills," see *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony*
[40] Chesney's notion of the "countervoyage" results in a not dissimilar vision of Orlando's madness: "Even as they parody those who profess to "know," Orlando and Panurge are at the same time breaking away from "ignorant learnedness" (as opposed to "learned ignorance") and seeking a truth outside the bounds of reason, civilization, and culture." See *Countervoyage*, 190.

familiar to the Renaissance, and especially to the Italian humanism whose crisis Orlando represents:

> Au fond, l'homme déjà est tout! Il l'est dans son project, il est toute la vérité à venir de ce tout de l'univers qui ne se soutient que par lui, il l'est sous la forme du sage dont le discours comprend toutes les possibilités du discours accompli…. L'expérience-limite est celle qui attend cet home ultime, capable une dernière fois de ne pas s'arrêter à cette suffisance qu'il atteint; elle est le désir de l'homme sans désir, l'insatisfaction de celui qui est satisfait "en tout", le pur défaut, là où il y a cependant accomplissement d'être.[41]

> At bottom, man is already everything! He is so in his project, insofar as he is all the truth to come from that whole of the universe that holds only through him; he is so in the form of the sage whose discourse includes all the possibilities of a finished discourse….The limit-experience is the experience that awaits this ultimate man, the man who one last time is capable of not stopping at the sufficiency he has attained: the desire of he who is without desire, the dissatisfaction of he who is "wholly" satisfied, pure lack where there is nonetheless accomplishment of being.[42]

Such a description seems to me to contain a powerful account of what Ariosto has in mind when he promises to tell of Orlando

> cosa non detta in prosa mai né in rima:
> che per amor venne in furore e matto,
> d'uom che sí saggio era stimato prima. (1.2)

> What never yet was said in rhyme or prose:
> How love made mad and drove at last insane
> That man who once was wiser than all men.

To read these lines with Blanchot in mind is to see Orlando's madness less as a degradation than as a deviation, less self-loss than self-transcendence, a journey into a territory heretofore unknown which at once completes and surpasses everything we take to be characteristically human. It is to see it as a philosophical investigation that can only take place as a form of experience. And it is, by the same token, to locate it beyond the interpretative grasp of all economies which would relate, for example, experience to knowledge or madness to wisdom, as well as of all hierarchies which would place man in relation to God on the one hand and the

[41] Maurice Blanchot, *L'Entretien Infini*, 302-204.
[42] *The Infinite Conversation,* trans. Susan Hanson, 204-205.

animal on the other. Thus it is, effectively, to locate it beyond any interpretation whatsoever, and in this sense to make it a cipher for experience as such.

Ariosto's emphasis on Orlando's madness per se, if read along these lines, causes the themes of love and indeed of love-melancholy to fade in importance. Ariosto had inherited from Boiardo an Orlando who was already love-sick; thus when he announces that he will describe "cosa non detta in prosa mai né in rima," it cannot merely be a question of increasing the degree of that love-sickness, or—*pace* Beer, Marinelli, and Wells—of changing its classification. What the lengthy account of Orlando's trance and subsequent madness shows is that to be *Furioso* and not merely *Innamorato* is to sever all relation to the object who inspires the love in the first place, and to enter a space beyond all recognition of self or other or of the difference between them. By analyzing that condition in terms of symptoms, whether medical or metaphysical, we miss the import of its presentation as something truly *singular*, something which bears no comparison with anything ever said in rhyme or in prose. It is not merely that no one has ever written a poem about madness; it is that such madness itself is unprecedented, not merely in degree but in type. While love might be its trigger it in no way explains or motivates the state to which Orlando is ultimately reduced. Ariosto is knowingly pushing him into a space that exceeds all explanatory and diagnostic concepts.

More specifically, this means that Orlando's madness does not simply blur the Ficinian distinction between divine and bestial love, but rather renders it altogether irrelevant, that no permutation of Ficino's categories can really account for Orlando's experience. If, as I have suggested, his madness does seem to belong to Ficino's bestial class, it can nonetheless also be seen as questioning the notion that we "descend" into such madness, that there is in other words a stable line between the human and the animal which Orlando simply crosses. The emphasis on

his learning means that his madness calls humanity into question in a different way, and raises the possibility that he might pass *beyond* and not simply sink beneath the human. For it enables Ariosto to suggest that the cultivation of the preeminently human faculties (language, reason) cannot fully exhaust what it is to be human, that, in other words, there is a space beyond such attainment in which our humanity is even more essentially, though more mysteriously, at stake.

What I have been calling the "immanent trance" takes us beyond the senses and the body, beyond the intellect even, and yet it does not simply substitute for these a higher presence whether divine or authorial—nor, for that matter, a bestial and supposedly lower presence. It makes of our humanity something that we can only experience, rather than name or classify, something irreducible to a hierarchical organization of faculties, even in an inverted form. Orlando's madness is an exemplary instance of such experience, excessive not in the sense that it represents some disharmony in the relations between higher and lower faculties, but rather in that it marks a total transformation:

> Non son, non sono io quel che paio in viso:
> quel ch'era Orlando è morto et è sotterra;
> la sua donna ingratissima l'ha ucciso:
> sí, mancando di fé, gli ha fatto guerra.
> Io son lo spirto suo da lui diviso,
> ch'in questo inferno tormentandosi erra,
> acciò con l'ombra sia, che sola avanza,
> esempio a chi in Amor pone speranza. (23.128)
>
> I am not he who I appear to be;
> For he who was Orlando now lies dead,
> Slain by that most ungrateful paramour
> Whose faithlessness waged war upon his head.
> I am his spirit severed from himself,
> Who now in this infernal torment tread
> That my shade may a sad example serve
> To all who hope from love more to deserve.

Who is speaking here? Since Orlando now goes silent, it is tempting to read this speech as his last self-conscious utterance before descending into oblivion.[43] Yet to take the speech at its word, he has already reached it: this is the voice of Orlando's "spirit" already fully divided from himself. Such a voice is then not merely the declaration of his madness but also its clearest symptom and expression, a voice belonging to an essentially alien presence, a speech uttered in a trance. Far from being an abandonment to the body and the passions, such a trance is, on the contrary, the experience of a voice without a history or an identity, of a spirit without body. It is the mysterious fact of consciousness itself, apprehended in its alienating purity. Beyond the exercise and the perfection of the mind, the "immanent trance" is this experience of consciousness in its fundamental alienness to the self, as alien in its way as the voice of Hermes' interlocutor in the *Pimander*, even though it finds its origin nowhere other than in the self's depths.

Such a voice stands outside all hierarchies and all economies. And indeed it is only as a voice, as the dispossession of a fundamentally alienating relationship to language, rather than as the extremity of a passion that Orlando's madness can bear comparison to Blanchot's notion of the limit-experience. Yet the extremity of his madness is also necessary, necessary precisely as the marker of that alienation, rendering it authentic and not merely a rhetorical pose. If it were less total and less destructive, or if his own previous behavior had been more obviously immoral or intemperate, it would be easier to speak of it as a necessary purgative, and to see the poem, in accordance with a familiar view of it, in terms of a final harmony both comic and cosmic; his story would then resemble that of Ruggiero, who undergoes a more classic (and more proto-Spenserian) purgation and education after his seduction by Alcina. When Orlando emerges from his trance in sixteen Cantos later, it is, admittedly, as a being who is, as it were, sadder and wiser:

[43] As Paolo Valesio does in his article on "The Language of Madness in the Renaissance."

ritornò la mente al primier uso
E ne' suoi bei discorsi l'inelletto
Rivenne, piú che mai lucido e netto.

Come chi da noioso e grave sonno,
ove o vedere abominevol forme
di mostri che non son, né ch'esser ponno,
o gli par cosa far strana et enorme,
ancor si maraviglia, poi che donno
è fatto de' suoi sensi, e che non dorme;
cosí, poi che fu Orlando d'error tratto,
restò maraviglioso e stupefatto. (39.42-43)

His mind returned to its first pristine use;
His intellect, with all its former skill,
Returned, now sharper and more lucid still.

As one who from a heavy, troubled sleep
Where he beheld the foulest kind of beast,
And monsters who do not and can't exist,
Or thought that he had done some strange great quest,
Awakes and yet still marvels at his dreams,
Though of his senses he's once more possessed:
Likewise Orlando, from his error freed,
Remained bemused and wholly stupefied.

Yet despite his being "piú che mai lucido e netto," it hard to see how Orlando's restoration to sanity and deepened wisdom are in any way the *effects* of a madness that could then be seen as therapeutic; it is hard, that is, to see that madness as a necessary passage for him except insofar as it horrifies and, indeed, stupefies him to look back on it. If we compare it to, for example, the temporary madness of the male lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the extremity of Orlando's madness and his self-loss, and its disproportion to both its cause and to his final *rinsavimento* become clear. It is almost as if Ariosto is attempting to exclude the idea that there might be some kind of redemptive harmony whereby all our errors, follies and passions turn out to be necessary steps on the way to enhanced wisdom. Instead, in place not only of wisdom but also of madness, what the striking language of this stanza reveals is an experience *of*

experience—a belated awareness that, through the madness and self-loss, he was in some way alive, active, and even sentient, just as the sentience we experience in dreams can only be made conscious retrospectively. But since it happens across a threshold that is not only temporal but divides him in two, Orlando's experience of experience is very close to an experience of *non*-experience, or at least of an experience which does not befall *him*. Both Spenser and Montaigne will explore that threshold, and the experience of non-experience that it makes possible, in much more depth.

Orlando's sanity is in fact restored by Astolfo, who in the famous Canto 34 travels to the moon, where he locates Orlando's wits in a vial; in Canto 39 Orlando, bound and held down by Astolfo, Sansonetto, and Dudone, inhales his wits from the vial and becomes sane again. The fantastical and at the same time ironically literal quality of that episode underscore, I think, the irreducibility of Orlando's state, the fact that there is no moral doctrine nor any esoteric knowledge that would have helped Orlando, already wise, to avoid it, nor any great lesson to be drawn from it afterwards. Instead it has served simply to isolate a vitality subtending consciousness and reason—chaotic and horrifying to be sure, but in the end no less a part of human experience than those more "rational" attributes. In fact there is something almost quaintly straightforward and quotidian about the way that, in the end, Orlando merely "wakes up" from his madness; for all its extremity, Orlando's passion, like all human passions and indeed like most of what we count as "experience" itself, simply comes to an end. He simply wakes up one day to discover that "colei, che sí bella e gentile / gli parve dianzi, e ch'avea tanto amato / non stima piú se non per cosa vile" ("She that had seemed so beautiful before / And whom he had so passionately loved / Now strikes him as no better than a whore.") His passion

simply subsides. If he comes out "wiser" nonetheless, it is not through any knowledge he has obtained, but merely through having experienced it.

But that quiet resolution conceals a surprising consequence. For to suggest that such an experience is a form of knowledge is to argue for a form of knowledge radically unlike that with which we are familiar. We typically understand knowledge as a belief which corresponds to a state of affairs in the world. And we have seen how, in a world where such knowledge is everywhere else unavailable, Orlando himself does indeed attain it. And yet beyond such knowledge there is an experience of experience itself—of our being-in-the-world in its sheer happening, before and beyond comprehension and identification—that, whether we call it knowledge or not, is the foundation of any more specific, propositional forms of cognition. While such an experience is presupposed by all of our knowledge it remains for the most part veiled, precisely beneath such knowledge. Thus if Orlando breaks through to it here, it is, however fundamental such experience might be, a miraculous and unprecedented feat. And far from being either beastly or divine, such experience is human in the most essential sense.

Chapter Two
Allegory, Consciousness, and Self-Feeling in the Spenserian "Stound"

Like many characters in *The Faerie Queene,* Scudamour is both a brooder and a dreamer.[1] Towards the middle of Book Four of *The Faerie Queene*, we encounter him riding along in a state of particular disaffection: egged on by the hag Ate, he has started to suspect his beloved Amoret of betraying him, and the thought is gnawing at him with sharpening vigor. Looking for a place to spend the night, Scudamour stumbles into what appears to be a smithy. Unsurprisingly, it is a difficult place to fall asleep—"The bellowes noyse disturb'd his quiet rest""—and when he does finally manage to doze off, it is not for very long:

> With that, the wicked carle the maister Smith
> A pairse of redwhot yron tongs did take
> Out of his burning cinders, and therewith
> Under his side him nipt, that forst to wake,
> He felt his hart for very paine to quake,
> And started up avenged for to be
> On him, the which his quiet slomber brake:
> Yet looking round about him none could see
> Yet did the smart remaine, though he himself did flee. (4.5.44)

The "House of Care" is, of course, simply an allegorical projection of Scudamour's inner turmoil, and this may serve to explain why it disappears when he wakes up, like a dream whose reality is purely subjective. But the problem is that Scudamour was already in the House of Care before he fell asleep, and indeed it was the noise of the House itself which kept him from falling asleep, as it is its "maister Smith" who wakes him up now; meanwhile no mention of a dream is made. Here and throughout much of *The Faerie Queene*, dream and reality are like the two sides of a Mobius strip: they always appear to be distinct, and yet if we trace one we soon discover that it turns into the other without any apparent crossing having been made. The thread which unites

[1] This chapter is adapted from my article "Anatomy of a Stound: Allegory and Physiology in Book II of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*."

them, the single side we may trace through both folds of the strip, is physical "smart": "Yet did the smart remaine."

It would seem that, in the mature Spenser of *The Faerie Queene*, the logic of his earlier dream-visions, in which waking consciousness is displaced by a higher, visionary state, has given way to a more subtle depiction of a threshold *between* sleep and waking—but it is a threshold which often looms larger than either of the states it modulates between, encompassing them both. The characters experience this threshold, moreover, only in state of "smart" or, as in Red Crosse's case, "bitter anguish" (1.2.6). Dreams and states of consciousness in the later Spenser are no longer the ideal, disembodied visions of his youth; rather they are inseparable from corporeal states of pain, anguish, and shock—of, in a term which Joseph Campana has made salient, vulnerability.[2] If we wish to speak of Spenser as a poet of consciousness, this cannot be in a sense which would render *The Faerie Queene* a poem purely eidetic in nature: rather we have to take into account the close relation, throughout the poem, between abstract mental states and more physical and hence "real" or material forms of experience.[3]

Like the *Orlando Furioso*, *The Faerie Queene* abounds in such states, moments of feeling so intense that they arrest the flow of action and root characters to the ground in a statuesque immobility. It abounds, in other words, in those "immanent trances" which, as in Ariosto, deprive a character of his senses without necessarily transporting him or her beyond them. Such states might in fact be seen as characteristic of romance as a genre:

> We suggest, on the contrary, that the strangely active and pulsating vitality of the "world" or romance, much like Stanislaw Lem's sentient ocean in Solaris, tends to absorb many of the act-

[2] Joseph Campana, *The Pain of Reformation,* 4: "Spenser makes vulnerability central to his idea of virtue, which he understands in a root sense as being related to manliness. Masculinity, or manliness, must then be reformed to accommodate vulnerability and an openness to the pain of others."
[3] See Campana and in particular chapter 3, "On Not Defending Poetry." Campana writes: "Spenser foregrounds what is most vital and moving about poetry by turning away from forceful visuality and locating an energy in intense experiences of physical and affective pain" (108).

> and event-producing functions normally reserved for narrative "characters"; to use Kenneth Burke's dramatistic terminology, we might say that in romance the category of Scene tends to capture and to appropriate the attributed of Agency and Act, making the "hero" over into something like a registering apparatus for transformed states of being, sudden alterations of temperature, mysterious heightenings, local intensities, sudden drops in quality, and alarming effluvia, in short, the whole semic range of transformation scenes whereby, in romance, higher and lower worlds struggle to overcome each other.[4]

That state which Spenser calls the "stound" is an exemplary instance of these "transformed states of being," and it is used by Spenser to cover the whole range of states which Jameson lists here. The "stound," we will see, is on the surface of it very different from dream-states often associated with Spenser, as well as from the ecstatic trances of neo-Platonism. Often described in a phrase beginning with "all his senses"—"all his senses stound, that still he lay full low"—the stound is a moment in which all sensory perception is inhibited without a compensatory moment of imaginative or intellectual vision. Guyon's trance in Book II, for example, could easily lead to a dream, yet it does not—Guyon is simply devoid of any perception, inner or outer, altogether. Nor can the stound be be understood as simply one more aspect of Spenser's medievalism. Swoons were a regular occurrence in medieval English narrative, often introduced with little commentary and little sense of their significance.[5] But though *The Faerie Queene* certainly features medievalizing swoons (as when Cymoent "swowned thrise," 3.4.35), in the following pages I want to suggest that Guyon's swoon, and other moments like it, go beyond archaism to adumbrate a whole account of human experience, one which is quite distinctive to Spenser and which is forward-looking rather than conservative in nature. Such moments force us to develop a notion of non-subjective physical experience, distinct both from consciousness in the sense of first-person awareness and from the translated consciousness of dream-visions.

---

[4] See Frederic Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 112.
[5] See Barry Windeatt, "The Art of Swooning." It is his medievalism, I suspect, which leads C.S. Lewis to see Guyon's swoon as "mere story." See *Spenser's Images of Life*, 31.

Focusing on such states thus need not mean abandoning the notion of consciousness or thought altogether. On the contrary, in this chapter I want to suggest that Spenser's concept of the "stound" bespeaks an exploration of human consciousness broader and more nuanced than that permitted under the rubric of the dream-vision. In particular it speaks to a vision of consciousness as a *vulnerable mode of thought.* I will try to show how a consciousness that is capable of being disrupted or destroyed is a consciousness intimately tied to our nature as living, breathing, embodied and hence fragile beings. It is a material vitality that, insofar as it cannot simply be identified with first-person awareness, has an oddly impersonal quality, manifesting in moments where the first-person is suspended and the body takes over—something which happens signally in Guyon's trance. Yet if the stound, instead of leading to the visionary reality of the dream-poet, instead violently re-embeds the hero in his body in an experience that seems to occlude consciousness altogether, there nevertheless *is* a form of peripheral or threshold awareness in such moments (otherwise why speak of consciousness at all?). Though the "stound" functions in the first place as a disruption of consciousness, at the same time it induces a moment of intense and painful self-experience—a feeling of our own vulnerability, of the non-self at the heart of the self, made palpable in the discontinuity of awareness as we normally understand the term and challenging any simple distinction between consciousness and its other, whether this be a dream state or simply non-consciousness. In Books I and II it is the role of the "stound" to instill this *feeling* of vulnerability in a character who otherwise believes himself to be impregnable, and in this sense it proves essential to his moral development. It is such a feeling, moreover, and not the "other" reality of the dream-poet, that truly grounds the "other-speaking" of Spenserian allegory.

"Stounds" from Chaucer to Spenser

Today the word "stound" is largely obsolete, but its original meaning seems to have been "a time, while; a short time, moment" (*OED n.,* 1a), and it is in this sense that we find it in Chaucer, for example in *Troilus and Criseyde*: "Now lat us stinte of Troilus a stounde." In this meaning it derives from a German word for a unit of time (from which we have the modern German *stunde*, hour), by extension of which it can also mean "a hard time, a time of trial or pain" (*OED n.,* 1.2a). Meanwhile in a second, related branch of meanings, it refers to "a state of stupefaction or amazement" (*OED n.,* 2). In this second branch, however, the word apparently derives not from Germanic but rather from a Latin word for amazement, *attonitus* or thunderstruck. A third range of meanings, meanwhile, is particularly relevant to Spenser, for it involves pain and wounding: "a sharp pain, a pang; a fierce attack, a shock" (*OED n.*, 1.2b) ; **"**To be acutely painful; to smart, throb" (*OED* v., 1.2b).

The double etymology of the word "stound," along with its range of possible meanings, yields some preliminary hints as to its narrative significance. To combine the word's two etymologies is to imagine a unit of time which is also a unit of feeling: a moment, one might surmise, in which we feel time's passing so acutely that, paradoxically, it appears to slow down. Such a state is not after all so inconceivable, for to feel time so intensely that it stops is precisely what happens to us in experiences of intense pain—in a "stound" in that third sense of pain and wound. As Elaine Scarry and others have reminded us, intense pain has the capacity to shut down selfhood and even awareness by causing the "disintegration of the contents of consciousness."[6] Even if we are not literally unconscious, under the pressure of intense pain we

[6] See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 48. Michael Schoenfeldt's discussion of "Shakespearean Pain" in *Shakespearean Sensations* echoes her account. Meanwhile in *Pain and Compassion*, Jan Frans van Dijkuizen challenges the relevance of Scarry's notion to the Early Modern period, suggesting instead that Early Modern pain was an essentially shared phenomenon.

are so dominated by our senses that, paradoxically, sentience itself seems to shut down: "as the prisoner's sentience destroys his world, so now his absence of world, as described earlier, destroys the claims of sentience."[7] With this in mind we can see how the distinction between consciousness and loss of consciousness might be a question of degrees rather than of absolute difference, indeed how under certain conditions the heightening of consciousness might be indistinguishable from its loss. It is, then, between the calm detachment of ordinary self-awareness and the total darkness of the trance that the varieties of the Spenserian "stound" may be located; following some of the vagaries of the word, in Spenser and in other authors, will thus allow us to think about the problem of consciousness more broadly in this period.

Even before Spenser, the word "stound" covers a range of conscious, unconscious, and semi-conscious states, all in some way implicated in an experience of temporality. In John Skelton's "Philip Sparrow," for example, the word is used in its original sense of a "a short time; a moment" (*OED n.,* 1a). But rhyming with "sound," or swoon, it also helps to convey a state of feeling, the speaker's "sorrowful heaviness":

> For within that stound,
> Half slumbering, in a sound
> I fell downe to the ground.[8]

The preposition "within" suggests that the poet is trapped or overwhelmed by the stound and his relationship to temporality intensified: the phrase conveys a sense of that intense subjection to time we feel in states of extreme pain. Thus we can see how, even when it is merely used as a temporal unit, the meaning of the word "stound" easily extends to suggest "a time of trial," and probably also to the meaning derived from *attonitus*: "a state of stupefaction or amazement"

[7] *The Body in Pain*, 38.
[8] *The New Oxford Book of Sixteenth-Century Verse*, 10.

(*OED n.,* 2). Indeed the phrase "half slumbering" confirms that this state, the "stound," even if it is not explicitly a "sound" or a trance, involves a partial occlusion of consciousness.

A "stound" thus need not be an explcit "sound," or swoon, in order to impact a character's consciousness. In Aristotle's treatise on the soul, the *De Anima,* Aristotle speaks of certain sensations which are too proximal to be sensed:

> For if one puts that which has colour right up to the eye, it will not be visible. Colour moves the transparent medium, *e.g.*, the air, and this, being continuous, acts upon the sense organ. Democritus is mistaken in thinking that if the intervening space were empty, even an ant in the sky would be clearly visible; for this is impossible. For vision occurs when the sensitive faculty is acted upon; as it cannot be acted upon, there only remains the medium to act on it, so that some medium must exist; in fact, if the intervening space were void, not merely would accurate vision be impossible, but nothing would be seen at all. (419a)[9]

Something analogous is happening in the stound: the very proximity of the sensation precludes conscious awareness of it. More so than sight and the other senses, consciousness is dependent upon—and perhaps even constituted by—by a separation between itself and its object, which could be a sensation, a thought, or an emotion. Thus in moments of violent sensation, when that separation is radically foreshortened, consciousness itself is undermined. The resulting state is one of stupefaction or amazement, in which we are unable to process—to step back from and respond to—what we experience. It is a state of paralysis such as that described by Goulding in his translation of the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. Here is his rendition of Orpheus's reaction when Eurydice is returned to Hell a second time:

> This double dying of his wife set Orphye in a stound.[10]

"Set … in a stound" is Goulding's translation of Ovid's "stupuit" ("stupuit gemina nece coniugis Orpheus"); Ovid goes on to compare Orpheus to a man turned to stone by the sight of Cerberus. Where "stupuit," a verb, refers to a violent but transient reaction, the "stound," by contrast, is

[9] See Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 107.
[10] *The. xv. bookes*, fol. 124r.

extended in time, and more thorough. The subject of a stound is not merely stunned, but transfixed—he does not react, except insofar as his very reactivity is frozen. The stound here is a stimulation of consciousness so intense that it induces its own paralysis.

Despite its often climactic position, the "stound" offers little possibility for the revelation associated, for example, with the Aristotelian *anagnorisis*. Far from enabling self-awareness, the "stound" would seem almost to obliterate it. Where the neo-Platonic *furor* purifies consciousness by separating it from the body and senses, the "stound" has precisely the opposite effect, overpowering our daily consciousness in a tide of sensory experience. It is a moment of unexpected reattachment rather than of increased detachment. Yet it is precisely in this respect that, for Spenser, the "stound" can have a morally transformative role: not through access to a conscious reality beyond the body, but rather by reminding us of the bodily vulnerability intrinsic to consciousness itself. The "stound" has little to do with self-consciousness if it is thought of as the prerogative of self-possessed and detached subjectivity. Instead, Spenserian reflexivity inhabits an intersubjective and somatic domain at the limits of our awareness and control, a domain which can only be apprehended through the language of allegory. Spenserian characters *are* "self-conscious," yet this proves to be a matter not of self-possession and detached observation, but rather of a decentered susceptibility to psychophysical states which can never be made fully transparent. And far from helping to bolster or circumscribe the self, consciousness in this sense leads inevitably to a transgression of self's limits—an experience of peripheral revelation which, for both Red Crosse and Guyon, proves extremely important.

Red Crosse: The Moral "Stound"

We have seen how Skelton and Goulding exploit the etymological and semantic ambiguity of the word "stound" to describe a temporally intensified state that involves aspects of both consciousness and unconsciousness. It is hardly surprising, then, that Spenser, with his longstanding interest in both altered states and the intermingling of Anglo-Saxon and Latinity, should have been attracted to the expressive possibilities of the word "stound"'s double history, using it some 39 times in the course of *The Faerie Queene.* Its first instance, in Book One, Canto Seven, comes at a moment of climactic self-forgetting traversed by a creeping sense of anxiety. Having defeated Sans Loy in the halls of the House of Pride, Red Crosse lies down by a fountain to rest:

> Hee feedes upon the cooling shade, and bayes
> His sweatie forehead in the breathing wynd,
> Which through the trembling leaves full gently playes
> Wherein the cheareful birds of sundry kind
> Doe chaunt sweet musick, to delight his mind. (1.7.3)

The fountain has magical powers which attest and respond, in a quasi-allegorical way, to the state of thoughtless lassitude into which Red Crosse is sinking: "[A]ll that drinke thereof, do faint and feeble grow." Red Crosse lies down "unweeting" of the fountain's debilitating effects, yet soon enough they make themselves felt:

> Hereof this gentle knight unweeting was,
> And lying downe upon the sandie graile,
> Dronke of the streame, as cleare as christall glas;
> Eftsoones his manly forces gan to fayle,
> And mightie strong was turnd to feeble frayle:
> His changed powers at first them selves not felt,
> Till crudled cold his corage gan assayle,
> And chearefull blood in fayntnes chill did melt,
> Which like a fever fit through all his body swelt.
>
> Yet goodly court he made still to his Dame,
> Pourd out in loosnesse on the grassy grownd, (1.7.7-8)

How much does Red Crosse know of what is happening to him? "Yet" might be taken to imply a Miltonic moment of choice, an act undertaken in full awareness of the alternatives faced. But on

closer inspection the passage proves to be replete with unmistakably Spenserian ambiguities, a collocation of details that we struggle to reconcile with each other and to weigh for a clear sense of Red Crosse's responsibility. At the end of the passage his state has turned to one of "crudled cold," in which "his chearefull blood in fayntnes chill did melt / which like a fever fit through all his body swelt." Is he hot or cold? Anxious or relaxed? Aroused or frigid? Does he assent or succumb? And perhaps most significantly: are we observing all of these symptoms from Red Crosse's point-of-view or from the narrator's? None of these questions can be clearly answered; what is clear is that what began as an unambiguously pleasant moment has devolved into an unbearably tense merging of oppositions barely held together by the poetry. Those oppositions would seem to be physiological in nature, perhaps drawn from the repertoire of Petrarchan contraries, and yet the effect of the third-person narration is to decenter then, suggesting a hybrid state of awareness and oblivion foreign to the eloquent self-knowledge of Petrarch. "Cold," "cheareful" and "chill" can *only* be qualitative states of feeling (a temperature is never in and of itself "cold"), yet by displacing them to the third-person, treating them as objects unto themselves, and by showing how Red Crosse simply keeps courting Una, Spenser implies that, paradoxically enough, the Knight of Holiness is unconscious of what he himself is feeling. Less, therefore, a Miltonic self whose "Right Reason" endows him with the capacity for self-government, Red Crosse at this moment resembles instead the "humoral self" described by Gail Kern Paster, a being dominated by the movements of pneumatic passions and sensations he is little able to control or even feel. Such a self, defined by the fluid exchange of humors, would seem to have little room for consciousness, at least in its Cartesian version, and *a fortiori* for the kinds of choosing attendant on it.

Yet it would be wrong to speak of Red Crosse as completely lacking in consciousness here. He seems instead to inhabit a threshold state between consciousness and unconsciousness, in which he feels something intense and unsettling, and yet does not fully feel *that* he feels it. That is the destabilizing effect, as I have already suggested, of describing first-person qualities as objects and from a third-person point-of-view, and of Spenser's ambiguous syntax. But it is even more clearly suggested in the following remarkable lines:

> His chaunged powers at first them selves not felt,
> Till crudled cold his corage gan assayle.

Spenser subtly interpolates a point, a few moments after Red Crosse has drunk of the stream but before he has been surprised by Orgoglio, in which he does apparently become aware of what is happening of him—or rather, more to the point, in which his "powers" do. That distinction is very significant, for it explains the narratorial ambiguity I have just described, the sense in which Red Crosse could be at once conscious and unconscious of his feelings. William James makes the same distinction when he argues that the "feltness" of a mental state precedes and is distinct from full consciousness of it:

> But the feltness which is its essence is its own immanent and intrinsic feltness at the moment of being experienced, and has nothing to do with the way in which future conscious acts may feel about it.[11]

What the humoral model fails fully to allow for in Spenser's sequence is its careful location of a moment, along these lines, of "feltness" at the threshold between consciousness and unconsciousness. To say that his powers are able (or not able) to feel themselves is to suggest that while Red Crosse himself may remain unaware of them, there is nevertheless a threshold of peripheral or vestigial self-awareness, one occupying the margins of consciousness as it is traditionally understood.

[11] William James, *Essays in Psychology*, 142.

There are, we might hypothesize, three different degrees implied here. The first is the state of total self-forgetting in which Red Crosse begins the sequence. The third, meanwhile, is a state of waking consciousness—into which, as we will shortly see, Red Crosse is impelled by the arrival of Orgoglio. But between the two is a second, threshold state in which feelings are aware of themselves without fully registering on the level of first-person consciousness. This is a state of "feltness," a reflexivity which is not, however, the same as self-consciousness. Such a threshold cannot be captured by the distinction between first- and third-person, self and other—rather it seems to happen precisely on the margin between them, between the impersonal processes of the body and the subjective "theater" of the mind. If Spenser's line implies that the powers do eventually feel themselves, it is significant that he chooses to remind us that at first they do not, as if that self-directed sentience were extremely close to a form of insentience. Red Crosse, we must remember, is under the influence of what is essentially a fast-acting narcotic, and in trying to imagine how this threshold feels, we might think about what it is like to take go under general anesthesia or even to die—to feel our consciousness rapidly ebbing into the darkness of blind physiological process. It is not enough to think of falling asleep, for the sensation is one of a slippage from consciousness into unconsciousness so rapid and involuntary that, right before the brink, we remain conscious enough to resist and take stock of what is happening to us. Indeed Spenser's description of the fount suggests that it is unnaturally potent, a kind of mythological anesthetic capable of effecting such an abrupt transition, in which his powers feel themselves suddenly being usurped.

With this lead-up in mind, we can see how the "stound" which follows amounts to more than an overpowering and unexpected blow. Instead it is a surfacing which presupposes events and processes already taking place below the level of conscious awareness—Orgoglio was, after

all, prefigured by the person of Pride. There appears to be little in Red Crosse's current lassitude, reprehensible though it may be, to evoke again this particular sin, but its unexpected recurrence seems to be part of the point: pride is always present but is often unconscious, a matter of assumptions and habits rather than consciously held attitudes, so that it is at once surprising and predictable when Orgoglio now leaps out of the wood, handily overthrows Red Crosse, and drags him away to an underground cell. The word "stownd" occurs at the end of the battle, which also marks the arithmetical center of Book One:

> Yet goodly court he made still to his Dame,
> Pourd out in loosnesse on the grassy grownd,
> Both carelesse of his health, and of his fame:
> Till at the last he heard a dreadfull sownd,
> Which through the wood loud bellowing, did rebownd,
> That all the earth for terrour seemd to shake,
> And trees did tremble. Th'Elfe therewith astownd,
> Vpstarted lightly from his looser make,
> And his vnready weapons gan in hand to take.
>
> […]
>
> That when the knight he sypde, he gan advaunce
> With huge force and insupportable mayne,
> And towards him with dreadfull fury praunce;
> Who haplesse, and eke hopelesse, all in vaine
> Did to him pace, sad battaile to darrayne,
> Disarmd, disgraste, and inwardly dismayed,
> And eke so faint in every ioynt and vayne,
> Through that fraile fountain, which him feeble made,
> That scarsely could he weeld his bootlesse single blade.
>
> The Geaunt strooke so maynly mercilesse,
> That could have overthrown a stony towre,
> And were not hevenly grace, that him did blesse,
> He had beene pouldred all, as thin as flowre:
> But he was wary of that deadly stowre,
> And lightly lept from underneath the blow:
> Yet so exceeding was the villeins powre
> That with the winde it did him overthrow,
> And all his sences stound, that still he lay full low. (1.7.11-12)

If my reading of the preceding sequence is correct, the "stound" is not simply a moment of complete surprise—nor, for that matter, is it simply an allegorical *prise de conscience*. There

were, we saw, already movements of what we might call "humoral self-awareness" within Red Crosse, even if he himself remained unconscious of them. The appearance of Orgoglio, leaving Red Crosse completely "astownd," is simply the final eruption of awareness, the crossing of the threshold from oblivion to knowledge— making Red Crosse at once "inwardly dismayed," and "wary of that deadly stowre." Red Crosse's wariness means that he has finally crossed the threshold, presided over by the "stound," between unconsciousness and consciousness, yet by locating this crossing *after* the more bodily moment of reflexivity, by emphasizing Red Crosse's unpreparedness, Spenser suggests that it is, as it were, too little too late—and that perhaps this is true of consciousness as such.

William James remarks that, on some level, all conscious experience is characterized by a structure of temporal deferral: "[A] feeling, to be named, judged, or perceived, must already be past."[12] Yet while this discontinuity of feeling and perception is usually too subtle to be noticed, there are some experiences, we might think, where the feeling is so intense as to overwhelm our power of response and noticeably defer the conscious act of perception or judgment. These are moments, then, in which the temporal disjunction between perception and consciousness is made explicit, and in which, therefore, the inherent temporality of experience is itself revealed. Foreclosing the distance consciousness requires and displacing it to a later moment, the "stound" is a situation in which we are completely gripped by our perception, so much so that we are left temporarily incapable, in that moment or "stound," of perceiving anything except its temporality as such—its happening in a stretch of time which impresses itself on us without any explicit (i.e. nameable) content. The "stound" is a unit of time which is indistinguishable from a unit of feeling. The deferred naming that is characteristic of Spenserian allegory is closely attuned to this inherent belatedness of consciousness which is exposed by the "stound": to the fact that we

[12] James, 142.

tend not to be verbally aware of what we experience until after the fact—and thus until it is, more often than not, too late to respond or react.

In its fullest version, then, the "stound" is a moment of self-reflexivity divided into two, in which, on the one hand, the "powers," rung like a kind of inner tuning fork, "feel themselves" without the full presence of consciousness, while on the other the subject himself is paralyzed in the face of a power whose impact precedes and deflects consciousness. It is a moment of reflexivity that happens prior to the onset of consciousness. Spenser provides a more condensed account of the same condition at the analogous moment in Book V, when Radegund lifts up her visor and reveals herself to Artegall, enabling her to defeat and then imprison him just as Orgoglio does Red Crosse: "He saw his senses straunge astonishment" (5.5.12). Both scenes suggest a self-reflexivity which is a property of the senses and not the mind; both imply a temporal disarticulation of consciousness from sensation; both go hand-in-hand with a relinquishing of agency. They suggest that it is sensation, in its power for astonished self-feeling, and not consciousness that lies at the heart of the Spenserian subject and of Spenserian reflexivity, and yet a sensation that is not in any way as stable as we fantasize consciousness to be. Its influence is disruptive, registered in the "stound," a moment of stimulated passivity and sensory proprioreception equivalent neither to the detachment of Enlightenment consciousness, which requires an "I" who is fully aware of his own states, nor to the total determinism of the humoral self, which cannot account for self-reflexivity at all; such a moment instead involves the reflexive auto-affection which, for Michel Henry, lies at the heart of the Cartesian *cogito*. The several meanings of "stound"—from the sense of a blow or shock to that of a state of stupefaction—merge in a way that allows Spenser to give this moment its full allegorical weight as a turning-point in Red Crosse's spiritual growth without, however, detracting from its

narrative function. The "stound" is on the one hand simply a violent blow, making for a compelling and suspenseful romance moment, yet on the other it is a complex state of moral self-contradiction, in which the nadir of Red Crosse's descent into sinfulness is allied to an incipient movement of self-knowledge.

To see Spenser as a poet of phenomenological subtlety, paying attention to his precise temporal layering of sensation, reflexivity, consciousness, and unconsciousness, need not be to impose on him a modern subjectivity—certainly not if this subjectivity is implicitly understood to be centered on a self-conscious reflexivity. On the contrary I have tried to show how such attention reveals a model of subjective experience that resists the kinds of punctual sensory integration that define the perceptual subject of the Enlightenment. Moreover the phenomenology I have tried to uncover has, precisely in its focus on feeling, a significant theological dimension. It is no accident that Red Crosse's "stound" of self-awareness comes only at the tail end of an unconscious and more gradual arc of self-feeling: the belatedness of his consciousness goes hand-in-hand with the irresistibility of sin. It is not simply that sensations and passions *threaten* to destabilize us, it is that they take advantage of a destabilization which has always already taken place, a permanent tremor of corporeal vitality in the face of which conscious self-knowledge is always belated. The "stound" is the embattled form which consciousness takes in light of the fact that our corporeal states often have an agency and even a reflexivity that is largely their own. When Red Crosse had attempted, in Canto One, to oppose Error unaided, Una had warned him to "add faith unto your force." Here we can see the full logic of that injunction—for sin has taken hold before Red Crosse is even conscious of the seduction, so that force alone will be unable to fend it off. Learning to have faith means learning to accept how much of his life plays out beyond the bounds of what he can control or even know.

Thus Red Crosse's passivity in the face of his own sensations, his inability to be anything other than a belated and paralyzed spectator to his own sensory undoing, first under the influence of the fountain and then at the hands of Orgoglio, bespeaks Spenser's Calvinistic belief in man's incapacity to atone for his sinfulness without the grace-giving intervention of God. Darryl Gless has interpreted Red Crosse's "stound" as a Protestant allegory for the metaphorical death of sinfulness, requiring God's grace (rather than works) for redemption:

> Red Cross' earlier myopia and hardness of hearing now become total when Orgoglio's blow stupefies him—"all his sences stound" (12.9). The knight can now be seen as an image of spiritual death, humankind's natural condition as Protestants conceived of it.[13]

Yet if "spiritual death"—a consequence of being bound to a body subject to senses and passions—is humankind's *natural* condition, if the sinner is *already,* as Williams Perkins puts it, a "man in a traunce," then surely Red Crosse's "stound" represents something over and above that trance.[14] Might there be something homeopathic about the stound, so that it would cure us from our trance through the agency of likeness? But the point is, precisely, that there is no simple cure to the permanent trance that, for the Calvinist, is comprised by the sheer fact of bodily life. Sensory experience takes hold prior to and on a level deeper than consciousness—a fact which is not merely phenomenological but theological in its implications, since it means that our own agency is never going to be sufficient to control that experience. Where we are unable to transcend our sinfulness in the direction of a cleansed being, the best we can do is to become aware of the trance itself. Paradoxical though such a condition may seem, it is, as we have just seen, exactly what befalls Red Crosse after he drinks of the fountain, and it is exactly what happens to Artegall when he "sees" his "senses straunge astonishment." It is this more complex

[13] Darryl Gless, *Interpretation and Theology in Spenser*, 123.
[14] For Perkins's "man in a traunce," see Christopher Tilmouth, *Passion's Triumph*, 36.

and involuted state of consciousness which, in Spenser, replaces the transcendent dream-visions of medieval Christianity and of his own early poems.

Near the beginning of his *Institutes*, Calvin describes the recognition of sin not in terms of awakening or redemption, but rather as a deepening of our stupor in a moment which closely resembles the Spenserian "stound":

> Hereof proceded that trembling and amasednesse (*horror ille et stupor*), wherewith the Scripture in many places reciteth that the holy men were striken and astonished so ofte as they perceiued the presence of God. For when we se that they whiche in his absence did stande assured and unmoved, so sone as he discloseth hys glorye, beginne so to quake and are so dismayed, that they fall downe, yea are swallowed vp and in manner as destroyed with feare of death: it is to be gathered thereby that manne is neuer sufficiently touched and inwardly moued wyth knowledge of his owne basenesse vntil he haue compared himselfe to the maiestie of God.[15]

For Red Crosse, as we have seen, the "stound" is a moment of horrified self-apprehension precisely along these lines, a state of "trembling and amasednesse" (*horror ille et stupor*) in which he is finally "inwardly moved wyth knowledge of his owne basenesse." In seventeenth-century theologian Thomas Bedford's *The Sinne Unto Death,* the word "stound" itself is used in a passage very reminiscent of this moment from Calvin, as well as of Red Crosse's own predicament. Bedford is describing the sins of presumption and pride:

> There is a sinne of Presumption proceeding from pride, and arrogancie, *wilfulnesse and haughtines of heart:* which both wilfully and contemptuously causeth a man to sinne against God. *wilfully,* as presuming upon Gods mercy and his owne future repentance, *Contemptuously,* as despising and contemning the Law of God. These are great, grosse, and grieuous, especially if the particular sinne be either Idolatrie which is the forsaking of God, or witch-craft, which is a ioyning Couenant with Satan. In these, to sinne against knowledge, against the checke of conscience, presumptuously, wilfully, and contemptuously, is a sinne that may make the earth to tremble, and the heauens to sweat with amazednes, that *earth should thus transgresse against heauen, man against God.*

Despite our knowledge of the good, and despite the consequent "checks of conscience," we still commit sinful acts of all kinds. Conscience, or consciousness of good and evil, is insufficient to

[15] Jean Calvin, *The Institution of Christian Religion*, fol. 2l.

make us good; it is in light of conscience's impotence that the stound, with its total overpowering of our consciousness, becomes necessary:

> Yea it may on a suddaine set a man into a stound, and driue his thoughts to a perplexitie to consider what further degree of sinne there can bee founde or thought of, into which the Sonne of *Adam* may slip or plunge himselfe.[16]

Bedford's "stound" entails, just as it does in Spenser, a shock of moral self-awareness even as it demonstrates the degree to which such awareness is impotent to effect meaningful change or resistance to corporeal influences. The "stound" strikes us "on a suddaine" and without our premonition or consent; it has the temporality of those experiences which disrupt the fluid integration of perceptual experience into consciousness. As a moment of unanticipated "perplexitie," the "stound" is a kind of mirror-image of divine grace.

Thus Red Crosse's "stound" certainly bespeaks a Reformation mode of subjectivity, and yet it is a mode quite distinct from the "interiority" usually linked with the Protestant emphasis on inner conviction and often located at the origins of modern selfhood. It is, instead, a form of awareness grounded on an unconditioned exposure to the material world, and consequently on affects and sensations which, precisely in their moments of self-reflexive intensity, exert an unsettling pull on consciousness as this term is normally understood; the stound is, in many respects, a breakdown of interiority.[17] Thus while Spenserian characters rarely engage in acts of conscious deliberation and meditation à la Hamlet, this is not merely because they are more completely subject to their passions and humors, or because they are somehow less modern or simpler. Amid the "pre-modern" interplay of humors, impulses, and passions, Spenser adumbrates a form of reflexivity very different from the self-consciousness of the

[16] Thomas Bedford, *The Sinne unto Death*, 7-8.
[17] For the Protestant emphasis on immediate experience as "something antecedent to intellectual apprehension" and "an event that is transitory and ultimately immutable," and for the tensions between experience in this sense and notions of inwardness and interiority, see Adam Rzepka, "Rich eyes and poor hands," 159-160.

Enlightenment, but arguably no less modern: a "self-feeling" which, mostly latent in the poem, is manifest in those moments of extreme sensation which Spenser calls "stounds." The "self-feeling" subject is certainly more passive and more passible than his autonomous, self-contained, and self-conscious cousin from the Enlightenment. And yet in the depths of his passivity he discovers a different kind of power, the power to know—or rather feel—his own physical, spiritual, and moral vulnerability.

Stounds and Spirits

We are shortly going to go on a tour of Alma's House, a tour which will give us a better sense of what, from a physiological perspective, these self-feeling powers might look like. But how might they have looked from the point-of-view of the medical world of Spenser's day? Here I want, in a brief excursus, to consider in particular the notion of the spirits, which as we will see are closely tied to the nature of the swoon or *syncope*, and which can help explain both the physiological and the theological resonance that it has for Spenser.

The notion of the spirits, as Spenser would have understood it, ultimately derives from Greek medical thought, in particular from the concept of *pneuma* as it was developed by the Stoics and by Galen.[18] *Pneuma*, meaning breath, was translated as *spiritus* by Augustine, and it was as *spiritus* or spirit that the concept was bequeathed to the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. From its earliest incarnation, *pneuma* was understood as a vital principle

[18] The most comprehensive history of "spirit" is still Gerard Verbeke, *L'Évolution de la Doctrine du Pneuma du Stoicisime à S. Augustin*. See also Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body,* 30-34, as well as Stephen Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers*, 98-107. Fallon argues that Milton "[identifies] the soul with the tenuously corporeal intellectual spirits" (104).

"constituted by the exhalations of the blood,"[19] and it is in these terms that it is still a touchstone, for example, for Descartes:

> Finally, the parts of the blood that are most agitated and lively are carried to the brain by the arteries coming directly from the heart in the straightest line of all; these parts of the blood make up a kind of air or very fine wind which is called the 'animal spirits.' These dilate the brain and make it ready to receive impressions both from external objects and from the soul.[20]

On Descartes' account the spirits are both active and passive, at once suffusing the body with life and at the same time priming it for the passive reception of sensory stimuli. It was precisely this all-purpose nature of the spirits which led William Harvey, who discovered the circulation of the blood, to dismiss them at first as poetic fancy:

> For commonly ignorant persons when they cannot give a reason for any thing, they say presently that it is done by Spirits, and bring in Spirits as performers in all cases, and like as bad Poets, doe bring in the gods upon the Scene by head and ears, to make the *Exit* and *Catastrophe* of their play.[21]

Recognizing the suspiciously literary qualities of the "spirits," Harvey is nevertheless eventually forced to admit their existence, conceding that "the blood and the spirit signifie the same thing, though divers in essence."[22]

A more typical account can be found in Bartholomaeus Anglicus' encyclopedic *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, written by the Franciscan Bartholomaeus sometime around 1245. *De Proprietatibus* would have been available to Spenser in the English of John Trevisa's translation, completed in 1399 and first published around 1495 by Wynkyn de Worde, or, more likely, in that of *Batman upon Bartholomee* (1582), clergyman Stephen Batman's revised, expanded, and modernized version of Trevisa. The spirits, Bartholomaeus explains, originate as a vapor given off by the heating of the liver. Their basic function is to enable the body to accomplish its many different tasks:

---

[19] Verbeke, 13.
[20] René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings,* Vol. 1, 316.
[21] William Harvey, *The anatomical exercises,* 42.
[22] Harvey, 44.

> Substantia subtilis, aerea, virtutes corporis excitans ad suas peragendas actiones.[23]
>
> A spirit is called a certain substance, subtill, and airie, that stirreth & exciteth the vertues of the body to their doings and workes.[24]

The "subtill, and airie" quality of these spirits is extremely important, since (at least to Bartholomaeus and Batman) it suggests how they are able to straddle the divide between spiritual and material: they are, as it were, the most immaterial of material things. In "The Extasie" John Donne will describe them in the following terms:

> As our blood labours to beget
> Spirits, as like souls as it can,
> Because such fingers need, to knit
> That subtle knot, which makes us man.[25]

For Donne it is not the soul but the spirits, in their function of joining body and soul, which "make us man." Donne uses the intermediate nature of the spirits to bolster his argument that the two lovers ought not to refuse their bodies completely in favor of the soul; as we will see, by inducing Guyon's faint the spirits serve a similar (though non-erotic) purpose in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.

Bartholomaeus gives us a more technically precise account of how the spirits mediate between body and soul. They are not to be identified with the soul; rather, he says, they act as its "instrument":

> Hunc quidem spiritum non debemus credere humanam anima sive rationalem animum, sed potius, ut dicit Augustinus, eiusdem vehiculum et proprium instrumentum.[26]
>
> We may not beléeue that this spirit is mans reasonable soule: but more truly the chaire or vpholder therof, and proper instrument.[27]

---

[23] Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *Bartholomaeus Anglicus on the Properties of Soul and* Body, 54.
[24] Stephen Batman, *Batman upon Bartholome*, fol. 21v.
[25] John Donne, *Songs and Sonets,* 220.
[26] Bartholomaeus, p. 56.
[27] Batman, fol. 22r.

It is in this capacity as instruments of the soul that the spirits can be understood (as Donne will understand them) as joining it to the body. But what this also means is that if they become impaired in this function, the body will be rendered useless:

> Mediante enim tali spiritu anima corpori iungitur, et sine talis spiritus nulla anime actio perfecte in corpore exercetur.[28]
>
> For by meane of such a spirit, the soule is ioyned to the bodie: and without the seruice of such a spirit, no act, the soule may perfectly exercise in the bodie.[29]

Bartholomaeus concludes by discussing in more detail the effects that ensue when the spirits fail in their essential task:

> Unde istis spiritibus lesis et in suis effectibus qualitercumque impeditis, soluta corporis et anime harmonia, rationalis spiritus in cunctis suis operationibus in corpore impeditur, ut patet in maniacis et in freneticis et aliis in quibus usus rationis sepius non habet locum.[30]
>
> And therefore if these spirites bée diminished, or lette of theyr working in anye worke, the accord of the bodie and soule is resolued, the reasonable spirit is let of all his workes in the bodye. As it is seene in them that be amazed, and madde men and franticke, and in other that oft leese the vse of reason.[31]

Madness and frenzy are not a result, then, of a defect in the rational soul, but rather of a faulty connection between that soul and the body in which it is seated. The possession of reason, this is to say, depends not merely on a sound mind, but on a sound connection between body and mind, which it is the spirits' task to maintain; when they fail in this task, both body and mind are compromised.

This last dimension of the "spirits," in which their blockage is seen as responsible for mental aberrations, is particularly important in understanding the spirits' role in Spenser. It shows how something as ordinary as eating and drinking too little could have consequences not only for the organism as a whole but for the soul as well; it suggests, therefore, why Guyon's

[28] Bartholomaeus, p. 56.
[29] Batman, fol. 22r.
[30] Bartholomaeus, p. 56.
[31] Batman, fol. 22r.

swoon has created such a dilemma for interpreters, conflicted as they are between naturalistic and allegorizing readings. Both, it turns out, can be imputed to the flexible entity known as spirit.

Bartholomaeus himself doesn't mention swooning (though there is a later section devoted to stupor), but presumably it would fall under the category of "aliis in quibus usus rationis sepius non habet locum." The two English versions of *De Proprietatibus,* however, modify this passage in a way that makes it more pertinent to that specific state I have tried to identify as the Spenserian "stound." Here is John Trevisa's rendering:

> And þerfore if þis spirit[is] ben apeired and ihurt and ilette of here worchinge in eny maner worchinge, þe accord of þe body and soule is resolved, [and] þe reasonable spirit is ilette of alle his werkes in body, as it is isene [in] a mased, madde man and frenetic and in oþir þat ofte leseþ use of resoun. And þat is for þe instrument of þese spirits is ihurt be somme humour oþir be some wounde. And if þese spiritis ben comforted þe soule is comfortid.[32]

Trevisa translates Bartholomaeus' "maniacis" as "mased, madde." For Trevisa, the two adjectives are working together to convey the meaning of "maniacis." Stephen Batman's version of this passage, however, works from Trevisa's but clearly distinguishes "them that be amazed" from "madde men and franticke":

> As it is seene in them that be amazed, and madde men and franticke, and in other that oft leese the vse of reason.

Batman's distinction of the three terms makes all the more striking the fact that "amazement" is appearing in a medical catalogue in the company of madness and frenzy. Unlike "madness," "amazement" is not typically thought of as a psychological condition in need of medical care. But the context in the discussion of the spirits suggests that, while Batman may not conceive of it precisely as a malady, it nonetheless stems from the same physiological origin as madness and frenzy—the "diminishing," in Batman's word, of the spirits. [33] Such a condition is a far cry from

[32] John Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things*, 123.
[33] Mary Thomas Crane discusses "the relationship between amazement and the veins and spirits" as "the physiological basis for this cognitive passion" in her essay on "Marvell's Amazing Garden." See esp. 38-39.

the courtly *meraviglia* of the Italian Renaissance; "amazement" here is closer to the hysterical dislocation of madness. Where on Aristotle's account, wonder leads to knowledge, Batman's "amazement" is exactly the opposite, a "lees[ing]" or loss of the "use of reason," which may spiral into madness and frenzy. "Stounds" bridge the gap between those two touchstones of Renaissance thought, *meraviglia* and madness.

A different account of the spirits can be found in Helkiah Crooke's *Microcosmographia*, which was written at a point when the notion of the spirits was becoming old-fashioned. In Crooke's rather heterogeneous work, however, it still plays an important role. Spenser would not, of course, have seen the *Microcosmographia*, but Crooke himself quotes Spenser admiringly in the Preface to his Second Book: "[the body] is put together with wonderfull Art, and framed according to Geometricall proportions, which the English Poet hath obscurely but excellently described vnder the type of the Castle of *Alma,* that is, of the soule."[34] Crooke goes on to quote the famously opaque twenty-second stanza of Book Two, Canto Nine:

> The Frame thereof seemd partly circulare,
> And part Triangulare: O worke diuine!
> Those two, the first and last proportions are,
> The one, imperfect, mortall, foeminine;
> Th'other, immortall, perfect, masculine:
> And twixt them both a quadrate was the base,
> Proportioned equally by seven and nine;
> Nine, was the Circle sett in heauens place,
> All which compacted made a goodly diapase. (2.9.22)

Some years later Sir Kenelm Digby would see the four humors as well as the "vital spirits" as allegorically implicated in Spenser's description of the "quadrate" here. The "circular," Digby maintains, is the soul, while the "triangular" is the body; it follows that the "quadrate" is that which binds them:

> By which Quadrate, I conceive, that he meaneth the foure principall humors in mans Bodie, *viz. Choler, Blood, Phleme*, and *Melancholy*: which if they be distempered and unfitly mingled,

[34] Crooke, 60.

> dissolution of the whole doth immediately ensue: like to a building which falls to ruine, if the foundation and Base of it be unsound or disordered. And in some of these, the vitall spirits are contained and preserved, which the other keep in convenient temper; and as long as they do so, the soul and bodie dwell together like good friends.[35]

The vital spirits, Digby observes, are what serve to maintain a temperate balance between the "quadrate" of the four humors, which in turn is what enables them to keep the soul and the body in harmony.

Crooke himself devotes a whole section of the *Microcosmographia* to the question "What is the Nature of a spirit." While his account concurs in a lot of respects with that of Bartholomaeus, we can also see the influence of the Renaissance reception of classical Stoicism, which emphasized the spirits' function as a medium between body and soul:

> The Stoickes call it, *The tye or band of the soule and the bodie;* for the distance is not so great betweene the highest Heauen and the lowest Earth, as is the difference betwixt the Soule and the Bodye. It was therefore verie necessarie that a spirite should bee created, by whose intermediate Nature, as it were by a strong though not indissoluble bonde the Divine soule might bee tyed to the bodie of Earth.[36]

This Renaissance Stoic inflection on the doctrine of the spirits is very much pertinent to Spenser's frequent use of them; for, as both Guyon's faint and Digby's reading suggest, Spenser does not merely treat the spirits as a kind of amorphous vital force, but also as the sustaining bond between the physical and the spiritual lives of his characters. It is when that bond is damaged that its importance becomes most manifest.

Like Bartholomaeus, Crooke is also concerned with the possibility that the spirits might fail in this mediating function. He describes the spirits' role, in Aristotelian terms, as that of converting the "potentiall virtue" of each part of the body into "operative act":

> We confesse that there is a naturall faculty bred and seated in euery part, but because the heate and naturall spirit of the partes wherein this inbredde faculty doth consist is but uncertaine like a fugitive, and dull or stupid; it standeth in neede of another influent yet like unto itselfe, whereby it might bee stirred up, established, and from a potentiall vertue brought into an operatiue act.[37]

---

[35] Sir Kenelm Digby, *Observations*, 15-16.
[36] Crooke, 173.
[37] Crooke, 174

This description already suggests why the spirits are necessary, and what will happen if their distribution is in any way changed or hindered. They serve as an animating intelligence for each part of the body; without their influence (they are literally "influents"), the body's local faculties are rendered "dull or stupid." From this description follows Crooke's account of what happens when the spirits are "intercepted":

> for if the Vessels Veines, Arteries, or Nerves be tyed, the life motion and sense of the parts to which these vessels passe do instantly abate & are in short time utterly extinguished upon the interception of the spirits, not of the faculties themselues which are incorporeall, because the band or tye dooth neither interrupt the continuity of the vessell with his originall, neither yet his naturall disposition. And this is the nature of spirits in generall.[38]

The spirits' function is to vivify each part of the body, to endow it with a life-force which enables it to perform its natural function. If they are in any way impeded in this task, the "life motion and sense" of those parts which they naturally support are effectively turned off. This may manifest itself, he says elsewhere, "in a *Syncope,* that is, a swounding where the vital spirits faile."[39]

A work such as Timothie Bright's 1586 *Treatise of Melancholy* shows the importance that the notion of the spirits, in particular their liability to damage, took on for an author concerned with the life of the soul in its relation to the body. The notion of the spirits lies at the core of Bright's painstaking explanation of how melancholy comes about:

> This is that which Philosophers call the spirits: which spirits, so prepareth that worke to the receaving of the soule, that with more agrement, the soule, and bodie, have growne into acquaintance: and is ordained of God, as it were a true love knot, to couple heaven & earth together; yea a more divine nature, then the heavens with a base clod of earth: which otherwise would never have growen into societie: and hath such indifferent affection unto both, that it is to both equally affected, and communicateth the bodie and corporall things with the mind, and spirituall, and intelligible things, after a sort with the bodie: saving sometimes by vehemencie of eithers action, they seeme to be distracted, and the minde to neglect the bodie: and the bodie and

[38] Crooke, 174.
[39] Crooke, 40. The connection of swooning and spirits goes back to Galen: "That syncope is an acute collapse of capacity has been stated by my predecessors. Since, however, the substance of the capacities controlling us lies in the *pneuma* and in the *krasis* of the solid bodies, what we must do is preserve these when they are present and restore them when they are weakened." See *Method of Medicine,* vol. 3, 265.

> bodily actions common with other creatures, to refuse as it were for a moment that communitie whereby it commeth to passe, that in vehement contemplations, men see not, that which is before their eyes: netiher heare, though noyse beat the ayre and sound; not feele, which at other time (such bent of the mind being remitted) they sould perceave the sense of, which pleasure or paine.[40]

This remarkable account gives us a contemporary philosophical description of that which, in Spenser's language, I have been referring to as a "stound." Starting from the notion, which we saw cited in Donne and applied to Spenser by Digby, that the spirits are the "true love knot" between body and soul, Bright moves on quickly to consider the possibility of a "moment" in which, the knot becoming unraveled, and the spirits being deflected to one part or the other, the mind "neglect[s] the bodie" even as the body reverts to being a creaturely, Hamletian "base clod of earth." Crooke too links the difference between body and soul to a larger theological difference between earth and heaven: "the distance is not so great betweene the highest Heauen and the lowest Earth, as is the difference betwixt the Soule and the Bodye."[41] By framing his discussion of the spirits in these terms, Crooke suggests that they are theologically as well as physiologically necessary, for they bridge the gap not only between body and soul, but also between man and God.

The stound, with its interruption of the operation of spirits, thus has consequences that are theological as well as physiological: it exposes the gap between man and God and threatens to make it permanent and unbridgeable. This dichotomizing effect, whereby God becomes inaccessible and man a mere creature, is always at work in Spenser's "stounds." Opening Canto Eight of Book Two right after Guyon's swoon, Spenser exclaims, "And is there care in heaven? And is there love / In heavely spirits to these creatures base?" (2.8.1), and likewise Timias's "stound" in Canto Five of Book Three immediately causes the narrator to reassure us that

[40] Timothie Bright, *A Treatise of Melancholie*, 35.
[41] Crooke, 173.

"Providence heavenly surpasseth living thought" (3.5.27). At such moments, moreover, the characters afflicted by the stound typically fall to the ground—such a gesture is not merely dramatic. In the context of Bright and Crooke we can see that this sudden and violent identification with the earth has a theological dimension as well: it is a metonymy for the division, potentially irreparable, of man into two parts, one heavenly and one earthly. "Stounds," by temporarily severing the knot which joins the two, provoke a crisis in which the possibility of salvation is fervently called into question, even as the character is dramatically reduced, in all senses, to earth. In Spenser's use of this device, his engagement with Protestantism and in particular Calvinism merges powerfully with his awareness of received philosophical ideas. Indeed one could go as far as to suggest that the Spenserian "stound" adumbrates the whole historical-philosophical crisis in which, in the absence of a mediating spirit, mind and body become irremediably split.

Bright, too, was a deeply Protestant author; in Paris during the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572, he shared a house of hiding with Sir Philip Sidney, to whom he would later dedicate one of his Latin works. His concern with melancholy also arises from the distinctly Calvinistic despair to which the concept of predestination could give rise. But he was a trained doctor as well. For him, as we have seen above, it is the mediating notion of the spirits which paves the way from the physiological basis of melancholy, which he conceives of as a kind of dangerously extended stound, to its theological dimension. The body is first weakened by excessive concentration of the "spirits" towards one activity or one part of the body:

> [T]he mind transporting the spirits another way by sudden conceit, study or passion: yet most certain it is, if it holde on long, and release not, the nourishment will also faile, the increase of the body diminish, and the flower of beautie fade, and finally death take his fatall hold.[42]

[42] Bright, 63.

When this withdrawal is excessively prolonged, Bright argues, the body's vital processes are slowly undermined, and melancholy sets in. But what causes the withdrawal in the first place is not melancholy itself, but rather a "sudden conceit, study, or passion": that temporary aberration which, I have been suggesting, Spenser calls the "stound." Bright's descriptions of the effects of this aberration are recalled by Spenser's account of Red Crosse on his emergence from Orgoglio's prison:

> His rawbone armes, whose mighty brawned bowrs
> Were wont to rive steele plates, and helmets hew,
> Were clene consum'd, and all his vital powers
> Decayd, and al his flesh shronk up like withered flowres. (1.8.41)

Spenser's "vital powers" are the same as Bright's "spirits"; like Guyon's at the end of Book Two, Canto Seven, here they have begun to "wexe both weake and wan." Bright shows how not only melancholy, but also "sudden conceit" or "study" could, via the spirits, cause the symptoms which Red Crosse exhibits here. No matter what causes it, the diversion of the "spirits" interferes with basic physical functions: "the spirit being either withdrawne from the outwarde parts by vehement passion of griefe, or over prodigally scattered by joy, or wasted by paine, the outward partes not only faile in their sense and motion, but even nourishment & growth thereby are hindered."[43] "Sense and motion," and "nourishment and growth" refer respectively to Aristotle's sensitive and nutritive souls—the point here is that strong emotions, as well as excessive studying or thinking, may radiate downwards to disrupt even the most basic organic functions of the body. For Bright it is the withdrawal of the spirits which explain how these effects are possible. Like Crooke and Donne, he too places them squarely in the middle of body and soul:

[43] Bright, 62.

"thus then the whole nature of man, being compounded of two extremities, the soule, and the bodie: and of the meane of spirits."[44]

Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* gives the spirits an equally prominent role in his account, and indeed he draws many of his explanations directly from Bright. When they are deprived of their humors, he writes, "the other parts [of the body] cannot performe their functions, having the spirits drawne from them by vehement passion, but faile in sense and motion."[45] Elsewhere, Burton links this condition specifically with "Swouning":

> The *Vitall Spirits* are made in the Heart of the *Naturall*, which by the Arteries are transported to all the other parts: if these *Spirits* cease, then life ceaseth, as in a *Syncope* or Swouning. [46]

This is precisely what happens to Guyon when "his vitall powres gan wex both weake and wan." "Life ceaseth," Burton writes; Spenser too writes that when Guyon faints, "the life did flit away out of her nest" (2.7.66) and when he comes around a Canto later, of "Life having maistered her sencelesse foe" (2.8.53). Bright, too, had linked the withdrawal of the spirits to the failure of life: "but so, as the spirit, in comparison of the bodie, fareth as the hand to the dead instrumentes." Without the spirits, the body is a limp, lifeless object: "the body & bodily members like flailes, sawes, or axes in the hand of him that useth them."[47]

For Bright, for Burton, and for Spenser, the connection between body and soul, ensured by the spirits, is that which underlies life itself. If this connection is severed, even temporarily, the character suffers a temporary paralysis resembling death. Swoons occur when the spirits are deviated en masse from the involuntary processes they sustain, and rerouted towards the mind or heart. Usually, this chain of events is very rapid, the immediate response to an object of fear of grief, as with Malecasta and Cymoent. In Guyon's case, however, the sequence of events is

[44] Bright, 48.
[45] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy,* Vol. 1, 249.
[46] Burton, 141.
[47] Bright, 65.

extended over three days. Over that period, the spirits are gradually withdrawn from their necessary, life-supporting functions just as happens more rapidly in sudden grief or joy. The sudden swoon is more popular—familiar not only from Spenser's other examples, but also as part of the excesses of John Lyly's *Euphues* novels and its followers. But by drawing the process out in Guyon's case, Spenser deprives it of some of its usual melodrama, and allows us to anatomize it in more detail; he shows us the important role the spirits play, and prepares the way for our sojourn in the House of Alma.

Some recent accounts of Spenser's relation to medical literature suggest that he was fundamentally opposed to any ideas which would have posited a material basis for the soul. Douglas Trevor has written of Spenser's and Bright's concern over "an alarming rise in materialist theories of the passions" and their "caution against hard-line Galenic readings of the body because these readings potentially support a "humoral" account of the soul."[48] Yet a thorough exploration of the concept of the spirits serves to demonstrate that, in this pre-Cartesian universe, hard-and-fast lines between the physiological and the spiritual are difficult to draw. Phenomena such as Guyon's swoon, and the "stound" more generally, are bodily occurrences; for many writers, they would be understood almost entirely on a physiological level. The physician Philip Barrough dedicates a whole chapter of his *Methode of Phisicke* to the topic "Of Swounding." He gives the following unambiguously physiological account:

> SINCOPE is a swift falling of the strength (as Galen saith). It is caused through much excretion and avoyding of bloud or through vnmeasurable emptying of the belly, or vehement moving, or through great paine, or much and often washinges. Also through aboundant swetts, and all other immoderate vacuations, also feare, dread, and all such like perturbations of the mind. Moreover through abounding of crude & raw humours, through great inflammacion or through vicious and thinne humours, or els by taken breath in a stincking ayer. The *sincope* is knowen by these tokens, the pulse is rare and obscure, the extreme partes, as the hand and feete be cold, swete about the face, the taking away of the brightnes of the skinne that is in it, and as it weare a palsey

[48] Douglas Trevor, "*Sadness in* The Faerie Queene," 241.

> of the whole body. Moreouer to these ther commeth desperation, vexation of the mind, & shaking of the body.[49]

Yet for a writer such as Spenser, syncope's physicality is precisely what makes it so theologically perplexing, immediately raising the question "And is there care in heaven?" In Bright and Crooke, we see the same problem reflected in their acknowledgments of the great distance separating soul from body—a distance both conceive of as analogous to that which separates earth and heaven. It was not a rigid insistence on the immateriality of the soul, but rather the flexible, at once material and immaterial concept of the spirits that gave them the most powerful response to such questions. The spirits themselves, bridging as they do the "circular" soul and the "triangular" body, are the supreme example of temperance, a temperance which constitutes man himself. To be sure, his metaphysical temperance necessitates a more pragmatic version of itself, a quotidian care for the well-being of the body and its unconscious processes, which, through the spirits, are intimately connected with the life of the soul. But underlying this attention to our daily well-being lies the belief in the mediating role of the spirits, through which our earthly life *is* obscurely connected to the workings of divine Providence.

Medically trained writers tend to treat with a certain scorn the notion that swoons and trances could have supernatural or divine aspect to them. This attitude is in evidence as far back as Hippocrates' treatise on *The Sacred Disease*, in which Hippocrates sets out to repudiate, through scientific explanation, the notion that epilepsy is divine in origin. Robert Burton spoke scornfully of those who claimed access to divinity through a deprivation of the senses:

> Of this fury there be diverse kindes, *Extasie*, which is familiar with some persons, as *Cardan* saith of himself, he could be in one when he list, in which the *Indian* priests deliver their Oracles, and the witches in *Laplande*, as *Olaus Magnus* writeth *lib. 3. cap. 18. Extasi omnia praedicere*. . . . The other *species* of this Fury are *Enthusiasmes, Revelations, & Visions*, so often mentioned

[49] Philip Barrough, *The Methode of Phisicke,* 74.

> by *Gregory* and *Beda* in their works; Obsession of Possession of divels, *Sybilline Prophets*, and Poeticall *Furies*.[50]

By representing Guyon's swoon as naturalistically as he does, Spenser participates in the same demystifying project. Yet the double nature of the spirits, which is particularly in evidence in a swoon, allows him to maintain a line of connection to the soul, indispensable for his allegory. The swoon does provide access to divinity, but not through a purification or enhancement of consciousness; rather through a displacement of it in favor of the subconscious workings of the spirits.

What might it mean then for Red Crosse to "feel" the activity of these sensible but largely unconscious powers? More provocatively still, what might it mean for them to feel themselves? As Bright and others suggest, their nature is only revealed in traumatic events—events where, precisely by virtue of being violently activated, rushing to the defense of an organism under threat, they are at the same time powerfully disrupted: we might think of the unconscious Timias "in whose faire eyes, like lamps of quenched fire / The Christall humor stood congealed round" (3.5.29). At once a vitalizing current and at the same time a medium essential for perception, the spirits are constantly at risk of an overstimulation which will incapacitate them and imperil vitality itself. If the underlying presence of a fragile but vital spirits is essential to explaining the nature of the stound, then the stound, in turn, is at least heuristically necessary to understanding the working of the spirits. Perhaps this can help us see why Guyon has to fall into a faint.

Guyon's Vital Trance

The stound is a unit of time which is also a unit of feeling—it is, we might say, the basic unit of experience, in the sense of that "super- or prevenient immediacy" which is "present, passive, and

[50] Burton, 133.

first person."[51] Resisting not only knowledge but also consciousness itself—even as it sets in motion the process of detachment from which consciousness emerges—the stound happens only in a peripheral or marginal manner, only as a threshold experience at the boundaries of the constituted self. At the same time it is profoundly intimate—it seems to speak to us and to us alone, even, or precisely because, we cannot quite articulate what it says. Guyon's notorious faint at the end of Canto 7 fulfills all of these conditions, both with regard to Guyon and to the poem's readers, who have long struggled to account for it satisfactorily even while intuiting that it is somehow essential to the unfolding of the Book's allegory. In the following pages I will try to understand Guyon's faint as an intimate encounter with the essential strangeness of the embodied self, and therefore as a form of self-experience par excellence: resisting allegorical and interpretative appropriation, and yet necessitating it, too, in the form of one of the poem's great allegorical set-pieces, the House of Alma. Where this episode has been read primarily in terms of discipline and self-regulation, I instead wish to see it as a culminating moment of mystical self-*experience*, an extension of the trance in which subject becomes object.[52] What happens, in generic terms, if we see the House of Alma as a romance episode and Guyon's trance as one of those "sudden alterations of temperature, mysterious heightenings, local intensities" which, as Jameson reminds us, are so characteristic of romance?

Guyon's "senceles dream" is, on the surface of it, no dream at all—at least it is not one whose content we are made privy to. If we are to understand it as a moment of self-transformation, we must also taken into account the fact that, far from allowing for heightened self-knowledge, it instead involves a cognitive emptiness even deeper than that of Red Crosse in

[51] Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction*, 74.
[52] For a reading of the episode in terms of the "constitutive nature of self-discipline," see Michael Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves,* 73. For this theme more broadly, see also Christopher Tilmouth, *Passion's Triumph.*

his "stound." Indeed the moment has long perplexed scholars of the poem precisely because, while it is similar to Red Crosse's "stound," it is lacking not only in content but also in any obvious moral significance. It too is placed near the middle of its Book; it too necessitates Arthur's intervention; it too leads the way to a place of healing prior to a final allegorical confrontation. It is hardly surprising that critics should have interpreted it along the same lines as Darryl Gless's reading of Red Crosse's "stound":

> There is, I think, no way to explain satisfactorily this curious episode except to understand Guyon's faint, not as a physical collapse, but as a metaphor for his spiritual state after (and before) his stay in the Cave of Mammon.[53]

But such a reading is now much less clearly justified. Where Red Crosse's "stound" is ensconced in moralizing exegesis buttressed by Reformation theology, Spenser himself explicitly declares that the causes of Guyon's faint have less to do with "foolish pride" (1.8.1) than with "want of food, and sleepe":

> And now he has so long remained there,
> That vitall powres gan wexe both weake and wan,
> For want of food, and sleepe, which two vpbeare,
> Like mightie pillours, this fraile life of man,
> That none without the same enduren can.
> For now three dayes of men were full outwrought,
> Since he this hardie enterprize began:
> For thy great *Mammon* fairely he besought,
> Into the world to guide him backe, as he him brought.
>
> The God, though loth, yet was constraind t'obay,
> For lenger time, then that, no liuing wight

[53] Hugh MacLachlan, "The Death of Guyon," 97. Maclachlan provides a useful bibliography of readings of the faint to that date (1983). Foremost among these are Harry Berger, *The Allegorical Temper,* to which I will come shortly, and Paul Alpers, *Poetry of the* Faerie Queene, 274: "it is the result of the inherent strains of knowing an evil." Berger and Alpers established something of a consensus that, in Alpers's words, the faint is not a "moral judgment against Guyon" but rather "due to man's nature, and it is the inevitable result of the trial Guyon has endured," a view which more recent readings have tended to confirm: see Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 51 (the episode reminds us "of the organism's dependence on just the digestive and defecatory processes that are detailed in the house of Alma") and Christopher Tilmouth, *Passion's Triumph,* 63 ("Guyon, it transpires, is no match for the most basic frailties of human nature"). Recently, however, Garrett Sullivan has offered a more deconstructive account of the scene by thinking more critically about its implications for the notion of humanity; see below.

> Below the earth, might suffred be to stay:
> So backe againe, him brought to liuing light.
> But all so soone as his enfeebled spright
> Gan sucke this vitall aire into his brest,
> As ouercome with too exceeding might,
> The life did flit away out of her nest,
> And all his senses were with deadly fit opprest. (2.7.63-64)

There is an almost Montaignean bluffness here, a wry awareness that, where we might have expected a metaphysical or moral heightening, we are instead presented with a mundane bodily ailment (much as at the end of "De l'Expérience"). To read this moment as moral or theological allegory is, then, to ignore the significance of the fact that, for once, Spenser himself has omitted to provide one; it is to ignore the boldness of Spenser's matter-of-fact insistence on "food, and sleepe" at the Book's climactic moment.

Against such allegorization, many readers of the scene have felt that Spenser's description is designed to remind Guyon of a "humanity" he thinks he can transcend, and thus to emphasize his confinement to the limits that mortal and material bodies place on our lives and even our "temperance." In a classic reading, Harry Berger argues "in Canto vii Guyon feeds his eyes at the expense of sustaining nature,"[54] and that the faint is the manifestation of this neglect. It is not enough, Berger concludes, for Guyon to resist the lure of senses, if in order to do so he "must ignore his common humanity—the needs of his body"[55]; similarly Paul Alpers writes that "Guyon's faint is the culminating expression of our awareness that there *are* limits to human strength."[56] For Berger and Alpers the faint does contain a moral lesson: it checks Guyon's belief that he can be superhuman, and in particular that he can transcend his body.

---

[54] Harry Berger, Jr., *The Allegorical* Temper, 23.
[55] Berger, 29. Berger's account is echoed by Lauren Silberman in her article on "*The Faerie Queene* Book II and the Limitations of Temperance," 12: "To the extent that Guyon's curiosity is the desire for pure intellectual experience, to the neglect of his grosser sensual needs, it is indeed the fault that brings about his downfall and reveals a serious division between his modes of perception and of self-perception."
[56] Alpers, 274.

Accepted as this reading has become, only recently have we begun to interrogate the notion of the human on which it relies. In many ways Berger's equivalence between "common humanity" and the "needs of the body" is itself at odds with the prevailing conceptions of an age whose "humanism" was in large part defined by a struggle to emulate the achievements of antiquity, and to distinguish man from animal through his attainments in the field of culture and the arts. If Guyon's swoon marks Guyon's "common humanity" then it is a humanity that, as Garrett Sullivan has recently shown, overlaps considerably with animality; Sullivan writes that "both Guyon's swoon and Verdant's sleep trouble the epic conception of the human. Like Verdant, the unconscious Guyon resembles animal, and perhaps vegetal, life."[57] Here I want to argue, along similar lines but with a different emphasis, that Guyon's swoon reflects not the Aristotelian concepts of animal and vegetal life but rather Montaigne's polemical, late Renaissance redefinition of the human, proposed near the end of "De l'Experience" in a passage well worth comparing to Spenser's description of the faint and to the interpretative crux that it raises; in particular I want to suggest that it reflects the notion of *expérience* which Montaigne develops in this essay. Montaigne is here putting forward his sharpest critique of those who "want to get out of themselves and escape from the man," declaring that such "transcendental humors frighten me, like lofty and inaccessible places; and nothing is so hard for me to stomach [*à digerer*] in the life of Socrates as his ecstasies and possessions by his daemons" (856). À digerer: the metaphor is not an accident at this point, since it is the denial of the body which, for Montaigne, is the clearest example of this folly:

> Come on now, just to see, some day get some man to tell you the absorbing thought and fancies that he takes into his head, and for the sake of which he turns his mind from a good meal and laments the time he spends on feeding himself. You will find there is nothing so insipid in all the dishes on your table as this fine entertainment of his mind….and you will find that his ideas and aspirations are not worth your stew. (856)

[57] *Sleep, Romance, and Human Embodiment,* 43.

As Berger and others have suggested, Guyon's faint results from his denying his body in just the way that Montaigne repudiates here; its corollary is thus an affirmation or at the very least a reminder of the embodied humanity on whose behalf Montaigne is advocating, and which, under the heading of *expérience*, this final essay champions.

Montaigne himself does not simply mean to bring us down a notch, but rather to invert altogether our preconceptions of the low and the high, the ordinary and the extraordinary, the normal and the strange as these are instantiated by human lives. He writes approvingly of Caesar and Alexander "in the thick of their great tasks, so fully enjoying natural and therefore necessary and just pleasures," but he is careful to add: "wise men, had they believed that this was their ordinary occupation, the other the extraordinary" (850). For Montaigne it is precisely in its embodied dimension that the self is most strange, stranger indeed than any other object of our experience. Exhorting us, in "De l'Experience," to pay more attention to ourselves, he writes:

> Besides, the uncertainty and ignorance of those who presume to explain the workings of nature and her inner processes, and all the false prognostications of their art, should make us know that she has utterly unknown ways of her own. (840)

He encourages us to accept these workings almost as we might learn to accept the inalterable behavior of another human being; discussing his kidney stone he writes: "it almost plays its game by itself and lets me play mine" (839). If for Montaigne a kidney stone can possess its own will and its own mysterious ends, then it is not hard to see how Guyon's swoon likewise need not be a moment of deflation only, but might instead serve as witness and portal to the mysterious autonomy of pre-conscious, somatic life. In order to see this, however, we will have to reconsider that swoon from the point-of-view of Guyon's awakening.

Montaigne's kidney stone, like his swoon in "De l'Experience," are both embraced as characteristic moments of *expérience*. In the course of his essay on that subject Montaigne

champions experience first against legal and then against medical bodies of knowledge, and he brings up the stone largely in order to denigrate the authority of the latter. Yet his point is ultimately not that experience is a more valid source of knowledge than these discourses still largely dependent, in Montaigne's day, on received wisdom. Experience is singularly capable of teaching not some particular form of knowledge but rather the limit of knowledge as such: "It is from my experience that I affirm human ignorance, which is, in my opinion, the most certain fact in the school of the world" (824). Experience in this sense cannot be confined to a finite, instructive episode; it is a necessarily open-ended and ongoing encounter with the unpredictability of the world—"that integrated, balanced, holistic, but always open-ended and provisional experience," in Martin Jay's words[58]—which Montaigne suggests is nowhere more manifest than in our own physical body. In the final stages of the *Essais,* skepticism, experience, and the body converge for Montaigne in their philosophical significance. *Expérience* comes to signify a continual adjustment and attunement to the mysterious ways of the body which, in their very intimacy, prove more consistently unknowable and unpredictable than anything else.

Montaigne's notion of *expérience* stands in contrast to the Aristotelian scheme which dominated European psychology until the sixteenth century, and in which those phenomena which Montaigne considers under the rubric of "expérience" were the competencies of a distinct soul: the sensitive as opposed to the intellectual. For Aristotle sleep is "an affection of the sensitive part of us—a kind of fetter or immobilization."[59] Thus, "plants," which lack sensation, "are not subject to sleep,"[60] but "all animals partake in sleep."[61] Montaigne rejects such dividing lines, and urges us by contrast to embrace the full spectrum of the activities, whether "animal" or

[58] *Songs of Experience*, 30.
[59] See his short treatise "On Sleep and Waking" in *On the Soul,* ed. and trans. W.S. Hett, 323.
[60] Ibid., 321.
[61] Ibid., 325.

"human," whether rational or bodily, in which we partake. *Expérience* consists in the tacit knowledge that such an embrace affords us, the knowledge that is as much implicit in the regularity and self-sufficiency of bodily process as it is explicit in our conscious awareness and description of that process. Thus for Montaigne, who describes himself as "intellectually sensual, sensually intellectual" (850), swooning and sleeping do more than merely trouble the distinction between human and animal—instead they bespeak this intuitive form of being-in-the-world which is not beholden to the Aristotelian schema, and which is "human" in the measure that it is embodied as well as rational, instinctive as well as voluntary. The House of Alma, I will suggest, is oriented towards just such a vision of the human, one which asks us, in keeping with the nature of Guyon's trance, to distinguish experience from consciousness.

Indeed for Spenser to emphasize Guyon's need for "food and sleep"—just at the moment where Red Crosse discovers "conscience" and begins his redemptive journey to the Mount of Contemplation—is for him to make a set of moves analogous to Montaigne's in "De l'Experience," not merely vindicating bodily process against asceticism but endowing it with an inverted kind of transcendence. Like Montaigne, Spenser is staking out a distinctive and polemical position on those somatic processes which, he suggests, constitute the human far more than humanism itself will allow. But he also resembles Montaigne in refusing to present this position as a reduction or even as a limitation. Instead, for Spenser as for Montaigne, the body itself becomes a habitable threshold, a boundary between self and other, mind and matter, life and death. Guyon lingers there for a whole Canto, implying that such a boundary is neither simply a theoretical construct, nor a bodiless line which exists only to be crossed over in one direction or the other. It is a substantial, even encompassing condition of its own. Cantos 7 to 9 of Book II can be seen as a sustained meditation on the nature of this threshold, and thus on the

particular problem posed by the relation of consciousness and unconsciousness when they are not apportioned to separate faculties but are instead conceived as continuous facets of the same naturalized humanity—a problem which is vividly and persistently, if tacitly, manifest in the form of Guyon's unconscious body.

That body idles uncomfortably on "stage" from the end of Canto 7 to the end of Canto 8, so that it marks a narrative threshold (between Mammon and Alma) as well as a philosophical one (between death and life). Within Canto 8, it serves as an inert prop for a series of actions of which Guyon remains blissfully unaware. First, the Palmer finds Guyon "slumbering fast / In senselesse dream," and yet watched over by a mysterious angel who commends Guyon's care to him. No sooner has the angel vanished than Cymochles and Pyrochles, the figures of Concupiscence and Rage with whom Guyon had struggled in Cantos 4 and 5, arrive on the scene along with Archimage and a dwarf, threatening to despoil Guyon's "outcast carkasse" of his arms:

> At last he spied, where towards him did pace
> Two Paynim knights, al armd as bright as skie,
> And them beside an aged sire did trace,
> And far before a light-foot Page did flie,
> That breathed strife and troublous enmitie;
> Those were the two sonnes of *Acrates* old,
> Who meeting earst with *Archimago* slie,
> Foreby that idle strond, of him were told,
> That he, which earst them combatted, was *Guyon* bold.
>
> Which to avenge on him they dearly vowd,
> Where ever that on ground they mote him find;
> False *Archimage* provokte their corage prowd,
> And stryful *Atin* in their stubborne mind
> Coles of contention and whot vengeaunce tind.
> Now bene they come, whereas the Palmer sate,
> Keeping that slombred corse to him assind;
> Well knew they both his person, sith of late
> With him in bloody armes they rashly did debate. (2.8.10-11)

It is as if Guyon's self-restraint, having exhausted itself in Mammon's Cave, now comes apart in the unmitigated vulnerability with which his unconscious body is exposed to the depredations of Cymochles and Pyrochles (just as, after resisting the lures of the maidens in the Bower of Bliss, he will unleash a "tempest of wrathfulness.") The brothers' plundering is checked only by the arrival of Arthur, who, though not without some difficulty, defeats and kills them. Only now does Guyon finally revive: "By this Sir *Guyon* from his traunce awakt, / Life hauing maistered her sencelesse foe."

Cymochles and Pyrochles's surprise arrival here is a return of the repressed, strongly implying that Guyon's own agency is insufficient to keep the passions that they represent permanently under control (much as Orgoglio is a more sudden and violent return of Pride); on the contrary it would appear that the effort to oppose them is not only fruitless but counterproductive, enabling them to bounce back with a force that is redoubled inasmuch as it is now unanticipated. Their unopposed sway over Guyon may well be seen as a lapse into an unconscious form of intemperance and thus a further reproach to the delusion of total self-control which led to the faint.[62] As we saw with Red Crosse's "stound," Guyon's faint bears witness to those unconscious stirrings of corporeality which place immanent limits on man's capacity to transform himself without external aid. Here, however, it is a matter less of sensory and sensual attractions than of affective exigencies buried more deeply within the unconscious self:

> We realize now that the point of putting Guyon on the brink of death, keeping him unconscious throughout, is to isolate and emphasize these somatic consequences— the unconscious power of rage and concupiscence as habits—which take hold on the body at a level deeper than the senses themselves: 'By this Sir *Guyon* from his traunce awakt, / Life having maistered her sencelesse foe' (2.8.53). The 'sencelesse foe' is death, which is beaten back when Guyon returns to his senses; but it is also, as Hamilton remarks, the morbid effects represented by Cymocles and Pyrocles. While manifesting themselves in the senses, rage and concupiscence fasten on the body addictively, on a level deeper than the senses themselves.[63]

[62] For the idea of intemperate sleep, see Garrett Sullivan, *Sleep, Romance, and Human Embodiment*, 33.
[63] Gordon Teskey, "Death in an Allegory," 75.

Depending as it does on conscious anticipation of passions and impulses, self-control is impotent to rescue us from forces that operate within an "addictive" somatic system largely independent of the mind. There is no way to escape the consequences of that system without outside intervention, which is in fact is abundantly present in Canto 8—in the form of the angel, the Palmer, and finally Arthur.

"Supercelestial thoughts and subterranean conduct" (856; "les opinions supercelestes et les meurs sousterraines"): Montaigne's phrase could not be more apt as a description of what the juxtaposition of these two episodes suggests, or indeed as a description which echoes some of our own recent assessments of Renaissance culture. On the one hand, we have an overstimulated mind obsessed with its own rectitude to the point where it becomes incapable of responding organically to bodily stimuli and physical needs. On the other, we have a body utterly victimized by those needs—not only by sleep but also by the more violent forms of passion to which sleep renders the undefended body susceptible. Guyon successively resembles Burckhardt's newly autonomous subject, awakening finally from the dream-like trance of the Middle Ages, and the "humoral subject" of recent criticism, helpless to immunize himself against the constant pressure of humors. In some ways (as Stephen Greenblatt first noted) Guyon embodies such oppositions in a particularly hardened form: where Red Crosse's "stound" and his recovery from it can be read as a pang of conscience in which he becomes aware of his pride, no such reading seems available here.

That opposition between "supercelestial thoughts" and "subterranean conduct," however, is one which Montaigne's own notion of *expérience* is designed to counter; thus if, as I have suggested, Spenser's purposes in this Book can broadly be aligned with those of Montaigne in "De l'Expérience," then perhaps here too we will find a way out of the impasse. At the end of

Canto 8 we glimpse one more source of that intervention which the mechanics of the Canto seem to necessitate, though one less luminous and also less "vertical" in its appearance than Arthur and the angel. Consider again Spenser's description of Guyon's awakening: "By this Sir *Guyon* from his traunce awakt, / Life hauing maistered her sencelesse foe." Through the past participle the second line suggests that, besides the battle between Arthur and Cymochles and Pyrochles, a second battle has been going on, this one inside Guyon, between "Life" and its "sencelesse foe." Guyon's prone and passive body was not quite as inanimate as it seemed. And like Spenser's initial description of his swoon ("the life did flit away out of her nest") the line implies a distinction between "Sir Guyon," who is just waking up, and his "Life," which, it now turns out, did not merely "flit away" but has been covertly active the whole time, temporarily replacing Guyon's agency with *her* own. As the feminine gender suggests, Life (the vital spirits) are being personified here as an allegorical force independent of Guyon's conscious agency, and yet (as Spenser has reminded us) absolutely vital to it. "Life" here must therefore be thought of as a principle of vitality independent of consciousness and even of the self, and it is ultimately to her, rather than to the Palmer or the Angel or Arthur, that we must attribute Guyon's recovery. Far from being, in Hugh Maclachlan's terms, an image of spiritual death, the trance instead proves to be an essentially vital moment, one which, correcting an excess of self-restraint, allows Guyon's sustaining biological powers—"a life that is prior to and deeper than his capacity for conscious articulation"—to come into their own.[64] The line cues us to step back and take in the whole scene as if it were a painting: we have on the one hand a furious battle between Arthur and his foes, and on the other hand Guyon lying on the ground in a swoon. In a single deft line, Spenser now suggests that Guyon himself has been undergoing a kind of internal, unconscious

[64] Timothy Harrison uses this phrase in reference to Adam's awakening in *Paradise Lost*. See "Adamic Awakening," 42.

version of what has been going on outside him. Is it conceivable that the two processes are one and the same? That the allegorical vision of the poet and the unconscious biological turmoil of his character have suddenly merged?

Regardless of how we answer these questions (and probably there is no good answer), it is clear that there is no "stound" of awareness here, no threshold between unconsciousness and consciousness like that traversed by Red Crosse in his encounter with Orgoglio. Guyon never registers what happens to him during his trance; he simply wakes up and moves on. And yet the stubborn presence of Guyon's prone body, and the whirl of activity surrounding it, suggests that more is going on than meets the eye. If on the one hand his passivity seems to be even more total than Red Crosse's, on the other there is, as we have seen, a different principle of corporeal vitality at work in this episode—one defined not, as earlier, simply by receptivity whether conscious or not, but rather in terms of an organic vitality capable of *acting* on our behalf. Such a vital principle is present, presumably, as long as we are alive, and yet it surfaces only at times of extreme duress—when ordinary biological rhythms are interrupted and our own conscious agency is inadequate or incapacitated, as happens to Guyon here. Loss of consciousness thus has the effect of casting into relief an underlying, unconscious principle of vitality which in many ways resembles the Aristotelian soul, and yet does not really fit into the tripartite structure. Instead it bespeaks that immanent principle of corporeal agency to which Montaigne would have us entrust ourselves in "De l'Experience," a depersonalized vitality very much characteristic of romance as a genre. Within Spenser's terms, it also anticipates Alma, the benign governess of the bodily House to which Guyon will shortly repair, and to which we will shortly turn. For now it is worth repeating that, even if from Guyon's perspective the trance appears to be a state of deep passivity, things are by no means so straightforward; in "reducing" Guyon to his body the trance

actually isolates and emphasizes the powers of an "inner life" quite distinct from that of consciousness, and yet equally—if not more—capable of action.

Guyon is in many ways a more stoic and impassive figure than Red Crosse, and it is perhaps for this reason that we hear less of his sensations and reactions. The trance seems an apposite fate for this character already so given to *apathia*: perhaps the only modulation of subjectivity conceivable for one already so impervious to feeling. But the stoic valorizes absence of feeling in large part because feeling (unlike political circumstance, for example) is something amenable to control, something over which he always has power, so that his refusal of feeling actually depends on a prior circumscription *to* feeling as that which, apparently at least, can be anticipated and minimized.[65] By enforcing a state of insentience, the trance inverts the terms of this circumscription, revealing that there are states which Guyon *cannot* feel and therefore that he cannot control; the involuntary accomplishment of *ataraxia* proves to be a critique of its valorization as a moral ideal. And yet precisely where Red Crosse's consciousness of sin proves impotent to redeem him from it, the subconscious principle of Life unveiled in the depths of Guyon's trance can *act* as a cooperating agent in his rescue.

In the following Canto, Guyon does apparently become conscious of this inner biological "Life" which exceeds the bounds of sensation. In the House of Alma, he is granted a vision of this benign agent who intervened on his behalf and cast out those "sencelesse foes" which had threatened its integrity and purity. The Canto begins with a "high Renaissance" encomium of the

[65] For the capacity to feel as a prerequisite of Stoic ethics, see, for example, Seneca's ninth letter to Lucilius, in Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, vol. 1, 44-45: "Consider, therefore, whether it is not better to say "a soul that cannot be harmed" [*invulnerabilem animum*], or "a soul entirely beyond the realm of suffering" [*animum extra omen patientiam positum*]. There is this difference between ourselves and the other school: our ideal wise man feels his troubles, but overcomes them [*vincit ... sed sentit*]; their wise man does not even feel them [*ne sentit quidem*]."

body's beauty, quite foreign to any ascetic rejection of the body and yet sharpened by the contrasting vision of its significant potential for "distemper":

> Of all Gods workes, which does this world adorne,
> There is no one more faire and excellent
> Then is mans body both for powre and forme,
> Whiles it is kept in sober government;
> But none then it, more fowle and indecent,
> Distempred through misrule and passions bace:
> It growes a Monster, and incontinent
> Doth loose his dignity and native grace.
> Behold, who list, both one and other in this place. (2.9.1)

As this prologue implies, the vision of Alma's House cannot exactly be said to reconcile mind and body—whatever harmony there may be relies on a fragile "government" which may break down, as in the faint, at a moment's notice. But while this acknowledgement that the body may be both "faire and excellent" and "a Monster, and incontinent" certainly resonates with Elizabethan discourses of temperance and bodily self-control, it also recalls Montaigne's vision, slightly less moralizing in its implications, of the body's irreducible mystery, a sense that it has its own autonomous if indeterminate nature, only fractiously responsive to conscious handling. Michael Schoenfeldt has read the House as an allegory of self-discipline, the result of a "heroic combination of immense moral effort and political consent," and yet he misses, I think, how alien the body remains to Guyon as he wanders through it, how much the "goodly order" of that body is the effect of a Life which Guyon apprehends, at best, as a subcutaneous and subconscious pressure.[66] Embedding consciousness deep within the body's interior, the House of Alma simply heightens the latter's strangeness:

> The maister Cooke was cald *Concoction*,
> A carefull man, and full of comely guise:
> The kitchin clerke, that hight *Digestion*,
> Did order all th'Achates in seemely wide,
> And set them forth, as well he could devise.
> The rest had severall offices assynd,

[66] See *Bodies and Selves*, 69.

> Some to remove the scum, as it did rise;
> Others to beare the same away did mynd;
> And others it to use according to his kind. (2.9.31)

In a series of similar scenes, Guyon encounters the full legion of powers which operate inside us independently of consciousness, engines of those "mouvements incogneus" at the heart of Montaignean *expérience*. Not merely the basis of involuntary biological rhythms such as sleep and waking, these powers are themselves characterized by a kind of inner sleep, enveloping us completely only at night, and yet always humming away impersonally just beneath the surface. If such a condition is our homeostatic norm, then consciousness, far from being our default or defining state as human beings, would instead be an exception, an infinitesimal and unstable separation from the unconscious activity that truly defines us. Guyon's visit to the House of Alma can be seen as an extension and even a deepening of the trance, an exploration, at the threshold between consciousness and unconsciousness, of the kinds of involuntary processes at whose existence the trance had already hinted. It can be seen, I am suggesting, as a much-dilated, allegorical moment of self-experience, rather than as an encomium of self-governance—an experience in which the autonomy of Guyon's somatic processes becomes the object of his own astonishment in an extended "stound": "[With] gazing wonder they their mindes did fill; / For never had they seene so straunge a sight" (2.9.33)

It might be objected that, as Suzanne Wofford has observed, Spenser's characters themselves remain unaware that they are participating in an allegory.[67] In the House of Alma this situation would seem especially poignant: how could Guyon, what would it mean for Guyon to be unaware that he was traveling through the corridors and recesses of his own body? But perhaps it would mean, simply enough, that he was in a trance. Indeed in Alma's House, and

[67] Susanne Lindgren Wofford, *The Choice of Achilles,* 219-294. For the notion that Spenser's characters "do not know they are in an allegory, and cannot and do not "read' the signs of their world as figurative pointers to another arena of understanding," see 220.

before it during Guyon's trance, the unawareness Wofford identifies proves to be precisely the point, for it is demonstrated to be a distinct and distinctly productive state—not simply the privation of awareness, but rather the condition in which the body's inner processes are constantly at work. Thus the episode does not in any way reconcile mind and body, or resolve the disjunction between consciousness and everything within the body that is unconscious. What we might instead say is that it reconciles the mind *to* the alienness of corporeal experience, much as Montaigne counsels in the final pages of "De l'Experience," and that it does so, moreover, through that form of self-experience which only the trance, displacing consciousness in its normal restricted sense, makes possible. Blurring the line between consciousness and unconsciousness, between subjectivity and objectivity, Guyon's wonder is a "self-experience" which allows him to enter the alternate reality constituted by nothing other than his body itself, and to become aware, if that is the right word, of what we might call his vital trance, much as Red Crosse had to become aware of his theological one.

Thus in the House of Alma allegory takes us beyond what we can consciously see and understand, but not by leading us "up" into a supersensible realm of form but rather "down" into a world of invisible physiological process. The objects are equally impersonal, and in each case allegory helps to unveil something invisible without corrupting its mystery. But where the structure of allegory is normally vertical, in this second model it proves to be more horizontal, a question of switching sides on a threshold rather than of traversing it. Guyon's faint is instrumental to his allegorical experience—not, however, because it liberates him from the senses and body, but on the contrary because it deepens his immersion in them, crossing into the somatic territory at which consciousness usually stops short, and coaxing him towards that inarticulate attunement to unconscious process which Montaigne calls *expérience. Expérience,* in

its most representative forms, is actually a mode of self-experience at the threshold of the body's unconscious processes: "To the end that sleep itself should not escape me thus stupidly, at one time I saw fit to have mine disturbed, so that I might gain a glimpse of it" (854). In the next chapter we will be thinking about what that glimpse might have revealed to Montaigne. For now let us pause on the thought that it is just such a glimpse which Guyon gains in his trance.

Chapter Three
Learning How to Die in the *Essais*

But what is it *like* to lose consciousness? To be in a state of such extreme suffering that we cannot speak or even cry out? Is there any lingering in the space between consciousness and unconsciousness? If so, is it possible to write about, or even from, such a space? Ariosto and Spenser both *show* us loss of consciousness as it befalls another, a character moving through a fictional world, but neither author ever gives a character the space to answer these more intimate questions. In both cases we are led to contemplate the causes and consequences of the semi- or unconscious state, yet the third-person narrative style of the verse romance forces on the characters a kind of muteness. Part of the mystery surrounding Guyon's faint (and perhaps Guyon himself) is that he never speaks a word before or after his trance—the narrative simply moves forward. Yet even for a stoic figure such as him, this silence seems unusual in the circumstances—wouldn't the return to consciousness at least be accompanied by some expression of confusion, some attempt to work out what has happened during the soul's absence? Guyon sees the bodies of Pyrochles and Cymochles and, somehow understanding what has happened, simply expresses obeisance and thanks to Arthur. He passes over his faint without so much as an expression of shame.

This is not the case for Montaigne, who, in the sixth essay of the second Book of his *Essais,* describes at length his descent into, and recovery from, unconsciousness on falling from his horse. The question of "what it is like" is clearly at the forefront of his mind, and he takes ample advantage of the occasion to report on his experience, making a concerted effort not only to register and consider (to "savor," as he puts it), but also to remember as much as he can. The moment raises several questions of a philosophical nature. It serves, first and foremost, as an unusually acute foretaste of death, bringing to a head many of the problems which troubled the

younger Montaigne. The first essay he wrote was entitled "That to Philosophize is to Learn How to Die," and as we will see, the faint makes for an important lesson of that kind; indeed as a form of "exercitation" or exercise the faint brings to the project of "learning how to die" an immediacy of lived experience that learning alone had been unable to provide. Second, as the passage from Lucretius quoted in the "Introduction" suggests, violent swoons also raise the question of the materiality and mortality of the soul, and this too is not lost on Montaigne, who actually cites Lucretius in his account. And there is, finally, an important question of pity—should we pity those whom we see in states of suffering so extreme they are only semi-conscious?

For Montaigne all of these problems can be addressed only by experiencing a near-death state himself, and in "De l'Exercitation," this is exactly what happens. The moment offers perhaps the first clear instance in the *Essais* in which Montaigne, speaking only of that which has happened to him personally, privileges experience over authority—a theme which, as we have already seen, becomes much more prominent later on.[1] The question of "what it is like"—of seeing for oneself—lies at the heart of this principle, and therefore subtends Montaigne's answers to all of the more specific questions with which the episode is concerned. And yet if this is the moment in which Montaigne can be said to "discover" the notion of *expérience,* so significant to his later essays, then we have to come to terms with the fact that he does so not in a moment of heightened sensory or emotional awareness, but rather in a moment where the very possibility of such awareness is violently foreclosed—a moment in which experience itself would appear to be shut down.[2] As in the Spenserian "stound," for Montaigne loss of

[1] Géralde Nakam notes that Montaigne describes this experience "en parlant de lui pour la première fois, semble-t-il avec une telle intensité," attributing to the episode "une valeur créatrice determinante." See *Montaigne et Son Temps*, 108-110.

[2] Lawrence Kritzman notes some of the paradoxes involved in Montaigne's account and the rhetoric that frames it: "If he embarks on an inquiry into his own knowledge through a semantic network that refers to the act of trying (exercising, experimenting, testing, tasting), how can he evoke the experience of death

consciousness goes hand-in-hand with a form of experience which consciousness is unable to assimilate, to liken to itself, and which is decoupled from that strong sense of self which is so often (including by Montaigne himself) taken as the *Essais*' central theme. Precisely by suspending that self, the swoon allows for that "experience without a subject" to which loss of consciousness, in various different contexts and temporal forms, so often gives rise. Indeed Montaigne's swoon will offer the clearest evidence for the idea that loss of consciousness is not simply one experience among others but experience's paradigmatic form.[3]

In what follows, then, we may have cause to question Montaigne's claim that the swoon gives him a glimpse of death in advance. For if it does, it is not quite analogous to, for example, finding out and describing what an orange tastes like. Even if we have never encountered such an entity before, the question is in and of itself not difficult to answer: while the exact series of adjectives—tangy, sharp, sweet—may differ slightly from person to person, most of us will understand each other when we are talking about the experience, which is to say that we will relate our descriptions to a potential sensory object in the same way. The adjectives, moreover, tell us as much about (what we take to be) the object itself as about our experience of it. As Sidney reminds us, the question of what an "elephant or a rhinoceros" looks like was, in

---

when death constitutes absolute difference and inaction? If the moment of death eludes consciousness, and if one then disappears in the nonpassage of death, how can one explain what can be grasped only in this ungraspable impasse? How can one take into account evidence of a nonexperienced phenomenon, an abyss of thought, in a discourse that claims to report the "trials" of a life." See *Fabulous Imagination*, 88. Similarly, Johannes Türk asks: "How can Montaigne, the narrator, give an account and draw conclusions from an experience he did not consciously make?, and notes that "Montaigne scholarship has only recently shed light on this astonishing fact" See "Approaching Death," 235-236, and note.

[3] Giorgio Agamben, Richard Regosin, and Martin Jay have all argued that for Montaigne, experience often seems to verge on the idea of a limit or terminal experience. Agamben writes that "Montaigne can formulate the ultimate goal of experience as a nearing to death; that is, man's advance to maturity through an anticipation of death as the extreme limit of experience. But for Montaigne this limit remains something that cannot be experienced, which can only be approached." See *Infancy and History*, 19. Citing this passage, Martin Jay writes that "Montaigne revealed an awareness of the unresolvable paradoxes within even the most authentic and fulfilled experience. In this sense, as Richard Regosin has remarked, "paradoxically, death becomes an emblematic experience" for Montaigne because it signifies the limits of all experience." See *Songs of Experience*, 27.

Renaissance Europe, a tricky one—yet at least in principle it could be answered by similar means and in analogous terms, by an image which "doth … strike, pierce, [and] possess the sight of the soul."[4]

Loss of consciousness, or syncope, cannot be approached by the same path. This is in part because it is an experience that is essentially passive, and which, therefore, cannot be *willingly* approached at all without being deprived of its essential nature. And it is, of course, because consciousness itself is absent, depriving us of a clear basis to which we may refer our sensations. But it is also because, unlike these other experiences, loss of consciousness does not involve an outside object: something certainly happens *to* consciousness, and yet that event has no immediate external object or source (the possibility of a self-induced trance is one we will explore in greater detail in the next chapter, on *Othello*). Loss of consciousness is therefore a fundamentally reflexive experience, in a way that ordinary consciousness can never be: it is an experience in which not only the limits but also the inner quality of consciousness itself, severed from its relation to objects, are made available. It is a "self-experience" in the strongest sense, though one which at the same time eludes the self altogether. Thus Montaigne's swoon will be about more than merely "what it is like" to lose consciousness, as if it were merely one possible experience among others. Instead it will be more a question of what consciousness *itself*—and perhaps this is where consciousness turns into experience—is like when separated from the kinds of objects, whether inner or outer, that usually provide it with content. Despite Montaigne's own disavowal of Renaissance esotericism there remains something mystical about such a moment: even though it does not point to any higher reality, it lays consciousness bare to itself in a way that clearly transcends the constraints of ordinary sentience.

[4] See his *Defence of Poetry*, in *Major Works*, 222.

In *The Feeling of What Happens*, Antonio Damasio develops a neurobiological account of consciousness by studying cases where it is somehow impaired. The most extreme cases of damaged consciousness, he admits, "afford little opportunity for behavioral analysis." Those which offer real insight are the ones in which some minimal residual consciousness is still present, such as in the case of "epileptic automatism," which "can be like a scalpel and separate consciousness from the things that are in consciousness." He asks us to imagine an encounter with such a patient:

> Observing an episode of absence automatism you would have watched the elaborate behaviors of an organism deprived of all extended consciousness and of everything but perhaps the dimmest form of core consciousness. One can only try to imagine the remains of a mind from which self and knowing have been removed, perhaps a mind strewn with images of things to be known but never really known, with things not really owned—stripped of the engine for deliberate action.[5]

In the case of patients suffering from "absence automatism," the difficulty of knowing other minds is redoubled, since such patients are not even present to themselves. Such patients become something like an absolute third-person, for they act entirely without the "deliberate action" that would imply a first-person center of consciousness, intention, and will. Almost by definition, such a state exceeds the powers of understanding and empathy. Damasio's account highlights the difficulty of the imaginative effort involved—"one can only try to imagine" it. I have been arguing that such an effort, as well as an analysis of the challenges attendant on it, is a central and overlooked dimension of the some of the major works of imaginative literature from the Renaissance. But nowhere is its difficulty clearer than in Montaigne's *Essais*. Not only in "De l'Exercitation," but in many of the *Essais* surrounding it, Montaigne contemplates the insurmountable gap between a conscious subject and "a mind from which self and knowing have been removed," a gap which become most poignant when they both belong to the same person.

[5] Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 99.

Practicing Death in the *Essais*

Though it offers glimpses at the notion of *expérience* he will develop later on, "De l'Exercitation" remains very much concerned with the Stoic themes of Montaigne's earlier essays. In essays such as "That the taste of good and evil depends in large part on the opinion we have of them," Montaigne recommends two different approaches to what he calls the "principal adversaries" of human life, namely death, pain, and poverty. Both strategies are clearly derived from Stoic thought. The first of these is to recognize how much our fear or desire of a thing depends on an erroneous opinion of its nature, and to attempt to alter or at least moderate that opinion accordingly. If we are gripped by fear of death, for example, Montaigne urges us to consider how differently others have viewed the same object. If we cannot adopt their opinion, we can at least use it to qualify the ardor of our own:

> Now this death, which some call the most horrible of horrible things, who does not know that others call it the only haven from the torments of this life, the sovereign good of nature, the sole support of our freedom, and the common and prompt remedy for all evils? (33-34)

After demonstrating this point with a range of examples, Montaigne comes to a surprising conclusion. It is not merely that we exaggerate the horrors of death. Death is so brief and inconsequential in its happening, Montaigne now muses, that it is in fact *only* felt in our imagination and anticipation of it. It is only felt, as Montaigne now puts it, in our "discours" or our reasoning: "La mort ne se sent que par les discours, d'autant que c'est le mouvement d'un instant." If we "feel" death only in an imaginative foreshadowing of it, then death itself is beyond the range of feeling.

Impressive though Montaigne's formulation is, it is hard to avoid feeling that it too is the product of excessive "discours"—a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* designed to assuage an anxiety that, as we will see, is not so easily overcome. In the meantime he acknowledges that we do feel pain regardless of our opinion of it, but argues that pain can be lessened through a practice of

patience and resistance: "But it is in us, if not to annihilate it, at least to lessen it by patience, and even should the body be disturbed by it, to maintain nevertheless our soul and reason in good trim….We must resist it and tense ourselves against it" (39). In order to face down our principal adversaries, then, we may either adjust our opinion to make them less fearful, or, through practice and habituation, accustom ourselves to bearing them; the first of these strategies is brought to bear on death and the second on pain. But for now it is the first of these strategies that Montaigne wants us to remember. Near the end of the essay he writes: "What matters," he writes, "is not merely that we see the thing, but how we see it" (47). What we might otherwise be tempted to call "wishful thinking" is for Montaigne a powerful philosophical practice: not a way of avoiding reality but rather of molding that reality for the sake of the strength and tranquility of the soul. It is not merely a question of deceiving ourselves. To the extent that the experience itself is actually constituted by our opinion of it—and, as Montaigne suggests, almost all experience is so formed—then there is no real discrepancy between its reality and our opinion, and thus we may as well mold that opinion as beneficially to ourselves as we can: "having the choice, if no one forces us, we are strangely insane to tense ourselves for the course that is more painful to us, and to give sicknesses, poverty, and slights a bitter and unpleasant taste [*aigre et mauvais goust*] if we can give them a good one and if, fortune merely furnishing us the material, it is for us to give it form" (33).[6] Insofar as death "ne se sent que par le dicours," it is the clearest

[6] For an account of how Montaigne's Stoicism entails a form of perspectivalism, see John D. Lyons, *Before Imagination*, 46: "In many ways Montaigne is a philosophical pragmatist who would be quite at home in Richard Rorty's intellectual world. He does not make a rigorous and exclusive division between what is objectively true and what is simply false because he recognizes that such a division would not allow an active place for the perceiver. In real life the perceiver actually causes things to become what they are, sometimes simply by perceiving them. This fact is a traditional part of the philosophy of *phantasia* and justifies the Stoic attention to managing perceptions."

example of an experience which is entirely malleable by opinion, and it is therefore the easiest to endow with a less horrifying aspect.[7]

Montaigne concludes the essay with two rhetorical questions whose spirit is perhaps less self-assured than what has come before:

> Well then [*Or sus*], why, out of so many arguments [*tant de discours*] which in various ways persuade men to despise death and endure pain, do we not find one that will do for us? And of all the many kinds of fancies [*tant d'especes d'imaginations*] which have persuaded others, why doesn't each man apply to himself the one that best suits his humor? (47)

The tone of these questions is somewhat difficult to read. Are they meant to be comfortingly rhetorical, implying a confidence that among the many preceding arguments we will be able to find one that will lessen our fear of adversity? Or do they instead betray an outburst of suppressed frustration, a premonition that, despite the accumulation of "so many arguments," our fear will still persist? That "so many arguments" will, in the end, boil down to so "many kinds of fancies"? The opening passage of "De l'Exercitation," in the next Book of the *Essais*, retrospectively suggests the second of these readings. It begins by addressing itself once more to those "principal adversaries" of human life, squaring itself against them as if for a renewed charge after a lull in a battle whose outcome is as yet far from certain:

> Reasoning and education [discours et l'instruction], though we are willing to put our trust in them, can hardly be powerful enough to lead us to action, unless besides we exercise and form our soul by experience to the way we want it to go; otherwise, when it comes to the time for action, it will undoubtedly find itself at a loss. That is why, among the philosophers, those who have wanted to attain some greater excellence have not been content to await the rigors of Fortune in shelter and repose, for fear she might surprise them inexperienced and new to the combat; rather they have gone forth to meet her and have flung themselves deliberately into the test of difficulties. Some of them have abandoned riches to exercise themselves in a voluntary poverty; others have sought labor and a painful austerity of life to toughen themselves against toil

[7] In his *Fabulous Imagination,* Kritzman extends such an analysis to the Montaigne's description of the faint itself: "The fear of death is weakened through rhetorical excess. Burying death in a "writerly shroud" plays the illusory experience of death off against death itself. The dream of eliminating all negative feeling associated with death is the symptom of a will to embrace an aberration of desire" (96); "Montaigne's analysis of the consequences associated with the anecdote of the fall generates a fiction that solitics … a figural historicization of the symptom: the desire to transpose death to a locus of pleasure, converting it into a malleable phenomenon." (103)

> and trouble; others have deprived themselves of the most precious parts of the body, such as sight and the organs of generation, for fear that their services, too pleasant and easy, might relax and soften the firmness of their soul. (267)

From the outset "De l'Exercitation" concedes what the earlier essay had attempted to deny, namely that "discours" may be insufficient to prepare us for action. Despite the accumulation of arguments and examples, we are often left unprepared for adversity, and thus Montaigne now confidently recommends the second of the two strategies suggested earlier, practice and lived experience in preference to reason and example. Perplexingly enough, "exercitation" itself actually means scholastic disputation or philosophical exercise, and thus seems closer to the latter of these options; we will have to see to what extent this meaning of the word continues to inflect its appropriation here, where it is usually translated as "exercise" (or glossed as "exercice"), in the sense of practice or training. For on the surface, that does seem to be what Montaigne has in mind: the essay that follows dispenses with explicit arguments, and turns directly to an episode from Montaigne's own experience.

Why does Montaigne so decisively now embrace the second of what I have called his strategies, leaving the notion of opinion all but completely behind? The idea that there are some ordeals we merely have to inure ourselves to suggests that, after all, some aspect of their experience is impervious to opinion, and indeed in later essays Montaigne remained interested in the experience of death, in the question of "what it is like," suggesting a somewhat diminished confidence in the power of mere thinking to preempt it. At the beginning of "De l'Exercitation," in fact, Montaigne admits that even the strategy of habituation is limited in application. For while we can inure ourselves to poverty and pain by voluntarily taking them on and thereby habituating ourselves to them, there is no way we can do so for the third in the triad of human adversaries:

> But as for dying, which is the greatest task we have to perform, practice cannot help us. A man can, by habit and experience, fortify himself against pain, shame, indigence, and such other accidents; but as for death, we can try it only once: we

> are all apprentices when we come to it. (267)

Again, Montaigne singles out death from the other adversities. But where earlier he did so on account of what he deemed the purely discursive (and hence negligible) quality of its feeling, here he does so for what may seem like the opposite reason: death now seems to have an experiential singularity which renders it completely unavailable to any kind of anticipation, whether through imagination or praxis. Indeed not only is death a singular event in our own lives, it is also one that, by its nature, no one else can help us to prepare for. Not only, in other words, is there a distinctive feeling of death which opinion cannot shape, but it is also one which is impossible to anticipate even by hearsay, since, of course, the dead cannot speak or write. This singularity is the aspect of death that Montaigne focuses on as he continues. "In ancient times," he writes, "there were men who husbanded their time so excellently that they tried to taste and savor it [*de la gouster et savourer*] even at the point of death, and strained their minds to see what this passage was, but they have not come back to tell us news of it [*nous en dire les nouvelles*]" (267).

It would now appear, then, that death does have a distinctive sensory quality of its own, a unique phenomenology which certain men have tried to "taste and savor." Like Sidney's rhinoceros, it presents us with a completely new sensory experience—and yet unlike that animal, no one will ever be able to describe it for us until we see it for ourselves. As difficult to imagine as it is to prepare for, death thus challenges the stoic maxim that "the taste of good and evil depends in large part on the opinion we have of them," and it leaves open the uncomfortable possibility that it may taint a lifetime of stoic impassiveness. All opinions are merely speculative when it comes to death, which in this essay, as in several that surround it, takes on a kind of transcendental sensory quality. Since no one has ever lived to tell us what that taste is like, death *is*, as he said earlier, the ultimate object of opinion and conjecture, of discourse, yet we now see

that this is not because it is outside of feeling but because its feeling is so singular as to deflect all description and anticipation: a taste that is entirely unmediated by opinion and that proliferates discourse precisely by proving so resistant to it. In other matters we may be able to mold our experience of a thing by altering our opinion of it, but when it comes to death our opinion has no bearing on what we have to undergo: the multiplicity of our perspectives is the measure not of death's emptiness but of its fullness, in the face of which both of Montaigne's Stoic strategies come up short.

In actuality Montaigne dedicates much thought, in "De l'Exercitation" as well as in other essays, to the question of how death and near-death states might feel—treating it, precisely, as a matter for opinion, and entertaining a number of different possibilities. Having opened the possibility that death has a distinctive quality or flavor, Montaigne at first asserts, though in a somewhat qualified way, that this is simply an absence of feeling. In the essay "Couardise Mere de la Cruaté," Montaigne describes Mohammed II's cruel method of execution: slicing the condemned in half, "whence it happened that they died as it were two deaths at once; and, he says, you saw both parts moving a long time after, full of life and writhing in torment" (530). Describing Mohammed's victims, he continues: "I do not believe [*Je n'estime pas*] there was much feeling in that movement." The same question is raised in "De l'Exercitation," right after Montaigne's description of his swoon, with only a slight concession to the necessity of conjecture: "And I could not believe that with so great a paralysis of the limbs, and so great a failing of the senses, the soul could maintain any force within by which to be conscious of itself….and that consequently they were not much to be pitied" (270). Though he now has his own experience to draw on, Montaigne's assertiveness on this matter remains somewhat surprising: given his claim that even one's own states are subject to the distortions of belief, it is

noteworthy that, in this case, he feels able to opine on the feelings of others even—or rather precisely when—they themselves do not feel anything at all. It is as if he were anxious to banish a possibility he found distinctly uncomfortable, and that presented a considerable obstacle both to the idea that we can inure ourselves to adversity by willingly exposing ourselves to it beforehand, and to the idea that we can meaningfully shape it by opinion.

In the chapter entitled "De juger de la mort d'autruy," Montaigne changes his view, acknowledging that some people can and do maintain sentience as they die, and indeed that they are worthy of admiration for doing so.

> But even in those of stouter heart who have resolved on their execution, we must see, I say, whether it was by a blow that left them no time to feel its effect; for it is open to question whether, on seeing life flow away little by little, the body's feeling mingling with the soul's [*le sentiment du corps se meslant à celuy de l'ame*], keeping the means of repentance available, they would have had constancy and obstinacy in so dangerous an act of will. (460)

In some deaths, he admits, the "body's feeling" does mingle with the soul's, so that we do maintain sentience as we are passing away. Now, however, the epistemological question all the more forcefully rears it head: "it is open to question" whether those who experienced a quick death would have been as resolved had they been sensible of what was happening to them. "It is open to question" because, once more, death seems to have a unique phenomenology which makes it impossible to know how well even the most hardened Stoic will be able to face it. This is a line of reasoning stands at odds with much of Montaigne's earlier thinking about death, premised as it was on the idea that death is not something we can feel.

As the essay unfolds, Montaigne considers those who are able to encounter and even savor the experience of death, such as the philosopher Cleanthes:

> His gums were swollen and decayed; the doctors advised the strictest abstinence. After fasting for two days, he is so much better that they declare him cured and allow him to return to his accustomed way of life. He, on the contrary, already tasting some sweetness in this faintness, decides not to draw back again and crosses the line toward which he had advanced so far. (461)

This notion that experiencing death might actually be pleasant becomes more and more prominent as the chapter winds up. He writes of Tullius Marcellinus, a Roman whose story is told in Seneca's *Epistles,* that:

> he undertook to leave this life, not run out of it; not to escape death, but to experience it [*non d'eschapper à la mort, mais de l'essayer*]. And to give himself leisure to deal with it, having give up all nourishment, and, on the third day after, having had himself sprinkled with warm water, he fainted away little by little, and not without a certain voluptuousness, so he said. In truth, those who have had these failings of the heart that get their hold from our weakness say that they feel no pain in them, indeed rather a certain pleasure, as when we pass into sleep and rest. (462)

Montaigne's descriptions of these moments—"the body's feeling mingling with the soul," "tasting some sweetness in this faintness," "a certain pleasure, as when we pass into sleep and rest"—all suggest that, against his original hypothesis, one does, in fact, have some feeling in these moments, but that it is a uniquely pleasing one. Again, it is hard to avoid a sense that Montaigne is anxious to banish or minimize a possibility by which he still remains unsettled.

Both within "De l'Exercitation" itself as in various essays surrounding it, Montaigne vacillates widely on the phenomenology of death and extreme states. Are they simply inaccessible to imagination and description? Are they unspeakably horrible? Or is there, on the contrary, "a certain pleasure" to be had in these moments? Or do we really just feel nothing at all? Perhaps these different possibilities need not be mutually exclusive—in fact, as we will see, several of them will be invoked in the course of "De l'Exercitation." But Montaigne's vacillation reveals that on questions such as these, he is either reduced to opinion and conjecture—"Je croy que," "Je n'estime pas," "De juger"—or forced to depend on the reports of others, but now not because death "ne se sent que part le discours," but on the contrary, as it were, because death "ne se sent *par* le discours," because of a gap between language and experience which death renders insurmountable. Each of the anecdotes emphasizes how much Montaigne's understanding of the other's condition depends on that other's narrative of what he felt, or did not feel—a kind of

traveler's account: "not without a certain voluptuousness, so he said"; "say that they feel no pain." Throughout the middle essays, the phenomenology of death and extreme suffering remains a central and unresolved problem, putting considerable pressure on the coherence of Montaigne's stoicism and bespeaking, as well, a slowly emerging skepticism, honed by the problem of the unknowability of other minds. In extreme states the invisibility of other minds is itself made visible, as the other's experience is swallowed up in the muteness of the agonized body.

The Phenomenology of Fainting

As we have already begun to see, the swoon described in "De l'Exercitation" seems, at first, to offer Montaigne a way around these obstacles, providing a resolution to the dilemma posed by death's singularity. This, at any rate, is how Montaigne first presents it: "But those who by some violent accident have fallen into a faint and lost all sensation, those, in my opinion, have been very close to seeing death's true and natural face." The swoon would thus provide him with a first-hand experience of something which, so far, he has only ever beheld from the outside, allowing him to speak with more authority on the several open questions surrounding the experience of death:

> During our third civil war, or the second (I do not quite remember which), I went riding one day about a league from my house, which is situated at the very hub of all the turmoil of the civil wars of France. Thinking myself perfectly safe, and so near my home that I needed no better equipage, I took a very easy but not very strong horse. On my return, when a sudden occasion came up for me to use this horse for a service to which it was not accustomed, one of my men, big and strong, riding a powerful work horse who had a desperately hard mouth and was moreover fresh and vigorous—this man, in order to show his daring and get ahead of his companions, spurred his horse at full speed up the path behind me, came down like a colossus on the little man and little horse, and hit us like a thunderbolt with all his strength and weight, sending us both head over heels. So that there lay the horse bowled over and stunned, and I ten or twelve paces beyond, dead, stretched on my back, my face all bruised and skinned, my sword, which I had had in my hand, more than ten paces away, my belt in pieces, having no more motion or feeling than a log. It is the only swoon I have experienced to this day. (268-268)

This experience, he now goes on to explain, gave him a much more intimate view of death than he had heretofore thought possible, and from the inside, as it were, it doesn't look so bad: "This recollection, which is so strongly implanted on my soul [*Cette recordation que j'en ay fort empreinte en mon ame*], showing me the face and idea of death so true to nature, reconciles me to it somewhat" (269). What we will have to investigate, however, is exactly how the "face and idea of death" looks now that it has been ostensibly unveiled, and how—and how far—it differs from his earlier and more speculative images of it.

His language again reminds us that, without immediate experience, the phenomenology of death and extreme states—how they feel—must remain a matter for belief and opinion. Indeed before describing his trance in detail he provides us with his fullest description of the problem which, as we have seen, he faces in several other places as well; it is very much presented as a matter of belief and speculation:

> I believe that [*Je croy que*] this is the same state in which people find themselves whom we see fainting with weakness in the agony of death; and I maintain that we pity them without cause, supposing that they are agitated by grievous pains or have their soul oppressed by painful thoughts. This has always been my view, against the opinion of many [*C'a esté tousjours mon advis, contre l'opinion de plusieurs*], and even of Etienne de la Boétie, concerning those whom we see thus prostrate and comatose as their end approaches, or overwhelmed by the length of the disease, or by a stroke of apoplexy, or by epilepsy-
>
> vi morbi saepe coactus
> Ante oculos aliquis nostros, ut fulminis ictu,
> Concidit, et spumas agit; ingemit, et fremit artus;
> Desipit, extentat nervos, torquetur, anhelat,
> Inconstanter et in jactando membra fatigat,
>
> —or wounded in the head: When we hear them groan and from time to time utter poignant sights, or see them make certain movements of the body, we seem to see signs that they still have some consciousness left [*où il semble qu'il leur reste encore de la cognoissance*.] (270)

Once more, people on the point of death or in states of unconsciousness or extreme suffering are seen to pose a unique epistemological problem: given that they are unable to speak of their own experience, how are we to know whether and how much they are suffering? The passage

Montaigne quotes to augment his list of such states is from the middle of Book Three of *De Rerum Natura* (3.487-491), in which Lucretius cites these cases as arguments for the mortality of the soul. For Lucretius they demonstrate that even before death, when the body is in extreme distress due to a disease, the soul too is seriously affected. Given this vulnerability, it is highly unlikely, Lucretius concludes, that the soul could survive the body's death. For Montaigne, the question is a slightly different one—are we *conscious* in such states, and simply unable to express ourselves (it is this, we should recall, that presents him with the greatest horror)? Or are we so afflicted that the soul, as it were, shuts down altogether? The essay's answer, at first, seems clear—Montaigne now asserts more confidently than ever that his long-standing opinion was correct: "Now I have no doubt, now that I have tried this out by experience, that I judged this matter rightly all along" (271)

As we have seen, however, Montaigne's opinion on the nature and feeling of this state has actually been far from fixed. And indeed the passage from Lucretius only serves to highlight the inconsistency of Montaigne's point-of-view on this matter. Lucretius' point in the longer section from which this passage is drawn is that the soul, even though it resides "inside the body itself," *is* affected, and that thus it is hardly likely to fare well "in the open air," i.e. after death:

> haec igitur tantis ubi morbis corpore in ipso
> iactentur miserisque modis distracta laborent,
> cur eadem credis sine corpore in aëre aperto
> cum validis ventis aetatem degere posse? (3.506-509)
>
> Since, therefore, the mind and spirit are tossed about by so great diseases in the very body itself, and are miserably torn asunder and distressed, why do you believe that the same without body, in the open air, amidst the mighty winds, are able to live?[8]

For Lucretius the vulnerability of the soul is evidence of its materiality and hence of its mortality as well. Montaigne seems to be quoting him to prove the contrary, namely that the soul

[8] See *De Rerum Natura*, ed. W.H.D. Rouse, 227.

is impervious, at least in these cases, to the body's suffering. Perhaps Montaigne is suggesting that the powers of the soul may be so acutely affected as to become insensible, as if beyond a certain threshold of stimulation, a kind of self-induced anesthetic set in. Yet even then it is not exactly the case—and Lucretius' demonstration of the soul's fragile exposure helps to reveal this—that the soul feels nothing; at least we must say that it *feels* nothing. But even this does not seem to line up with the spirit of this passage from Lucretius, whose examples are intentionally somewhat horrifying, designed to frighten us into an awareness of just how vulnerable and fragile our soul actually is.

What does it mean, after all, to argue that the soul is insensible of its own suffering? How can one see all the outwards signs of agony, and yet share Montaigne's blithe certainty that the soul remains blissfully impervious? And how, indeed, can Montaigne describe in such detail his own predicament, his position, that of his horse and his belt, and yet assert that he lay completely unconscious? Though he claims that he felt no pain or discomfort, in order to be able to make that claim he must have felt *something*, some "effect": "Or que je l'ay essayé par effect"; after all it would be of little use, in resolving the quandaries with which the essay begins, if he really felt nothing at all. In fact as we have seen in the other passages, Montaigne does seem to acknowledge, despite his overt claims to the contrary, that there is some feeling in death: a pleasant one, in fact. And here as he proceeds, it becomes clear that he did maintain a remarkable degree of sentience throughout the whole experience, even if his awareness of that sentience was somehow disrupted. "C'est le seul esvanouisement que j'aye *senty*" (my emphasis), he writes.

The view apparently confirmed by the experience is the following: "And I could not believe that with so great a paralysis of the limbs, and so great a failing of the senses, the soul could maintain any force within by which to be conscious of itself [*aucune force au dedans pour*

se recognoistre].” This last phrase, and “cognoissance” in the preceding passage [*qu'il leur reste encore de la cognoissance*], are both translated by Donald Frame with the English “consciousness.” *Se recognoistre* can be used idiomatically to mean “*reprendre conscience*,” that is to regain consciousness, though here it seems to mean, simply, to be conscious of oneself, to be aware of one’s own existence. *Connaissance*, meanwhile, may mean knowledge *or* consciousness, and thus *perdre connaissance* is to faint. Was the difference clear to Montaigne? *Le Robert* gives “before 1650” as the origin of *connaissance* in the sense of *conscience* or “consciousness,” and Larousse dates its earliest usage in this sense to 1647; earlier, then, it would just mean “knowledge” in the more specific sense. Similarly the English word consciousness does not come to mean “faculty of awareness” until the later seventeenth century; thus John Florio, in his 1603 translation, translates Montaigne’s phrases here as “it seemeth they have yet some knowledge left,” and “I could not believe that at so great an astonishment of members and deffailance of senses the soul could maintaine any force within, to know herself.”[9] It is possible, of course, to be “conscious” and not to have “knowledge,” and thus it is not surprising that these two senses of *connaissance* came to be distinguished and defined differently. But it is hard to be sure if Montaigne is making this distinction. And if the two meanings of *connaissance* were not fully distinguished, the lines also mean that for Montaigne to lose consciousness is to have his “knowledge” somehow broken, in the same way that in madness our capacity to make judgments is severely damaged.

But if *connaissance only* means knowledge in the original, restricted sense—as the word’s history as well as Florio’s translation suggest—then perhaps Montaigne’s point is different: perhaps his point is that he lost his capacity to know himself and what was happening to him, but not his capacity to be conscious of it. Perhaps this distinction is what makes the

[9] John Florio, *The Essayes*, 217.

episode so interesting: what is terrible, what the Stoic then wishes to avoid, is not feeling pain but *knowing* that one is feeling on it. The value of the whole episode relies on Montaigne's having maintained some degree of awareness right before and right after the trance, so that he may evaluate, once and for all, "that which has always been his view, against the opinion of many." But in the end, almost by necessity, the episode reveals something slightly different from his supposition that the soul would not suffer: the soul is indeed unconscious of its pain, not because it does not feel anything, but rather because it does not *know* that it feels anything.

Indeed as I have already suggested, it is hard to argue that Montaigne was completely lacking consciousness—as opposed to merely lacking knowledge—for the whole time. Instead, what happens as he continues is that the borderline between consciousness and unconsciousness becomes increasingly fine. "I know that I felt nothing [*si sçay que je ne sentois*] in my imagination that *hurt* me" (271; my emphasis), he explains—a statement which does not exclude all feeling whatsoever. It was, after all, the pain that Montaigne had feared the most, the possibility of having "my soul alive and afflicted, without means to express itself" (271). Yet though he feels no pain, some kind of perceptual activity does seem to have persisted:

> As I approached my house, where the alarm of my fall had already come, and the members of my family had met me with the outcries customary in such cases, not only did I make some sort of answer to what was asked me, but also (they say) I thought of ordering them to give a horse to my wife, whom I saw stumbling and having trouble on the road, which is steep and rugged. It would seem that this consideration must have proceeded from a wide-awake soul; yet the fact is that I was not there at all. These were idle thoughts, in the clouds, set in motion by the sensations of the eyes and ears; they did not come from within me. I did not know, for all that, where I was coming from or where I was going, nor could I weigh and consider what I was asked. These are slight effects which the senses produce of themselves, as if by habit; what the soul contributed was in a dream, touched very lightly, and merely licked and sprinkled, as it were, by the soft impression of the senses. (271-272)

In Spenser's words, "he saw his senses strange astonishment." That is, in their bewilderment his senses seem to act of their accord: Montaigne simply looks on from without as idle thoughts are "set in motion by the sensations of the eyes and ears," "slight effects which the senses produce of

themselves." None of these activities seem to proceed from his soul, from that self to which, a century later, Locke would attribute all conscious activity. The last sentence of the passage accords with the descriptions of the deaths of Cleanthes and Marcellinus, both of whom felt, as we saw, a "voluptuousness" in dying. But the answer to Montaigne's outstanding uncertainty about the phenomenology of death is now more complicated than that as well—for "the fact is," he says, "that I was not there at all." Thus it is not that he don't *feel* anything in such states, it is that *he* doesn't feel it; the feeling itself continues, but apparently in the absence of a subject who is aware of it. The self is, of course, one of the great themes of the *Essais*—"I am myself the matter of my book," he famously announces in the preface, and thus this loss of the self, even if only temporary, is nothing short of momentous. Yet at the same time the episode marks a realization that experience may go on in despite, or even in the absence of such a self, and that experience may sometimes exceed the grasp of a self-aware subject. Such a realization, I would suggest, marks an important turning-point in the development of Montaigne's thought, a turn, within the *Essais*, away from the idea of a self constituted through the exercise of self-control and towards a self affirmed in an "ethics of yielding."[10] And it marks, as well, the recognition of a form of *connaissance* independent not only of knowledge, but of consciousness as well—if this is understood, as it would be in the Enlightenment, as the prerogative of a self-aware subject and the form of possible knowledge. "I did not know," he writes, "where I was coming from or where I was going, nor could I weigh and consider what I was asked," and yet his soul was "wide awake"—*esveillée.* Losing consciousness in the sense of knowledge, Montaigne gains it in the sense of experience—experience as that which happens to us "immediately," before and

[10] For Montaigne's "ethics of yielding," see David Quint, *Montaigne and the Quality of Mercy,* esp. chapter 4.

without our conscious recognition and consent, and as that which, extrapolated from such immediacy, can be set over and against received wisdom.

Montaigne, as we have seen, sets up the swoon as if it enabled the empirical resolution to a series of doubts and divergent opinions he has entertained concerning extreme states, and to an extent it succeeds in doing so. And yet at the peak of his experience of the swoon, the language of doubt, far from being dispelled, instead comes to a climax: "I did not know." If, as I have suggested, *connaissance* means knowledge and not consciousness, then what happens here is that the faculty of knowledge is suspended in an overriding moment of Skeptic *epoché.* The first effect of the swoon is not to suspend Montaigne's capacity for sense-experience, but rather to displace it to a site outside the knowing, remembering self, so that his own experience becomes a matter of conjecture to himself as well. Far from confirming Montaigne's beliefs through experience, the swoon undoes the very possibility of such confirmation by decoupling experience from knowledge altogether. What Montaigne instead discovers is the dominion of a doubt so absolute that it may extend even to the most basic awareness of self and of world; this is what it means to say that he "loses knowledge." As per Montaigne's Pyrrhonism, doubt's dominion could never itself be the object of a proposition, nor could it be practically integrated into normal life; rather it is only available in the form of a limit-experience such as that which Montaigne undergoes here.

Many aspects of the essay bear out this idea that the swoon is not a moment of certainty and resolution, but rather of climactic doubt. First there is the fact that he is unable to remember when exactly it took place: "During our third civil war, or the second (I do not quite remember which)." It is perhaps a marker of the intensity of the experience itself, of its autonomy from a subject continuous in memory, that it severs all connection to what happens before or after, that

it is ejected from the temporal continuity which, for later thinkers, will be essential to consciousness. And yet it suggests that in its very intensity the experience generates a circumambient vagueness in the mind, one which can only be filled by guesswork and, as John Lyons suggests, by imagination.[11] Indeed Montaigne hedges the experience itself with quotations not only from Lucretius, but from Virgil, Ovid, and Tasso as well, as if even here, precisely at the point where the immediacy of lived experience is supposed to supervene on the proliferation of conjecture and report, his own language still felt short. And finally there is the strikingly mimetic way in which he frames his newfound intimacy with death: he describes the moment "me representant son visage et son idée si pres du naturel." The analogy between the swoon and death is conceived in terms of a resemblance based on mimesis rather than similarity: as the likeness between an original and its image rather than between two objects of the same family. It is not death itself but death's "visage and idea" that are represented to him—not, then, as they are in themselves, but "pres du naturel."

Regardless of how "close" the swoon's image of death may be to the reality of death itself, the introduction of mimetic logic undercuts the whole rhetoric in which the experience was initially framed. The swoon was supposed to break down the barrier presented by an inherently incommunicable experience to those who have not undergone it; by suggesting that even this moment was fundamentally representational in nature, by introducing, moreover, a series of poetic formulas, Montaigne firmly reintroduces that barrier. With no other sense-experience to measure it against, what happens to Montaigne himself in the trance must rest within the remit of faculties regulated by opinion, representation, and by imagination. But this deconstructive

[11] See his *Before Imagination*: "The author's near-death state can only be appreciated, in fact, can only be known, through some form of imagination" (40); "this is without a doubt the passage in the *Essays* in which the ancient ideal of *tranquillitas* is most completely achieved, yet it is achieved by accepting the spontaneous productions of imagination, rather than by calling them into being according to a preconceived program" (44).

account of the episode by no means diminishes its value as phenomenology; on the contrary the two may go hand-in-hand. Death and extreme states such as the trance may be moments of unmediated experience, but in that very respect they sever themselves from the rest of life and force the senses to abandon even that minimal claim to certainty which pain seems to offer, multiplying rather than quelling doubts and hypotheses. The moment of pure experience also turns out to be a moment of pure conjecture; the turn to "exercice" in the sense of practice turns out to be a scholastic "exercitation" after all.

It is true, then, when it comes to death and states of unconsciousness, we are entirely reduced to speculation—that death "ne se sent que par le discours." But we now see that it is true for a different reason than the one originally proposed. It is not true because death is instantaneous and therefore imperceptible. Rather, it is because in near-death states our souls somehow become detached from themselves, so that we are not fully aware of what we ourselves our feeling. In such states, we do not feel nothing, nor do we feel pleasure; instead we are reduced to absolute conjecture. But though *I* may not feel it, something is nevertheless felt, along the lines of William James's "feltness"—enough, in any case, to warrant a conjecture. One recent reader of the scene has gone as far as to suggest that Montaigne reconstructs the whole experience based only on the later information of his wife and his servants.[12] But the whole point is that we may continue to be sentient even in the absence of a subjective witness, a self, whether ours or anyone else's, to whom that sentience may be attributed. If Montaigne does manage to recollect the fragments later on, it is in the manner of a flash memory, of an experience that is all the more vividly personal in having, for all intents and purposes, befallen another.

From "Exercitation" to "Expérience"

[12] See Johannes Turk, "Approaching Death."

In his effort to develop a neurobiology of consciousness, Damasio distinguishes between "wakefulness" and "consciousness," and offers an explanation of how the former can persist in the absence of the latter:

> Wakefulness is not the same as consciousness. In the wakeful state the brain and mind are "on," and images of the organism's interior as well as the organism's environment are being formed. Reflexes can be engaged, of course … , and low-level attention can be driven to stimuli that conform to the basic needs of the organism. And yet, consciousness may be absent. Patients with some neurological conditions … are awake and yet lack what core consciousness would have added to their thoughts: images of knowing centered on a self.[13]

Damasio defines such states as "absence automatisms" and goes on to discuss several cases. His conclusion is strikingly similar to Montaigne's: what is absent in wakefulness, when it is cut off from consciousness, is not sentience per se but rather those "images of knowing centered on a self" which integrate the data of sentience with the purview of a self-aware subject, just as Montaigne finds that, despite being wide-awake, *esveillée*, "the fact is that I was not there at all." Those images of the self, for Damasio, are no more immaterial than the sense data they allow us to make sense of, which is why they can be impaired by damage to the brain. They are as fragile as they are essential.

Damasio's fine-grained account of consciousness, with its degrees from "wakefulness" through "background emotions" to "focused attention" and "verbal report," allows us to see what Montaigne himself all but admits: the conclusion that his soul is "asleep" is not the whole picture.[14] *Some* kind of awareness—Damasio's "wakefulness"—remains active, and Montaigne's discovery and description of the activity of this layer of consciousness is as significant as his confirmation that *self*-awareness is asleep. Somehow, Montaigne *was* aware during this experience, even if it is merely in a way that he must reconstruct later on, after his sense of a unified identity has been restored. What is lacking is precisely any kind of *connaissance* in the

[13] *Feeling of What Happens*, 90.
[14] *Feeling of What Happens*, 89.

sense of knowledge. He compares this sensation to that of falling asleep: "So it happens to us in the early stages of sleep, before it has seized us completely, to sense as in a dream what is happening around us, and to follow voices with a blurred and uncertain hearing which seems to touch on only the edges of the soul [*qui semble ne donner qu'aux bords de l'ame*]" (271). The image of the "bords de l'ame" is a striking one, giving literal and spatial form to what I have referred to as peripheral, marginal, or threshold states of awareness. It is at the "bords de l'ame" that the moments we considered in Spenser—Red Crosse, Guyon, and Artegall's "stounds"—presumably take place.

For Damasio, such liminal states provide further evidence for the potential dissociation of wakefulness and consciousness. "Wakefulness and consciousness tend to go together," he writes, "although the coupling can be broken in two exceptional circumstances. One exception occurs when we are in the state of dream sleep. We are obviously not awake during dream sleep and yet we have some consciousness of the events taking place in the mind. The memory we form of the last dream fragments before we wake up indicates that some consciousness was 'on.'."[15] Ariosto describes a similar phenomenon when Orlando finally awakens from his madness in Canto 39 of the *Orlando Furioso*:

> Come chi da noioso e grave sonno,
> ove o vedere abominevol forme
> di mostri che non son, né ch'esser ponno,
> o gli par cosa far strana et enorme,
> ancor si maraviglia, poi che donno
> è fatto de' suoi sensi, e che non dorme;
> cosí, poi che fu Orlando d'error tratto,
> restò maraviglioso e stupefatto. (39.58)

Ariosto's description captures the curious experience of being conscious of having been conscious—that is, perceiving our perception after an interval such that the earlier perception

[15] Ibid., 90.

seems to have belonged to another. Montaigne is speaking of falling asleep rather than wakening, but his reconstruction, after the fact, of the "slight effects which the senses produce of themselves" is identical to the process Ariosto describes here. Philip Sidney goes one step further in *Astrophil and Stella* 38, a sonnet which is a precise account of the course of his sensations during the "early stages of sleep." For Sidney, the vision of Stella he has when falling asleep, which he describes in the octave, is disrupted by his effort to grasp it in full self-consciousness, as described in the sestet:

> I start, look, heark; but what in closed-up sense
> Was held, in opened sense it flies away,
> Leaving me nought but wailing eloquence.[16]

Sidney is not talking about dreaming, the total alteration of consciousness which occurs during sleep, but rather about those "blurred and uncertain" sensations that, as Montaigne reminds us, immediately precede sleep. These perceptions, on the threshold between closed-up and opened sense, allow for an altered mode of perception that full sentience ("opened sense") conceals, and that the rhetorical devices of the Petrarchan sonnet ("wailing eloquence"), presumably the fruit of a fully waking consciousness, try but fail to reconstitute.

In *The New Wounded*, Catherine Malabou takes the Damasian distinction between wakefulness and consciousness a radical step further: she suggests that the former might offer a mode of truth-disclosure by opening a unique window onto an underlying process of sensory calibration and self-receptivity that she calls "auto-affection." "The only possible subjective experience of cerebral auto-affection," she argues, "is that of the suffering that follows its damage or interruption."[17] The state in which we are not fully conscious—in which our ordinary consciousness gives way to mere wakefulness without identity—allows, as Malabou understands

[16] *Major Works*, 168.
[17] *The New Wounded*, 45.

it, access to the realm of "cerebral auto-affection," a level of sentient responsiveness that precedes our conscious awareness, and which precedes, as well, our conscious sense of identity, of who we are. No longer capable of recognizing the things and people around one, cut off from the dialectic of mutually constitutive subjects and objects, the patients she considers feel and consider nothing but their own feeling. Malabou follows Damasio—and, as we have seen, Montaigne as well—in acknowledging the extent to which such experiences detach us even from ourselves, not by eliminating sentience altogether, but by cutting it off from self-consciousness. "Changes caused by brain lesions," Malabou writes, "frequently manifest themselves as an *unprecedented metamorphosis* of the patient's identity" and it is such a transformation, if only temporary, that Montaigne undergoes in the absence of "images of knowing … centered on a self."[18] Montaigne's experience, as his account makes very clear, is of losing his sense of identity, of temporarily becoming someone else, of becoming a third person *to himself*. We could describe this process as crossing the threshold between mind and brain, between a fully self-aware, strongly founded identity, and an impersonal, biological mechanism, no more one's own than anyone else's. While Malabou surely does not consider such an experience desirable, she does want to insist that it is more than a mere privation—that it enables a form of disclosure which is normally unavailable. By considering Orlando's madness, Red Crosse's stound, Guyon's faint, and now Montaigne's swoon not as moments of madness, mystical experience, or moral breakdown but rather as states of phenomenological exception, I hope to have shown how for them, too, limit-states of the soul permit auto-affection to disclose itself: an experience of consciousness itself which is presupposed by consciousness in its everyday functioning and yet can never be fully grasped by it.

[18] *The New Wounded*, 15.

Such an experience can never be directly affirmed, described, or undergone. Montaigne vacillates between wanting to dismiss this episode and finding reasons to mark it out for significance: "I do not want to forget this, that the last thing I was able to recover was the memory of this accident" (272). He singles out, as the most notable feature of this experience, the one most important to remember, the fact that he almost forgot it completely. Unable to hone in on the experience of unconsciousness or even on the event that brought it about, Montaigne does all he can to reconstruct the margins of the experience, the passage into and out of unconsciousness. The experience seems to resist direct recollection, reconstitution, and narration, but it is precisely this resistance which, for Montaigne, renders it valuable: "I do not want to forget this." It is not merely, then, that the experience allows Montaigne to answer the question of what death will be like, to develop a phenomenology of cognitive blankness, but rather that it brings home why such a phenomenology would always be a contradiction in terms, why at the limits or "edges" of sensation even the simplest features of our own experience are traversed by radical doubt. Malabou, too, is interested in reconstructing not the phenomenology per se but rather the "plasticity" of the traumatic experience. She insists that "destruction might indeed constitute a form of psychic life" and yet such life, she continues, unfolds in a space that it is impossible to grasp clearly: "Between the traumautic effraction and the response of identity to this effraction, there remains a space of psychic elaboration—a space that is never explored as such."[19] It is just such an impossible exploration that Montaigne undertakes in "De l'Exercitation."

Montaigne situates his fall at some point during either the second or the third French war of religion. The second war of religion lasted from 1567-8, and the third from 1569-70, which would mean that the event took place as little as a year before Montaigne retired from public life

[19] *The New Wounded*, 20.

to his tower and commenced work on the *Essais* in 1571. Could the disturbance of this event have had something to do with Montaigne's decision? Though it would be hard to demonstrate that Montaigne felt physically weakened and in need of retirement after his fall, it is clear from Montaigne's account of the swoon that it brought him face-to-face with death, with which so many of the early essays are concerned. Was it that, newly faced with the fragility of his life and the ever-present possibility of death, Montaigne decided it was time to begin the work by which he would be remembered? Or was it rather that having finally mastered death he was at last ready to write about it? Montaigne's account of the episode suggests that this latter is the case, that when he wrote the *Essais* he was doing so as someone who was returning from the threshold of death, and finally able to write about it.[20]

The episode thus serves as a capstone to Montaigne's stoic concern, in the first half of the *Essais*, with how we may confront our death. But it also introduces both the skepticism as well as the more subjective concerns of the second half, implicitly raising what is perhaps the central question of his later writings, not how to die but how to live: "What, have you not lived? That is not only the fundamental but the most illustrious of your occupations….Have you been able to think out and manage your own life? You have done the greatest task of all" (850). For Montaigne has by now emphatically repudiated, in the immediately preceding essay "De la Physionomie," the Ciceronian idea that "To Philosophize is to Learn How to Die," writing now that "If we have not known how to live, it is wrong to teach us how to die" (805); rather than "tensing" himself against the vicisttudes of fortune he is now "the sort of man who readily

[20] This is the argument of Géralde Nakam. "L'indication de date qu'il nous donne, pour evasive qu'elle soit, montre pourtant ceci: Montaigne a le souvenir que l'accident a précédé de peu sa démission et sone entrée en littérature. Et ne les a-t-il pas déterminés?" See *Montaigne et Son Temps*, 110. Unlike Nakam, however, I see the essay itself as marking a turning-point *within* the philosophical development of the essays, rather than as an inaugural moment of writing.

commits himself to Fortune and abandons himself bodily into her arms" (812).[21] Accordingly it is perhaps unsurprising if we discover that the swoon, which he had presented in the guise of a preparation for death, instead turns out to have anticipated a principle of life, the *expérience* to which his last essays are dedicated. As we have seen, that concept has a wider scope than what we today we mean by consciousness—it involves an awareness of habits, desires, and behaviors we might consider aspects of character rather than of consciousness, topics for morality rather than for neuroscience or phenomenology. In fact as I suggested in the last chapter, what is at stake in the notion of *expérience* is not self-regulation but rather a self-attunement which incorporates an acknowledgment of the limits of the conscious self. For Montaigne even these apparently ethical concerns are ultimately dependent on a permanent subjective *exstasis* which exceeds the bounds of self-consciousness:

> I cannot keep my subject still. It goes along befuddled and staggering, with a natural drunkenness. I take it in this condition, just as it is at the moment I give my attention to it. I do not portray being: I portray passing. Not the passing from one age to another, or, as the people say, from seven years to seven years, but from day to day, from minute to minute. My history needs to be adapted to the moment. I may presently change, not only by chance, but also by intention. This is a record of various and changeable occurrences, and of irresolute and, when so befalls, contradictory ideas: whether I am different myself, or whether I take hold of my subjects in different circumstances and aspects. (610-611)

If our modern notion of consciousness is restricted, through the legacy of the Enlightenment, to those states which we are able to make clear and transparent to a self, then this passage offers a powerful alternative, a notion of experience which extends to embrace such states as we can only make half-visible to ourselves, which we apprehend only, as it were, drunkenly.[22] The trance

[21] Donald Frame notes that "at first Montaigne had preached premeditation of death as our only freedom; later he tells us to forget about it and leave it to nature. Part of this is a real change of attitude; but part of it is that his preparation for death has succeeded and is no longer necessary. His accident on horseback makes him realize that imagination magnifies his fear of illness." See *Montaigne*: *A Biography*, 149.

[22] For a reading of Montaigne which places consciousness and self-consciousness at the center of his project, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Lecture de Montaigne," 251: "La conscience de soi est sa constante, la mesure pour lui de toutes les doctrines….Il ne s'est jamais lassé d'éprouver le paradoxe d'un *être conscient*."

itself is, of course, an isolated and exceptional state, an aberration from which Montaigne soon enough returned. But already there we saw the emergence of a grey area between consciousness and unconsciousness, a threshold realm of "slight effects which the senses produce of themselves"; so here the wording of the passage suggests, even more clearly, that the distinction between self-possession and self-loss is far from clear-cut. The condition Montaigne here describes here as man's natural one, a "befuddled and staggering …. natural drunkenness" ("troublé et chancelant, d'une yvresse naturelle") bears a close resemblance to his reawakening from the trance "with a vision so blurred, weak, and dead, that I still could distinguish nothing but the light." Such a condition, he now suggests, is far from an aberration, a mere lapse in control and self-possession. Rather than the trance interrupting consciousness, it now begins to look as if consciousness itself were an extension of the trance, as if the whole rest of his life were comprised of the unshakable but not unpleasant stupor of his reawakening.

Seen from the perspective of Montaigne's last and most famous essay, then, the trance is not merely a detour but rather a radical realignment of Montaigne's philosophical program. For what emerges from the trance is a self premised no longer on an identity and continuity whose ultimate test will be self-possession even in the face of death, but rather on the ever-present possibility of interruption and self-loss, on a "natural drunkenness" in which the lines between subject and object, consciousness and unconsciousness, life and death becomes permanently difficult to draw. Of course, "De l'Experience" takes as its object not a single event or a class of events, but rather the kaleidoscope of pains, appetites, aversions, habits, and pleasures that, by and large, govern Montaigne's daily being, processes he clearly opposes to "ecstasies and possessions" (856). Yet if the trance is the inaugural moment of experience in this sense, then it is difficult for Montaigne to separate himself completely from those "transcendental humors,"

even if the swoon is not exactly that; in fact as we saw in the last chapter Montaigne's turn to experience endows bodily process with an opacity of its own. Thus while his swoon is not a moment of esoteric knowledge as this was understood in the Renaissance, it nevertheless represents something esoteric in the structure of consciousness itself, an auto-affective fold which underlies our temporal experience, and yet cannot be consciously apprehended without being unsettled.

Expérience is better conceived in terms of "changes that take place in us, irregular and unknown" (846) than as regular, predictable, or quotidian process—or, for that matter, as consciousness in its restricted modern sense. The swoon bears witness to just such changes, and in fact several moments in "De l"Experience" seem to recall its blurring of the lines between consciousness and unconsciousness. "We must really strain our soul to make it feel how it is ebbing away" (848), he writes, as if the most characteristic and desirable form of *expérience* were defined not by intensity but by its opposite, a pleasant waning; along the same lines, he "saw fit to have [my sleep] disturbed, so that I might gain a glimpse of it." (854). Montaigne's championing of experience in this final essay, written as he was succumbing to the kidney stones which would eventually kill him, is inseparable from the sense that "thus do I melt and slip away from myself," from the sensation, occasioned by his kidney stone, that "it is … my life that I am letting out little by little, not without some natural pleasure," 840): from the delight of self-loss he had first felt on falling from his horse.

What the Swoon Taught

"Consciousness" as we understand it today is in and of itself an unremarkable phenomenon. Most of us, when awake, would describe ourselves as conscious, though much of our waking life

is spent in states—absorption in a film or conversation or task—which presuppose consciousness, but which leave little room to pay attention to consciousness *per se*. But there are particular moments where consciousness itself seems to be laid bare. These might be moments of intense stimulation—the "flash memories," for example, which enable us to remember exactly where we were and what we were doing when a significant historical event took place. To a lesser extent, traumatic events in our own life have a similar structure. But they may also, and more simply, be moments of inattention and distraction, in which, transitioning between different objects of attention, or simply looking up or away, the surrounding world comes into view; then, rather than offering a new object, it instead reminds us of our bare consciousness, of a preliminary grasping of objects and situations which bespeaks our capacity to become absorbed by them, and yet holds back on the threshold of such absorption. Such moments are far from ordinary, and the "consciousness" they reveal is the opposite of consciousness in the sense of continuous self-presence, in which the self is one object among others in a temporal flow: instead it is a state of auto-affection in which consciousness grasps nothing but itself.

Beyond unveiling such a state, what might Montaigne's nuanced verbal account of his swoon have to tell us about Orlando's madness and Guyon's trance, both of which are subsequently buried in muteness? Montaigne's swoon, as we have seen, emerges as a later evolution in the *Essais*' inaugural program of "learning" how to die—of learning how to do something which there is no abstract way to practice or anticipate. It appears to offer a "practical" solution to a problem where reason and instruction ("discours et l'instruction") come up short. And yet on closer inspection Montaigne's swoon proves to be either so incommensurable with the rest of experience that it merely replicates the condition of death, proliferating speculation and quotation accordingly, or it must be assimilated to a mimetic or

discursive logic which continues to skirt the fact of the experience itself. It is as if the only way to recapture what the swoon taught is to swoon again, and indeed it is just such an effort that many passages in "De l'Experience" suggest.

Orlando's madness and Guyon's swoon pose a similar set of challenges to critics of Ariosto and Spenser, who have repeatedly sought to understand what these characters learn from their own loss of consciousness. While the structure of the works in question, and in particular the climactic location of these moments, certainly suggests some kind of moral transformation or revelation, it has proven enormously difficult to translate the cognitive emptiness of Orlando's madness or Guyon's trance into an unambiguous statement of moral or philosophical meaning. Coming near the midpoint of his *Essais,* Montaigne's swoon inevitably hints at a similar kind of significance. In fact, in Montaigne's version, the problem of interpretation becomes all the more pointed, for Montaigne *wants* to learn something from the swoon, in particular he wants to learn that death is not painful, and the swoon is clearly set up as a resolution this anxiety. Yet at its climactic point the experience proves to be one in which knowledge, far from being confirmed, is instead completely emptied out. And what happens is that this condition itself turns out to be the desirable one, a synecdoche for life itself as the later Montaigne will come to conceive of it—a "natural drunkenness." Insofar as the *Orlando Furioso* and, especially, *The Faerie Queene* can be seen as poems which also pit lived experience against inherited knowledge, perhaps for Orlando and Guyon, too, loss of consciousness is best understood as loss of knowledge, one which would make room not for faith but for experience.

Chapter Four
Othello's Monstrous Thinking

The trance was often associated, in the Early Modern mind, with deep thinking, and thus with the absolute retreat of the mind from the body, which would therefore appear limp and lifeless.[1] We still speak of being "entranced," yet whether such a state is indicative of intense mental activity, or of the complete absence of thought, is not always clear. It tends to suggest a state of immersion so complete as to exclude all other stimuli. As we have just seen, Ariosto, Spenser, and Montaigne all reject or at least complicate that conception of the trance, evoking it only with some notable differences—the trances they describe are accidental rather than voluntary, and in all of them attention, at least as it is conventionally understood, is absent. In its place we glimpse a subliminal form of phenomenal experience in which consciousness grasps only itself.

Othello's trance, in Act 4, Scene 1, of Shakespeare's *Othello*—long neglected in both performance and criticism—is both similar and different.[2] Like those earlier moments, it replaces consciousness with a self-reflexive form of physical experience that resists verbal or conceptual articulation; in particular it punctures the rhetorical self-consciousness so characteristic of the Othello whom we first meet. Yet although Iago attributes this moment to "epilepsy," and though

[1] See, for instance, Burton's description of trances in his chapter on the "Force of the Imagination" in the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 250-251: "Fracast. *l. 3. de intellect*, refers all ecstasies to this force of imagination, such as lie whole days together in a trance: that priest whom Celsus speaks of, that could separate himself from his senses when he list, and lie like a dead man, void of life and sense. Cardan brags of himself, that he could do as much, and that when he list." Montaigne too cites this moment in his essay "De le Force de l'Imagination."

[2] I will address the performance history later in this chapter. As for criticism, a few critics have speculated about the moment in passing. Joel Altman sees it as the apex of the play's fixation with the rhetorical figure of hysteron proteron: "What might this *lapsus*, this seizure mean? It would seem to be the figural gesture of the mental involution he has undergone, for it is accompanied by the maddened discourse of *hysteron proteron*, as Othello struggles with the images Iago has planted in his soul and then scans his own somatic response to those images in a desperate effort to find inverse testimony to their truth." See *The Improbability of Othello*, 198. For Edward Pechter, Othello's trance is a shudder with sexual overtones; see *Othello and Interpretative Traditions*, 100-102, also for a useful overview of its history in performance. Jane Adamson writes simply that "the frightful strain of confused 'realities' and shaken feelings literally floors him." See *Othello as Tragedy*, 198. For psychoanalytic readings of *Othello*, see Janet Adelman, "Iago's Alter Ego" and Edward Snow, "Sexual Anxiety."

it too appears accidental and thoughtless, it is hard to avoid suspecting that it is induced by an almost manic access of thinking. It is preceded by a disjointed monologue in which the famous poise of what G. Wilson Knight called the "Othello music" breaks down, but in which Othello comes as close as he is capable of coming to a kind of perspicacity.[3] In *Othello*, then, thought itself becomes other, the element not of consciousness and self-possession but rather of that unconscious vitality we have just encountered in Spenser and Montaigne; conversely, however, this means that Othello's swoon comes closest of the moments we have considered to instancing that threshold encounter of consciousness and non-consciousness which, I have suggested, is always at stake in such moments. Although Othello's trance calls to mind the disembodied experiences of sages and seers, it will demand of us a very different account of its relationship to thought.

Two moments in the play, one at the beginning and one at the end of the play, may serve to frame some of these issues. Joel Altman has recently described what he calls Othello's "fundamentally rhetorical sense of self"[4]—the sense that Othello's language does not draw on a pre-existing knowledge of the self, but rather that his self is on the contrary an artifact of his language, emerging only in description and rhetorical elaboration and co-created by an affirming audience:

> Of antres vast and deserts idle,
> Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven
> It was my hint to speak—such was my process—
> And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
> The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
> Do grow beneath their shoulders. (1.3.140-145)[5]

[3] G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*.
[4] Joel Altman, *The Improbability of Othello*, 20. This view of Othello that goes back to F.R. Leavis's critique of Bradley's "noble" Othello. Leaves writes that a "habit of self-approving self-dramatization is an essential element of Othello's make-up, and remains so at the very end." See "Diabolic Intellect," 126.
[5] *Othello*, ed. Michael Neill. All citations will follow this edition, which is based on the Folio text.

What results is truly a rhetorical *sense* of self rather than merely a rhetorical self, for in its rhetorical elaboration Othello's being often seems to be as external to himself as it is to others, as if for him, too, that "self" only became palpable in a narrative such as the one that he recounts here. What is striking is how many degrees of distance are interpolated between Othello and the wondrous subject-matter of his narrative. The material itself, of course, is already familiar and even hackneyed: it belongs to the conventional "wonders" of medieval wonder books, travel narratives, and romances, and Othello lists it in an offhand way, almost as if to acknowledge how commonplace these wonders have become. At this moment, moreover, the cannibals exist only in the telling to Desdemona, and that telling is itself merely a part of the more significant feat of her seduction, which is the subject of Othello's current narrative. Between Othello and the "raw experience" of romance three degrees of separation have intervened: its conventionality, its narration to Desdemona, and the nesting of *that* narration in his narration of her seduction. In that process Othello himself has become more of a character in his third-person story than a subject of first-person experience, as if he must be distanced from himself in order to believe in himself.

A similar dynamic is visible in Othello's famous last speech:

> Soft you, a word or two before you go:
> I have done the state some service, and they know'it—
> No more of that. I pray you in your letters,
> When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
> Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
> Nor set down aught in malice: then must you speak
> Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;
> Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,
> Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,
> Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
> Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
> Albeit unused to the melting mood,
> Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees
> Their medicinable gum. Set you down this;
> And say besides that in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk

> Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
> I took by th'throat the circumcised dog
> And smote him—thus.
> *He stabs himself*
> (5.2.337-355)

Once again Othello becomes a character in a story which is not even directly told; in the earlier moment it was nested within another narrative, here it is displaced to a future moment of narration. In order to break down those degrees of difference, to become an agent in his story and not merely its narrator and observer, Othello must destroy himself—as if he had only ever existed in and as that difference between narrator and narrated. The second speech thus renders explicit something slightly ominous already contained in the first: a displacement between teller and tale which is also a displacement between consciousness and agency. Othello is irreconcilably other to himself, not merely in the sense that he does not know himself, but rather that he is only a witness to the actions that he performs.

What might these moments have to tell us about the trance? And what light, conversely, might the trance shed on Othello's performativity? Both speeches bear witness to a degree of false consciousness unprecedented in Shakespeare's work—a self-fashioning so deep-rooted in a character's being that it almost appears artless. In some respects the trance collapses the extreme degree of self-difference implicit in these two moments of theatricality, the difference between Othello as narrator and Othello as character. It forces him to *feel* his experience and not merely recount it at the safe remove of narration and self-fashioning. If, for Othello as for Hamlet, consciousness can never be fully divorced from rhetoric, then the trance is that raw experience his quests never actually provided, a moment which, in temporarily banishing consciousness,

also punctures his "rhetorical sense of self," his "self-approving self-dramatization," his "self-fashioning through story."[6]

And yet for this character whose sense of self is so thoroughly rhetorical, such puncturing can only take place through an even greater experience of alienation—through the activation of a different and more literal "sense" of self, one which, like the self-experience of Red Crosse and Montaigne, is physical in nature and resists verbal articulation, expressed only as a repeated outburst of horror: "O monstrous! Monstrous!" Each of these two framing moments evokes a kind of monster, and as the play unfolds between them, it is hard to avoid the sense that a monstrosity which Othello would banish or destroy has instead turned up right in the midst of his world and indeed of his self. That monstrosity has a precise ontological status, for it is the result of a process whereby Othello's passion gives life to a mere thought, blurring the boundaries between subject and object and engendering a "monster." Embodied thinking in *Othello* thus means an experience of auto-affection in which Othello apprehends his own subjective feelings as objective things in the world, in which he is therefore both subject and object of his passion; culminating in his trance, this auto-affection exemplifies a notion of theater not as mimetic representation but rather as embodied or immanent process.

Othello and the "Monster in …thought"

John Bayley writes that "Othello is the most unexpected hero to … live in the mind"[7], and it is a claim whose full measure we have not yet taken. While there is certainly a contrast between the externality of the Othello whom we first meet—a character defined by action, command, and rhetoric—and the brooding interiority he develops under the influence of Iago, in its analysis of

[6] See, respectively, Altman, Leavis, and Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 252.
[7] *Shakespeare and Tragedy*, 200.

thinking the play goes beyond those dualistic terms. The play repeatedly associates thinking with an idea of monstrosity, as Bayley himself notes: "in *Othello* there is something furtive about consciousness itself. It lurks, as if there were some monster in it too hideous to be known"[8] What does it mean to see that "consciousness itself" might be monstrous? Is the idea simply thought entertains a monster it refuses to speak? The imagined scene of Desdemona's infidelity might well be unspeakable, and yet in its analysis of the epistemology of jealousy, the play also suggests that this passion has the ability to turn consciousness itself into something monstrous, something that is potentially dehumanizing rather than distinctively human. In particular it suggests that the monstrosity of consciousness might consist not simply in a withdrawal from the external world—a trance as conventionally understood—but rather in the blurring of subject and object, of mind and body, which takes place in jealousy and which culminates in a trance of a different kind, a trance defined as "epileptic."

Othello's initial serenity is premised on the ability to tell stories which dispose the world in certain ways. Accused by Desdemona's father Brabantio of having charmed Desdemona "by spells and medicines bought of mountebanks" (1.3.62), Othello calmly defends himself by explaining how it was merely the story of his adventures that seduced her. His response deflects the barbarism imputed to him onto cannibals and other monsters ("men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders"), against whom he himself can be marked as human and even European. In naming and banishing the cannibals and the "men whose heads/ Do grow beneath their shoulders" to the far reaches of the world, Othello at the same time banishes the monstrosity which is implicitly attributed to him, much as, later on, he kills the "Turbaned turk." The narratives themselves provide figures for their own rhetorical function, which is to mark a clear line between Othello and the monsters who dwell beyond the pillars of Hercules.

[8] Ibid, 165.

It is against this background of the real-life monsters encountered by Othello on his journeys that the play introduces the motif of jealousy itself as a cognitive monster, an idea which is most clearly stated by Emilia after Othello has asked her mistress for the handkerchief he had given her:

> DESDEMONA:
> Alas the day! I never gave him cause.
> EMILIA:
> But jealous souls will not be answered so;
> They are not ever jealous for the cause,
> But jealous for they're jealous. It is a monster
> Begot upon itself, born on itself.
> DESDEMONA:
> Heaven keep that monster from Othello's mind. (3.4.154-158)

Jealousy is a monster that lives not in the far-flung reaches of the world, but rather in the recesses of the human mind, a region no less obscure and indeterminate. It has features which, to Emilia and Desdemona, seem profoundly unnatural—which seem, without hyperbole, to be monstrous. It is the fact that jealousy descends on its victim without cause or provocation that gives it this quality of an almost unnatural birth, a spawning outside a natural order in which effects follow more or less predictably from causes: "They are not ever jealous for the cause." And because it is self-begotten, depending on nothing external for its life, it is also self-begetting: it can continue to propagate from within itself, just like the monsters of the romance world, from Boiardo's Orilo to Spenser's Errour. Emilia's tautologies are thus not merely emphatic, but rather capture this self-reproducing power of jealousy: once "begotten" it can be "born" again and again.

From the perspective of the one who is jealous, however, this process is not simply subjective, for the begetting appears as alien to him as his own passion does to those who behold it. Grief or love-sickness are passions which, responding to a situation which is more definite, do

not call the world into question and can remain safely confined to the subject; both indeed may be seen as ways of coming to terms with the world's externality to the self, as in Freud's theory of mourning. Jealousy, by contrast, is a distinctively epistemological passion which exists only in and as the unconfirmed possibility of a state-of-affairs outside the self. The "horrible conceit" may originate in the mind and yet its whole nature is to taunt that mind with the suggestion of its possible reality. It never crystallizes in a definite image; rather it afflicts the mind with uncertain suggestions and half-formed visions which are monstrous precisely in their lack of a "clear and distinct" shape, and in their ambiguous hovering between mind and world. The sphere that it occupies, then, is that of the body; in jealousy the body becomes the site of imaginings whose existence is not quite external or internal, the prototype for a "monstrous" image that can be neither definitively imputed to another nor fully identified with the self.

Jealousy thus blurs those boundaries which Othello's narratives, at the beginning and the end of the play, attempt to erect between the normal and the monstrous, between self and other. Like Thomas Nashe's "Terrors of the Night"—and, for that matter, like Spenser's dreams—the objects of jealousy refuse to be either subjective or objective, appearing to arise from within the self and yet endowed with an agency independent of it. Jealousy's insidiously objective quality manifests itself in a series of accruing physical changes, as if it had the power to tamper with the body's impersonal mechanisms. Each moment of Othello's unraveling is registered by those around him in a visible alteration of his manner:

> IAGO: I see this hath a little dashed your spirits.
> OTHELLO: Not a jot, not a jot. (3.3.216-17)

> IAGO: My lord, I see you're moved.
> OTHELLO: Not much moved. (3.3.228)

DESDEMONA: Why do you speak so faintly?
Are you not well?
OTHELLO: I have a pain upon my forehead, here. (3.3.285-6) .

DESDEMONA:
Something, sure, of state,
Either from Venice, or some unhatch'd practise
Made demonstrable here in Cyprus to him,
Hath puddled his clear spirit. (3.4.136-139)

These exchanges all depict an Othello who is transforming under the eyes of those around him, a metamorphosis brought on not simply *by* his thought, but by the *fact* that he is thinking in the first place. Thinking for Othello is a condition which does not withdraw him from his body, but rather alters his bodily habitus. What these passages suggest is that his brooding and his physical changes are one and the same: it is not merely that his doubt affects his body—his thinking, instead, is an activity that takes place in and throughout his body. The trance, in which Othello becomes a monster he cannot control, is the culmination of this dynamic, in which the merely "subjective" monster of jealousy gradually assumes an involuntary life that is one and the same with that of bodily process, an objective subjectivity much like Guyon's "Life" and yet much more destructive in its effects. By "shaking" Othello's body it is clear that the "monster" is at once confined to him and yet that it has the impersonality of a bodily process or disease.

Othello allows us to track its protagonist's unwitting internalization of, and transformation by, the conceit of the "monstrous"—and, inversely, the emergence of consciousness as the result of a physical transformation.[9] This evolution goes hand-in-hand with the play's generic self-realignment, the way it settles from epic-romance into romantic comedy only to lurch violently into tragedy. Romance wonder, with its clear distinction of subject and

[9] For another version of this idea, see Michael Neill's chapter on "Death and Discovery in *Othello*" in *Issues of Death*, esp. 159. Neill sees Iago as responsible for a "systematic opening of Othello" (145) and his "violent induction into [a] new discourse of interiority" (162).

object, is displaced by an affect which—whether we call it "epilepsy," demonic possession, or passion—is much more destabilizing to the mind, for it turns the subject into its own object, rendering it both more intimate and more alien to itself. Just as Book Two of *The Faerie Queene* moves from its opening vista of "Peru," "Virginia," and "the Moones fayre shining sphere" to the much more intimate, and yet much stranger terrain of the body and its interior processes, so Othello supplants the imaginative expansion of consciousness which is associated with romance, and which is called "wonder," with an involution which lays consciousness bare to itself on a physical plane. Thus tempting as it is to see Othello's "monstrosity" in terms of the problem of racial difference, the point of juxtaposing the "monster jealousy" with the "real" monsters of the unknown world, and indeed with Othello's own blackness, is, I think, to make all the more pointed the fact that this form of monstrosity goes deeper than these cultural markers.[10] It produces a set of physiological markers all its own. Indeed what marks thought's power as, in Othello's term as well as Hamlet's, "monstrous," is its capacity not merely to inflict powerful, visible transformations on the body, but rather to become one with the body in a series of "monstrous" psychophysical insurrections culminating with Othello's trance in Act 4. Montaigne describes exactly Othello's predicament when he writes that "One imagination acts only on the spleen, another on the brain; one makes us laugh, another weep. Another paralyzes and stuns all our senses and arrests the movements of the limbs…..But how a spiritual impression can cut such a swath in a massive and solid object, and the nature of the relation between these wonderful springs of action, no man has ever known" (402).

Gail Kern Paster has discussed the last passage I cited above in the context of Renaissance humoralism and the larger ecology of the passions that it bespeaks:

[10] Most readings of Othello's "monstrosity" have focused on racial overtones. See in particular Karen Newman, "'And wash the Ethiop white'," and James R. Aubrey, "Race and the Spectacle of the Monstrous in *Othello*."

> If Pyrrhus's wrath exemplifies evidence of inner qualities distributed out into the phenomenal environment, the image of Othello's puddled consciousness brings the fetid materials of the outside world into the innermost recesses of self and mind. All of these references deepen the quality of our attention to the phenomenology of the passions because they stand as evidence of the unity of the physical and the psychological everywhere else in the canon.[11]

Paster's account captures the blurring of subjective and objective, of mind and matter, that lies at the heart of Othello's jealousy, and that reflects a humoral model of the self and of its passions. But it is somewhat problematic to make this moment, striking as its imagery may be, into an emblem "of the unity of the physical and the psychological everywhere else in the canon." First of all, if the physical and psychological are unified here, then it is a unification that takes place in a way that is involuntary and almost, as we have seen, pathological; thus it seems more accurate to say that the psychological is swallowed up or at least assimilated by the physical than that they are united. The effect, in any case, is one of an increasing isolation which is imposed on Othello; the unity of his mind and body turns him into a monster unlike all those around him and, like someone in intense pain, unable to communicate with them. Second, therefore, Paster's reading also neglects the significance of the fact that Desdemona's description of Othello reflects not a normal state-of-affairs but rather a deep transformation.[12] Othello's nature is not initially disposed to passion at all; he represents a statuesque *virtù* which is closed to the pneumatic exchange of Paster's humoral subject. "I think the sun where he was born / Drew all such humours from him" (3.4.28-29) remarks Desdemona; Lodovico, seeing Othello strike Desdemona, recalls his as "the nature / Whom passion could not shake" (4.1.257-258). And even after this transformation, the psychopathology of jealousy creates what is in some ways an even more closed system, an autogenerative mechanism which is impervious to outside influence and

[11] Paster, *Humoring the Body*, 76.

[12] See Paster, 63: "To recognize the conventionality of such meteorological thinking about the passions is not thereby to underestimate its significance for early modern phenomenology, but to point again to the pneumatic character of pre-modern life and the humoral subject." Othello is precisely lacking "pneumatic character": even after his transformation he remains impermeable to appeals from without.

even, at the limit, to Othello himself.[13] The physicality of Othello's monstrous thought is precisely what makes it so incommunicable and so isolating.

It is almost as if Othello is slowly being turned inside-out, with what began as a mere thought gradually suffusing each limb even as thought itself is vitiated. It is not merely a question of degrees, for Lodovico's question, coming right after Othello's trance, suggests that what has taken place is a transformation in his very nature. The being that emerges from this process is finally visible in the trance: a being whom thought has transformed into a monster, something like Spenser's dehumanized allegories of Lust or Jealousy. The resulting condition may be one of psychophysical unity: the trance and the symptoms preceding it, I have suggested, are not merely the effects of thought; they *are* thought insofar as, in jealousy, thought assumes the involuntary vitality of bodily process, with the power to displace consciousness and his "rhetorical sense of self" from its commanding position. In order to see what replaces it, we must turn to the trance.

"It is not words that shakes me thus"

Michael Neill has spoken of Othello's "violent induction into [a] new discourse of interiority," a claim which furthers Bayley's idea of Othello as a hero who lives in the mind.[14] And yet the interiority which Othello exhibits cannot be the same as the interiority we associate with, say, Hamlet, or with the lyric meditations of Herbert, in which the minds hears and responds to its

[13] For an account of this isolation see Anne Barton's essay on the involuntary in late Shakespeare: "The involuntary plays a significantly new part in the last plays. Although, in general, good and evil are oddly transparent and recognizable for what they are, a few individual characters are arbitrarily deprived of this knowledge. Sealed off from everyone around them, they inhabit a strange, isolated state of consciousness in which they not only make false judgements, but cannot be reached or reasoned with by anyone else. These extreme states of mind are not arrived at, as it seems, by any logical, psychological, or psychologically comprehensible, process: they are simply 'caught', like the 'flu.' See *Essays*, 174.
[14] *Issues of Death*, 162.

own thinking. Such interiority is premised on an at least provisional stability and self-identity, and perhaps above all on a clear boundary between the self and the world, whereas in *Othello* thinking serves precisely to destroy these qualities. For Othello thinking is something at once dynamic and impersonal, as the following monologue, one of the last in the long arc that leads up to the trance across the second and third acts, suggests. Thinking here would break down completely the distinction between subject and object:

> Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic Sea,
> Whose icy current and compulsive course,
> Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
> To the Propontic and the Hellespont,
> Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
> Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
> Till that a capable and wide revenge
> Swallow them up. Now, by yon marble heaven,
> In the due reverence of a sacred vow,
> I here engage my words. (3.3.453-462)

Follow Foucault's *Order of Things,* Gail Kern Paster, David Hillman, and several others have instructed us to see such moments as more than figural—as expressing an affinity between self and cosmos which reflects an underlying unity of substance rather than a likeness between heterogeneous orders of being; Paster's reading of Pyrrhus is perhaps the classic example of this theory. On such a reading, Othello's "bloody thoughts" would be humoral and physical in basis, and therefore "like to the Pontic sea" in sharing a similar basis in the four elements. Such a reading would make sense of the way in which the syntax here seems to assimilate Othello's thoughts to cosmic process in this speech. If Othello's thoughts have a humoral and hence objective basis in the processes of the physical body, and if that body is itself continuous with the cosmos rather than insulated from it, then it is hardly surprising that the thoughts themselves should be "swallowed up" by a revenge of which, in the end, the cosmos alone is executor.

Yet if the idea of interiority cannot fully account for Othello's subjectivity here, in two important senses the "humoral self" falls even shorter of accounting for what happens in a speech such as this. First, it neglects the speech's dramatic and performative context in the vow—Othello's vision of himself expresses not a reality but a desire, one which is arguably unfulfilled, or rather fulfilled otherwise, by the subsequent events in the play: in this section I will try to suggest that Othello's image of himself here—a fundamentally solipsistic one—is fulfilled not by his revenge but by the trance. Second, in turning Othello's "bloody thoughts" into humors and thereby linking them with cosmic forces, the humoral reading simply recapitulates the problem of subjectivity by displacing the subject to an even more isolated position, one in which even Othello's own thoughts appear to him as objects endowed with an almost mechanistic autonomy. Far from being pre-Cartesian, such a displacement is in fact precisely what happens in Descartes' *Meditations,* in which Descartes observes himself feeling and thinking and makes his thoughts themselves the objects of reflexive cognitions (hence the formula: *videor percipere*). That is precisely what Othello describes here: in the sequence Othello envisions, his "bloody thoughts" are themselves the protagonists of a desired course of action to which he would remain exterior, or at least sufficiently so that he is able to speak of those thoughts as if they were independent agents. The cognitive structure depicted in this speech can thus be seen as an evolution of jealous thinking and its monstrous power to self-propagate. That evolution will culminate in the trance; epilepsy is the play's deepest figuration of the "compulsive course" which it exhibits.

Othello's speech before falling into a trance exemplifies, precisely enough, thoughts on the verge of being "swallowed up" by an impulse greater than themselves:

> Lie with her? Lie on her? We say 'lie on her' when they belie her. Lie with her?
> 'Swounds, that's fulsome! Handkerchief—confessions—handkerchief? To confess, and be

> hanged for his labour? First to be hanged and then to confess! I tremble at it. Nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction. It is not words that shakes me thus. Pish! Noses, ears, and lips! Is't possible? Confess? Handkerchief? O, devil! (4.1.33-40)

Othello's "broken voice," as Hamlet would call it, marks the first break in the "Othello music" in the whole play, Othello's first lapse into prose and indeed into a string of signifiers that (at least as they are usually read) appear to be barely coherent. In contrast with the vow we have just considered, Othello's language is faltering, disjointed, and profoundly inconclusive—as if the full measure of his plunge had not yet been measured by that earlier speech, still of a piece with the heroic Othello whom we had first encountered, and whose "music" we had first heard. Two centuries of heroic Othellos notwithstanding, Shakespeare here—like Ariosto in his depiction of the mad Orlando—obviously means to take us into cognitive territory unaccounted for by the idea of a noble or thorough passion.

And yet what is going on here is more subtle than a "decline into incoherence," a "kaleidoscopic volatility of reference."[15] Othello is trying and failing to piece together "evidence" before him into certain proof—"Handkerchief—confessions—handkerchief?"—the possibility of a guilty verdict ("Lie with her?") in balance with the possibility of slander ("belie her") even as the possibility of just deserts ("To confess, and then be hanged for his labour?") is in balance with a miscarriage of justice ("First to be hanged and then to confess!"). Faced, then, with the failure of ratiocination and judgment, Othello is instead thrust back upon his own "shadowing passion" and his own "shaking" with a newfound intensity. Unable as he was before to move seamlessly from experience to language, in the interstices of his broken logic Othello must now confront the fact of his feeling as such, with what Michael Witmore has described as the "the sensed fact of affect in the moment as it ripples through the body or overtakes the soul":

[15] See, respectively, Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare After All*, 111, and Edward Pechter, *Othello and Interpretive Traditions*, 102.

> The dramaturgic effect of this speech is striking, not only because the words themselves upend the causal sequence of deliberation—hanging precedes confession—but because the speaker stands inside and outside himself at the same time. He is both the object and the organ of sense, a site or trembling pressure that makes him both the subject who senses certain "shadowing passions" and the object of that sensed fact. And, of course, there is an argument here: the fact that I have such passions, Othello is saying, proves that there is a reason for such passions. The logic is perverse, but the structural coincidence of subject and object—or more exactly, of the sensing agent and patient who is subject to sense—is absolutely central to the dramatic power or the scene.[16]

Othello's speech, in other words, expresses a "sense of self" that is now phenomenological rather than rhetorical; he is feeling himself feel rather than hearing himself speak. But as with Red Crosse, "his changed powers at first themselves not felt"; here only do they cross a threshold into a form of self-feeling which is closer to self-loss than self-consciousness. For like Red Crosse, Othello is a character sparked into self-awareness only by an internal upheaval which is noticed too late to be reined in. Taken together their two examples might suggest why we might want to see the swoon as a form of self-consciousness in this earlier period, and why we might want, in turn, to see that self-consciousness as an exceptional and transformative physical and phenomenological state rather than as a foundational condition.

Indeed it is important to keep in mind the context of the moment—the "fact of affect" is able to be "sensed" here only because ordinary consciousness has broken down, because its hold on the objective world, usually asserted through acts of naming and judging, has been profoundly shaken. Thus Othello's swoon is, like Red Crosse's "stound," a climactic and transformative state of feeling, but it is also, like Montaigne's swoon, a climax of doubt. Othello insists that "It is not words that shakes me thus" and that "Nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction," and yet these statements are revealing in their direct negation of that which is precisely Othello's predicament. Behind them we can hear silent questions, epistemological possibilities with which Othello is obviously grappling: *could* nature invest

[16] Michael Witmore, "Shakespeare and Phenomenology," 420-421.

herself in such passion without any instruction? *Could* words alone shake me thus? In his very anxiety to negate these possibilities, Othello confesses that their answer might also be yes—as in fact it is. Behind these statements, then, we can infer a minimal awareness of what is happening to him, a skeptical realization that the ideas implanted in him may not have any ground beyond his own "shaking" and "shadowing passion." The speech represents a climax of doubt attempting to turn into certainty and breaking under the strain. If Othello's self-experience here marks, as in Paster's account, a state of unity with the physical environment, it is only in the measure that the whole world now appears to Othello under the sign of his "shadowing passions," and is, therefore, called radically into doubt.

Why, we might finally ask, should the "sensed fact of affect" happen in such close proximity to the state of total insentience into which Othello is now plunged? Is it merely that the stimulation of Othello's receptivity exceeds a certain point, his consciousness shuts down altogether? Or is there some deeper affinity between insentience and the sensed fact of affect that Othello experiences at this moment? If the self-sensing described by Witmore involves, as he suggests, a division of the self, a state in which we feel ourselves feel as if from outside, then we can perhaps see why such a perception would border on a trance-state, a state in which our perceptions and passions seemed to have a will of their own. While Othello proves unable to work up his evidence into definitive proof and a ground for action, he does negate those two statements which identify his predicament, implicitly answering no to those tacit questions that still linger in his mind, and going on to act accordingly. It is as if the trance itself, in its impersonal happening, now provided him with the certainty that words could not, finally resolving into an objective phenomenon those shadowy monsters of jealousy by which he had been so perturbed. The "shadowing passion" of the trance goes from being the medium of doubt

to becoming the bedrock of an epistemological certainty which consciousness alone is unable to provide.

The trance would thus represent a hypnotic undertow whose influence is already palpable in Othello's speech, making him assent to something ("shadowing passion") that another part of him does not quite believe. It is, so to speak, his body itself which is thinking here. The faint would then be only what Stanley Cavell calls the "explicit trance"; in Act 5, Scene 2, he suggests, right before Othello kills Desdemona, "the words are those of a man in a trance, in a dream state, fighting not to awaken; willing for anything but light."[17] Perfectly poised between, on the one hand, an *anagnorisis* in which Othello almost becomes conscious of his error, and, on the other, acquiescence in a rationale that is no longer even his own, Othello's speech shows how consciousness itself, at its highest pitch, can at the same time exhibit the characteristics of an unconscious trance. In the very effort to make his mind transparent to himself Othello instead encounters its "shadowing passion," which precisely in its attempt to shadow the external world instead casts a shadow over both it and Othello's own mind.

Iago, Epilepsy, and the Limits of Mind-Reading

It is impossible to talk about Othello's condition here, the way he is both "inside and outside himself at the same time," without taking into account Iago's effect on him, and the way in which consciousness in the play is as much a dynamic effect of their reciprocal relation as a private mental domain belonging to each character in isolation. Othello's trance-state is, at least in part, due surely to Iago's increasing power over him, to a kind of hypnosis in which Othello's mind no longer belongs to him. If Iago can be seen as gradually infiltrating Othello's mind, then

[17] Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, 133.

the trance marks, on the one hand, the ultimate success of this process—a moment in which Iago's consciousness no longer simply influences Othello's but rather supplants it altogether. And yet if what we have been saying is even partly true, if Othello's trance like that of Montaigne and Guyon, discloses a domain of experience which extends beyond consciousness, then the trance also marks the limits of Iago's machinations. For it adumbrates a form of subjectivity which, in the measure in which it is inaccessible to the subject's own consciousness, must likewise be inaccessible to others, and which therefore reveals the limitations of what has recently been called Iago's "Theory of Mind." The question of Iago's "Theory of Mind" is brought to a head by his diagnosis of "epilepsy," a diagnosis which both expresses his growing control over Othello's mental world even as it reveals the shortcomings of Iago's "mind-reading" and of his very concept of mind. And in doing so it serves to highlight what is so significant about the trance: the way in which the trance bespeaks a form of self-experience in which consciousness has no content but grasps only itself, and which is therefore impervious to mind-reading.

In the words of the Folio's stage directions, Othello "falls down in a trance"; the First Quarto has: "He falls down." Iago calls for him as if he were simply out of earshot, or as if he had suddenly vanished: "What ho, my lord! / My lord, I say! Othello!" Iago calls to Othello as if he were offstage. Are we to understand this as an ironic confirmation of his mastery—of course he knows exactly where Othello is—or, instead, as revealing that in this withdrawal into himself Othello has eluded even Iago's grasp? Though Iago would of course want us to believe the first of these readings, *Othello* instead asks us, I think, to keep both of them in play. A similar ambivalence hovers around Iago's diagnosis of epilepsy, as Cassio now enters and asks "What's the matter"?:

IAGO:
My lord is fallen into an epilepsy
This is his second fit; he had one yesterday.
CASSIO:
Rub him about the temples.
IAGO: No, forbear:
The lethargy must have his quiet course;
If not, he foams at mouth, and by and by
Breaks out to savage madness. (4.1.46-54)

Few readers have commented on Iago's "diagnosis," and the Oxford editor assumes that he is simply "covering his tracks." Yet even if Iago is lying, there is more to the moment than deception. Iago has often been seen as a great mind-reader, as possessing an unusual attunement to the intentions, desires, and weaknesses that constitute others' habits-of-mind. What does it mean, then, that he should now resort not to mind-reading but to diagnosis? If, as Paul Cefalu has recently argued, Iago's "overmentalizing" rapidly turns into a "cognitive impairment," indeed a form of "mindblindness," then the diagnosis of epilepsy here—which reduces that full spectrum of mental states to a mere mechanism—represents a significant turning-point in that transformation, a moment in which Iago moves from treating others as minds to treating them as puppets.[18] The diagnosis of Othello's trance as an automatism would thus represent an emerging stance towards other minds which—even if it is false in literal terms and even if he himself *thinks* that it is a lie—Iago is nevertheless beginning, more broadly, to believe. Such minds would be determined entirely by desires and beliefs which Iago believes himself capable of manipulating; under his surveillance and control they would relinquish their volition in favor of that puppet-like mechanicity which Damasio refers to as "epileptic automatism." In a metaphorical sense, "epilepsy" represents the minds of others under the rubric of a global mechanism which Iago feels he can understand and subvert, so that, as in epileptic automatism, what looks like conscious volition has actually become its opposite.

[18] See Paul Cefalu, "The Burdens of Mind Reading in Shakespeare's *Othello*."

Looking at Iago's diagnosis in the context of both classical and Renaissance ideas about epilepsy and similar conditions reveals, respectively, both its aptness and its limitations. The notion was often allied to a program of demystification. In his treatise *The Sacred Disease,* Hippocrates sets out to account for epilepsy in naturalistic terms and thereby to discredit its reputation as having a divine origin:

> I am about to discuss the disease called "sacred." It is not, in my opinion, any more divine or sacred than other diseases, but has a natural cause, and its supposed divine origin is due to men's inexperience, and to their wonder at its peculiar characters…. My own view is that those who first attributed a sacred character to this malady were like the magicians, purifiers, charlatans, and quacks of our own day, men who claim great piety and superior knowledge.[19]

He goes on to a give a sober summary of the disease's symptoms, and to explain them in terms of their natural causes:

> The patient becomes speechless and chokes; froth flows from the mouth; he gnashes his teeth and twists his hands; the eyes roll and intelligence fails, and in some cases excrement is discharged. I will now explain how each symptom occurs.[20]

Hippocrates attributes all of these symptoms to a disorder of the brain; this disorder, in turn, he attributes to humors such as phlegm or bile, which are also responsible for strong mental states:

> Just as in the waking state the face is flushed, and the eyes are red, mostly when a man is afraid and his mind contemplates some evil act, even so the same phenomena are displayed in sleep. But they cease when the man wakes to consciousness and the blood is dispersed again into the veins.[21]

The treatise then constructs a psychopathology in which brain, humors, bodily symptoms, and emotions all interact and mutually affect each other. No matter which we posit as ultimate cause, there is, he concludes, no need to resort to a demon or a God to explain how the apparently magical, inexplicable symptoms of epilepsy come about.

The very need to go into a detailed physiological explanation reminds us that the symptoms themselves have no *obvious* explanation or cause and suggests why, well after

[19] Hippocrates, *The Sacred Disease*, 139.
[20] Hippocrates, 159.
[21] Hippocrates, 177.

Hippocrates' death, they continued to appear wondrous. For Lucretius in *De Rerum Naturae*, however, it is so obvious that epilepsy has a purely natural aetiology that this fact itself serves as prime piece of evidence for his naturalistic, embodied account of the soul more generally. Lucretius describes a fit very much like Othello's, one usually identified by commentators as epileptic:

> Moreover, we have often seen someone constrained on a sudden by the violence of disease, who, as if struck by a thunderbolt, falls to the ground, foams at the mouth, groans and shudders, raves, grows rigid, twists, pants irregularly, outwearies himself with contortions; assuredly because the spirit, torn asunder by the violence of the disease throughout the frame, is in turmoil and foams, just as in the salt sea the waves boil under the mighty strength of the winds. Further, groans are forced out, because the limbs are afflicted with pain, and in general because seeds of voice are ejected and rush forth from the mouth in a mass, where they have been, as it were, accustomed to pass, where is the established highroad. There is raving, because the strength of mind and spirit is set in a turmoil and, as I have shown, divided apart and separated up and drawn asunder by that same poison. Next, when the cause of the disease has already turned back, returned to its secret haunts, then first, staggering as it were, the man rises, and by degrees comes back to his full senses and receives back his spirit. Since, therefore, the mind and spirit are tossed about by so great diseases in the very body itself, why do you believe that the same without body, in the open air, amidst mighty winds, are able to live?[22]

Lucretius' description of the fit comes in the midst of a long meditation on the relation between body and soul, in which he attempts to prove that the soul, like the body, is mortal. For Lucretius, the possibility of such a fit, in which our "soul" is clearly affected even though encased by the body, proves that the soul too is mortal. He does not merely prove that the trance has a physical rather than divine origin—he goes one step further and uses the fact of the epileptic fit to demonstrate the falsehood of the Platonic thesis of an immaterial and immortal soul. The soul, on this argument, is something quasi-physical, simply a more refined form of body contained within the "frame" (artus) of the body itself. As we saw, when Montaigne cites this passage in "De l'Exercitation" he uses it to argue that the soul is "asleep" in such states—that, in other words, the state of the soul is subordinate to that of the body.

[22] Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 255-257.

It is this demystificatory aspect of the epileptic diagnosis that, I think, Iago is invoking here—"covering his tracks," yes, but also expressing a cynical view of the world as driven entirely by blind but predictable and even manipulable impulses. Othello's trance closely resembles the fit that Hippocrates and Lucretius describe; Iago attributes it to epilepsy and the symptoms he describes are precisely those that the ancient medical thinkers associated with the disease. Thus if most members of the audience would have thought here not of epilepsy but rather of demonic possession—Othello himself cries out "O devil!" before falling into a trance—then Iago's diagnosis serves, like Hippocrates' treatise, to counter that assumption. But at the same time it tells us—as so often with Shakespeare's skeptical villains (think of Edmund)—as much about the skeptic himself as it does about the object of his critique. In this case it tells us about Iago's tendency to view the whole world of human intentions and desires in terms of an aberrant and virulent disease, and about a power over others which that viewpoint ostensibly allows him. It tells us how that tendency, insightful and powerful though it may first seem, gradually becomes as reductive as Iago's diagnosis suggests, unable to account for complexity or ambiguity in others' motives. And thus it shows how *any* "Theory of Mind" presupposes a model of mind which is impoverished precisely in the measure that it treats those minds as autonomous and legible systems, how it lacks an account of the impersonal forces that intersect with consciousness in the shaping of a mind, qualities of which there is no better illustration than Iago and Othello themselves.

If the classical idea of epilepsy saw it as a purely physiological and humoral phenomenon, in the Renaissance it was more closely associated with passion, emotion, and perception; read against Iago's diagnosis, Renaissance discussions of epilepsy show both its accuracy and the limitations. In his 1603 treatise, *Discourse of the Suffocation of the Mother*,

Edward Jorden expressly sets out to rebut the notion that cases of the "mother"—a disease, he notes, often mistaken for epilepsy—have metaphysical origins. Comparing the disease to "apoplexies, epilepsies, syncopes," he writes, echoing Hippocrates:

> And hereupon the *Symptoms* of this disease are sayd to be monstrous and terrible to beholde, and of such a varietie as they can hardly be comprehended within any method or boundes. Insomuch as they which are ignorant of the strange affects which naturall causes may produce, and of the manifold examples which our profession of Phisicke doth minister in this kind, have sought above the Moone for supernaturall causes: ascribing these accidents either to diabolicall possession, to witch-craft, or to the immediate finger of the Almightie.[23]

Again invoking Hippocrates, he promises to explain the "mother" in terms only of natural causes:

> The strength of this argument will better appeare hereafter in the particular *Symptoms,* which we are to entreate of: where it shall be made manifest that the most of them doe both depende upon such naturall causes as other diseases have in our bodies, and also are oftentimes mixed with other diseases which are accompted naturall.[24]

But there are two important points in which Jorden's account of the "mother," even while invoking Hippocrates' demystifying preamble, departs from Hippocrates' argument, and both are relevant to our discussion of Iago. The first is Jorden's analysis of the "mother's" effect on our perceptual processes:

> These internall sences are ouerthrowne either in part or in whole in this suffocation of the mother: and thereupon it is likened unto these former diseases: and this kind is accounted by *Auicen* to be the most grieuous of all other, where the imagination and reason is hurt … The Internall sence is depraved when a man doth imagine, iudge, or remember thinges that are not as if they were, or things that are, otherwise then they are indeed. Whether they do it in cogitation alone, or do expresse it by word or deede.[25]

Nowhere does Hippocrates pay this kind of attention to epilepsy's effect on our perceptions and judgments, and in fact Jorden's account reflects the influence of the faculty psychology of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, with its division of imagination, judgment, and memory. It results in a description very appropriate to Othello, whose "internall sense is depraved," most

[23] Edward Jorden, *A Briefe Discourse*, fol. 2.
[24] Jorden, fol. 3.
[25] Jorden, fol. 13

powerfully, just before he falls into his epileptic fit, imagining "things that are not as if they were."

The second new aspect of Jorden's account is its strong emphasis on the role of the passions in bringing about fits of the mother. Hippocrates mentions this possibility in passing; Jorden instead concludes his treatise by discussing the role played by the passions:

> Lastly the perturbations of the minde are oftentimes to blame both for this and many other diseases. For seeing we are not maisters of our owne affections, wee are like battered Citties without walles, or shippes tossed in the Sea, exposed to all maner of assults and daungers, euen to the ouerthrow of our owne bodies.
>
> We haue infinite examples among our Historiographers, and Phisitions of such as haue dyed vppon ioy, griefe, loue, feare, shame, and such like perturbations of the mind: and of others that upon the same causes haue fallen into grievous diseases: as women deliuered of their children before their time, vpon feare, anger, griefe, &c. others taken with the Falling sickenesse, Apoplexies, Madnesse, Swounding, Palsies, and diuerse such like infirmities vpon the like causes.[26]

In Jorden's account, the pathology of the mother and of epilepsy (the "falling sickness") is dependent on a moral discourse on the control of the passions, a favorite topic among late sixteenth-century writers. Of particular bearing on *Othello* is a reference Jorden takes from the sixteenth-century humanist physician, Giovanni Battista da Monte: "*Johannes Montanus* tels us of a patient of his, who fell into the fits of the Mother vppon iealousie."
that a mental passion such as jealousy is capable not simply of adversely affecting the body *like* a disease, but of actually causing a disease. Thus to read a moment of uncontrolled passion as a fit of "epilepsy" or "the mother" is not necessarily to deny its relationship to the passions, though this seems to be what Iago does; on the contrary, it is to emphasize how closely, in the early modern world, the passions were allied to pathology. Both our imagination and our moral passions were seen as bound up with, even responsible for the intimate processes of our bodies in

[26] Jorden, fol. 16.

a way that is far removed from the purely scientific approach of modern medicine, but that is also more moralistic than classical approaches.

Iago's diagnosis itself thus only gives us part of the picture. His assessment of the symptoms is accurate, but it does not incorporate those perceptual and moral elements focused on by Jorden and Monte. It suppresses precisely that dimension of the disease grounded in human desire, a process in which a distorted perception might give rise to a conceit, which in turn could solicit a passion capable of destabilizing the whole organism. The early modern theory of epilepsy itself has a flexibility which Iago's "overmentalizing" begins to lack. Precisely in treating other minds as unerringly autonomous and self-transparent, Iago paradoxically reduces them into caricatures of real minds, whose intentions and desires are far more obscure than he allows for. In contrast, theorists such as Jorden and Monte allow for the complexity of first-personness, for the way in which it is always more obscure to itself than it thinks, bound up as it is in passions and pathologies which exceed its control and understanding. Othello may not be epileptic, but he is "diseased" in the measure in which his passions and beliefs cannot be reduced to intentions and judgments, but instead—as we have seen—have sources only half-visible to Othello himself.

Thus if the medical analysis of epilepsy demystifies the idea of the swoon, there is nevertheless more to it than mere pathology, more to it as well than Iago appears to imply. This is not to suggest that the bracketing of Iago's explanation through its ascription to a character who is untrustworthy simply restores to the trance the supernatural quality of which he would deprive it. But the notion that epilepsy might be caused by the passions, a notion of mind which Iago has ceased to acknowledge, complicates the picture. On the one hand it reveals that Iago's diagnosis (at least by the standards of his time) could have been accurate. And yet it also

suggests that this diagnosis might apply precisely to the dynamic I discussed in the first section, where, as we saw, thought itself had the capacity not simply to function like a disease, but to *be* a disease. Thought, passion, and body converge in a moment that is, for all intents and purposes, indistinguishable from demonic possession. The language of disease may replace the notion of such possession, but in doing so it merely displaces the quality of the demonic to thought itself, to the embeddedness of our imaginative processes (Jorden) or our passionate obsessions (Monte) in our somatic life. And that displacement to a sphere of embodied and affective cognition is precisely what Iago's diagnosis of epilepsy names but cannot capture; it is what, whether as audience members or critics, we respond to not by guessing at motives and intentions but rather by sharing in the consciousness of their opacity.

Hamlet and the Monstrosity of Playing

Having at first zoomed in on the trance by working up to it across the first half of the play and thinking about Othello's transformation from the points-of-view of Desdemona and Emilia, we have now begun to zoom out again, moving from Othello's own experience of what happens to him to Iago's unreliable diagnosis of it. And what this multiplication of perspectives has revealed is that "what happens to Othello" is by no means a stable category; as we have seen, in the trance his own experience becomes at once overpowering and illegible, and thus it is hardly surprising, given that Othello's experience is a matter of interpretation even to himself, that the play should incorporate other points-of-view as well—much as the singularity of death, as we saw in Montaigne, only serves to multiply conjectures and opinions. Jealousy, passion, epilepsy, and demonic possession are just some of the different interpretations to which those varying perspectives give rise. But above those points-of-view we have already considered, there is one

that may seem to occupy a privileged position: that of the audience, from which each of the character's reactions and interpretations may be observed and compared. If the audience's is in a sense a master perspective, it is not, however, because the audience has privileged insight into what happens to Othello, a unique ability to read minds. Rather it is because, in being able to see how many varied interpretations his behavior and in particular his trance solicit, they are able to see it precisely as a tragic experience exceeding explanation and intepretation, and exceeding in particular the "Theories of Mind" which are forced upon us when we assume that we are all separately constituted by discrete centers of consciousness.

It is of course impossible to know how an early modern audience would have reacted to Othello's trance. But it is hard to imagine a scene which would have drawn more deeply on the skills of an actor, and in particular on those of a celebrated "personator" such as Richard Burbage. Burbage, the first actor to play the role of Othello, was celebrated for his lifelike mimetic capacities. As an anonymous elegy suggests, his talent was most powerfully on display, paradoxically enough, in his "lifelike" portrayals of death:

> Oft have I seene him, leape into the Grave
> Suiting the person, which he seem'd to have
> Of a sad Lover, with so true an Eye
> That theer I would have sworne, he meant to dye,
> Oft have I seene him, play this part in ieast,
> So livly, that Spectators, and the rest
> Of his sad Crew, whilst he but seem'd to bleed,
> Amazed, thought even then hee dyed in deed,
> O lett not me be checkt, and I shall sweare
> Even yet, it is a false report I heare,
> And thinke that he, that did soe truly faine
> Is still but Dead in iest, to live againe,
> But now this part, he Acts, not playes, tis knowne
> Other he plaide, but Acted hath his own.[27]

[27] For the ode and some useful commentary, see Tobias Doring, "Writing Performance," 67.

The paradox invoked by the anonymous elegist, in which Burbage plays the part of death "so livly" that the spectators are convinced he is actually dead, applies equally well to an unconscious body, and it is one which Shakespeare clearly appreciated: it is often inscribed into the plays themselves, from Rosalind's purportedly counterfeit swoon, to Falstaff's counterfeit death, to Lady Macbeth's suspicious faint on "discovering" Duncan's death. Like sleep, unconsciousness—whether it is real or not—may itself be seen as a counterfeit of death. Thus if the "highest praise for early modern tragic actors was to say they died well, a bravura act of stage performance often written out in death scenes of extraordinary length and verbal profusion,"[28] then presumably Burbage's rendering of Othello's faint would have elicited similar approbation; one might go so far as the hypothesize that the scene, in some ways superfluous to the main action of the play, was written specifically with Burbage's talent in mind. When in the early eighteenth century, in accordance with an emerging neo-classical decorum, the scene began to be cut from performance, at least one audience-member was not happy:

> I have likewise a notion that Othello's trance being a thing not strain'd, but very natural, and which did once give great satisfaction, how that comes to be omitted I know not, except the players are resolved not to humour us in good sense and reason.[29]

If later audiences came to view the scene as superfluous or uncomfortable, the writer of the letter to the *Tatler* suggests that for earlier generations the scene was a familiar favorite—it "did once give great satisfaction."

Yet it is particularly significant that our letter-writer should make a point of describing the trance as a "thing not strain'd, but very natural," as if to defend it from the charge of being overly histrionic. We may have here a glimpse of a moment in which theatrical sensibilities are changing—in which high pathos and vehement physical gesture are going out of fashion. In fact

[28] Ibid., 67
[29] *Original and Genuine Letters*, ed. Lille, vol. 1, 255-256. See also Marvin Rosenberg, "The Refinement of Othello."

as Jonathan Gil Harris has recently reminded us, in Shakespeare's own day vehement acting was already bordering on bad taste, associated with the Coventry Mystery plays and with the figure of Herod in particular, and famously mocked by Hamlet's stricture against "out-Heroding Herod." The issue at stake was precisely the naturalness—or not—of such vehemence:

> If angry stamping and staring was not considered "unseemly," it was in large part because these gestures were understood to represent the natural bodily expression of internal complexional processes….By the turn of the seventeenth century, [however], hyperbolic acting up had come to be regarded by certain playwrights not as the outward expression of natural humoral process, but as embarrassingly histrionic bluster—"player-like"—with no necessary connection to passion.[30]

Though the swoon itself would not necessarily have recalled the Coventry style, the rant preceding it certainly would have, as would the shaking and writhing which the swoon could have entailed. The profusion of at least potentially counterfeit swoons in Shakespeare may suggest that already in the Elizabethan and early Jacobean era there was something quintessentially and perhaps excessively "player-like" as opposed to natural about the swoon as well. Shakespeare's swoons are often marked as counterfeit in a way which suggests a self-consciousness about their potentially histrionic quality, and which is perhaps designed to deflect criticism such as a Hamlet himself might level at them.[31] Iago's diagnosis of epilepsy might have had a similar meta-theatrical role, justifying the naturalness of a moment which, to an audience beginning to value self-restraint, might otherwise have appeared histrionic and unnatural.

What, then, are the stakes of performing a "real-life" swoon as late as 1603, when *Othello* was probably written, if already in the earlier comedies swoons were linked to a melodrama that was fast becoming passé? Precisely in naturalizing Othello's swoon by giving a medical explanation for it, Iago's diagnosis also suggests that on its own terms, a swoon might at this point have appeared excessively histrionic, an indulgence in an outmoded form of theatrical

[30] See Harris, "'Look not big'," 383.
[31] Harris argues that Shakespeare was trying to distance himself from the "histrionic bodily techniques" of the Coventry cycle as early as the *Taming of the Shrew*.

excess. It had to be tied to an impersonal biological process to appear credible. And yet on the other hand, as the celebration of Burbage's "lifelike" death-scenes suggest, it was precisely moments such as the trance that most fully exploited the skills of naturalistic personation at which actors such as Alleyn and Burbage excelled, and which Hamlet acknowledges in his speech:

> O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
> Is it not monstrous that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> Could force his soul so to his own conceit
> That from her working all his visage wanned,
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
> A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
> With forms to his conceit? and all for nothing!
> For Hecuba! (2.2.538-546)[32]

The idea of an epileptic swoon on stage, by forcing the actor to imitate something monstrous and yet inescapably natural, allows for a blurring of the distinction between the emphasis on naturalistic, restrained performance and the persistence of passionate and extreme states on stage—a tension very much live at the time of Othello's first performance, and perhaps most clearly revealed in the contradiction between Hamlet's praise of the player here and his cautionary speech, in the next speech, against "out-Heroding Herod." In his *Apology for Actors* Thomas Heywood lists some of the behaviors which might transgress the norms of the emerging style:

> to frown when he should smile, nor to make unseemely and disguised faces in the delivery of his words, not to stare with his eies, draw awry his mouth, confound his voice in the hollow of his throat, or teare his words hastily betwixt his teeth, neither to buffet his deske like a mad-man, nor stand in his place like a liuelesse Image, demurely plodding, & without any smooth & normal motion.[33]

[32] *Hamlet*, ed. G.R. Hibbard. All references follow this edition.
[33] Sigs. C3v-C4.

In contrast he praises "comely and elegant gesture, a gratious and a bewitching kinde of action, a naturall and a familiar motion of the head, the hand, the body, and a moderate and fit countenance sutable to all the rest."[34] Necessitating at least some of the gestures which fall under censure here, Othello's swoon would have tested the limits of this new decorum while calling into question its difference from some of the older models.

A "monstrous" moment such as Othello's writhing would have pushed naturalistic acting to and perhaps beyond its limits, crossing into Herodian territory even while fulfilling the promise of "personation" to an unprecedented degree.[35] And yet as Hamlet's speech suggests, the theatrical relevance of the swoon goes deeper still. For by calling the player's self-induced transformation "monstrous" Hamlet uses the same word which, as we saw in the first section, takes on a looming significance in *Othello*, describing an arc in which the self-begetting monsters of romance gestate within Othello's own mind. Though he is speaking of an actor, Hamlet is describing the exact same process, a psychophysical pathway whereby a mental figment, a "conceit," can give rise not merely to the external signs of emotion but to the actual emotions themselves in a way which quickly bypasses the actor's own volition. In the case of the actor playing Othello, then, the monstrousness of the character is not merely mimicked but

[34] Sig. C4.

[35] For personation, see Meredith Anne Skura, *Shakespeare the Actor*, 49-52. See also B.L. Joseph, *Elizabethan Acting*, 1-3. In Joseph's view "personation" is for all intents and purposes the same as modern "method acting" as formulated by Stanislavski, in which the actor seems "to become an entirely different person according to the demands of every separate role" (3). Accordingly in the player's performance, "what Stanislavski calls the magic "if" has allowed the actor really to feel moved by [Hecuba's] imagined agony. His 'whole function'—voice, face, attitude, gesture—expresses what he feels" (3). Skura largely agrees, suggesting that "we should be careful not to overestimate the differences between "personating" then and now….The fact that a player used stereotyped gestures does not preclude his identifying with the feelings believed to motivated such external signs of emotion" (49). For the opposing view, against the idea that Elizabethan acting involved "acting, in its now-commonplace sense of self-transference" (328), see Peter Thomson, "Rogues and Rhetoricians." Thomson accordingly reads Hamlet's commendation of the player very differently: "It is the imitation of grief, not the imitation of Aeneas, that astounds Hamlet. Indeed, real grief would look and sound very different from this histrionic representation" (323).

redoubled, since the actor would be "forc[ing] his soul to his own conceit" in the effort to imitate a character who had himself undergone this very process. In Othello's speech before falling into a trance, then, we might see not merely the fragments of an encroaching madness, but rather the efforts of the actor himself to work up a convincing passion by summoning appropriate conceits:

> But how are we to generate these emotions in ourselves, since emotion is not in our power? I will try to explain as best I may. There are certain experiences which the Greeks call *phantasmiai*, and the Romans *visiones*, whereby things absent are presented to our imagination with such extreme vividness that they seem actually to be before our very eyes. It is the man who is really sensitive to such impressions who will have the greatest power over the emotions.[36]

If the actor could thus have identified in Othello's predicament some of the basic practices of his own evolving profession, this would have led not to the redoubled distance of metatheatricality, but rather to a heightened realism and affective intensity.

If moments such as the trance were also pinnacles of theatrical performance, it is hard to avoid Hamlet's conclusion that there is something "monstrous" simply about acting itself, even—or precisely—at its most "natural." The distinction itself might depend on a notion of mimetic representation, a gap between representation and reality which Othello's swoon serves to break down. As Iago's diagnosis of epilepsy has already (if inadvertently) suggested, Othello's swoon evokes a sphere of depersonalized affectivity which does not observe distinctions between subject and object, mind and body (and which is therefore impervious to mind-reading). A similar implication is present in Hamlet's second monologue*,* which singles out the sort of physical transformation undergone by Othello as the height, for better or worse, of an actor's performance. The earlier Hamlet had accused the whole world around him of acting, donning "suits and trappings" to mask or misrepresent an inner reality. Acting on this view is inherently distortive of underlying reality. But what now appears truly "monstrous" to Hamlet is

[36] See Quintillian, *Institutio* 6.2.29, vol. 2., 433. Quoted in reference to Elizabethan acting by Joseph, *Elizabethan Acting*, 10.

the opposite possibility that, far from being a façade, the exterior of the actor might instead be made to correspond all too perfectly to his conceit. And yet the notion of correspondence does not do justice to what Hamlet describes here. For Hamlet now sees how a "mere fiction" could give rise to emotions and indeed to observable physiological transformations, so that acting is no longer mimetic at all, but rather characterized by an impersonal "force" or "working" that operates at the threshold between mind and body, a threshold defined by affectivity. The pronouns in Hamlet's speech depict that threshold with surprising precision: at first the actor appears to be in control of his emotions, he "forces his soul to *his* own conceit." But no sooner has he done so than a natural and impersonal affective process sets in, so that it is "from *her* [i.e. his soul's] working," and no longer his own, that "all his visage wanned." The discrepancy between these pronouns limns that threshold between first- and third-person, between consciousness and experience, which I have been tracing in each of my chapters. That threshold, I have suggested, is often approached only in and as a kind of trance state, and indeed from Hamlet's speech it appears that acting itself is a kind of trance, becoming natural precisely to the degree that, monstrously, it usurps the player's consciousness of his own separateness from his role.

Within the world of the play the consequences of that monstrous transformation are inescapable; unlike Othello, the actor is able to step outside of his conceit. But presumably he can do so only after the solicited emotions have run their course. Indeed if we insist too much on doubling and redoubling, on mimesis and metatheatricality, we miss what is perhaps most significant about the moment. In Hamlet's speech as in Quintillian's theory, the emotions solicited and displayed on stage are "real" in a way that actually collapses the sustained difference between actor and character, between stage and place, in the same way that having a

baby or a bear on stage introduces an unstable reality into the play, destroying illusionistic distance. In moments such as the player's passion or Othello's trance, acting evokes a shared current of depersonalized affectivity which both outside and inside the theater is normally concealed. It is a moment in which theater pervades and shapes reality as well as other way around—from the actor's point-of-view it is the height of his "personating," of his penetration by the character, a moment in which his very consciousness, *becomes* that which is imagined by the author: in which his body, just like Othello's, is pervaded by a conceit. Theater and life converge in those moments where conceit takes on a bodily autonomy of its own, bypassing consciousness altogether, and the result is a kind of waking trance such as that in which Othello spends much of the rest of the play and in which the actor always operates. The trance becomes a moment in which the distinction between the natural and the monstrous, between body and conceit, and finally between the real and the theatrical, is no longer operative, a moment of heightened theatricality in which, however, theatricality itself undergoes a sea-change, becoming a process fundamentally akin to, and not merely mimetic of, the "monstrous" workings of biological life.

Once more, then, we see that—on Hamlet's own terms—the Hamletian monologue should not be taken as the paradigmatic form of early modern subjectivity (whether we are defending or attacking this notion); we see that even more broadly, mimesis should not be taken as the theater's governing principle. Moments such as Othello's swoon bear witness to a form of embodied subjectivity, or rather of "experience without a subject," which stands in counterpoint to consciousness as it is normally conceived, and which channels consciousness into the non-conscious mechanisms of the body—much as the actor must enter into the script of the persona he is playing. If such experience can be accessed only through the medium of theatrical performance, then it is not through theater's imitation of reality but rather through its affective

immanence in reality, and in particular through the relinquishment of individuated consciousness which is necessarily involved in acting, reaching its highest pitch in moments where the character himself undergoes such a process. Greenblatt argues that "Othello's loss of himself—a loss depicted discursively in his incoherent ravings—arises not only from the fatal conjunction of Desdemona's love and Iago's hate, but from the nature of that identity, from what we have called his submission to narrative self-fashioning."[37] Once Othello's self-fashioning breaks down, Greenblatt suggests, he is left with no identity whatsoever, but only with raving and incoherent fragments of speech. And yet if we can object to Greenblatt that those "incoherent ravings," and the trance that follows them, would heighten, rather than diminish, the submission to fashioning that is inherent in every actor's performance, then the point is not simply that there is no escaping from theatrical conditions. For the moment is at once metatheatrical and, as I have suggested, no longer theatrical at all. Instead it is a moment in which the theater goes from being a mimetic representation of reality to being, in Michael Witmore's words, "a substance made up of embodied processes."[38] As a temporary node or surface within such a substance, the actor becomes what Jameson calls a "registering apparatus" for "mysterious heightenings," and what Witmore describes, in the context of the theater, in terms of an "openness to affection—which is an openness to the interconnected climate system of moods & emotions that one substance implies."[39] Such openness might temporarily center on an actor who evokes it, but it ripples outwards to include the audience as well:

> What would he do,
> Had he the motive and the cue for passion
> That I have? He would drown the stage with tears
> And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
> Make mad the guilty and appal the free,

[37] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning,* 244.
[38] *Shakespearean Metaphysics*, 8.
[39] Ibid., 30.

> Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
> The very faculties of eyes and ears. (2.2.546-552)

If the account of our anonymous letter-writer is any indication, Othello's trance would have evoked a reaction not far from the one described here. That response is itself a kind of trance, a moment in which consciousness is lost or rather reconfigured, otherwise entangled and disposed. In such moments the audience is not engaged in acts of mind-reading, guessing at motives and calculations. Instead, they are involved in a shared experience of romance heightening, one which does not merely bring together atomized individuals, but rather activates an "a-subjective consciousness" preceding individuation.

The Winter's Tale will carry the exploration of this consciousness much further. In the meantime we might conclude that if Shakespeare's career contributed from its earliest days to the emergence of a new acting style based on self-restraint and the emergence of a new bourgeois interiority, then Othello's swoon testifies to the persistence, well into the second half of that career, of different style of acting premised on a different mode of subjectivity: on an embodied and shared form of experience which proves capable, in the trance, of embracing consciousness itself.[40]

[40] See Harris, 389, for Petruchio's speeches as exemplifying a "language of interiority, stripped of looking, stamping, and staring."

Chapter Five
"Bequeathing Numbness": Specters of Insentience in *The Winter's Tale*

Minute by minute they live;
The stone's in the midst of all.
-W.B. Yeats

Like the other works we have been considering, *The Winter's Tale*, too, revolves around a central loss of consciousness. Whether Hermione actually dies, or merely enters a coma, her swoon on hearing of her son Mamilius' death is in many ways the pivot of the play's action, coinciding with Leontes' renunciation of his jealousy and marking the transition to the play's redemptive second half. Admittedly, *The Winter's Tale* does not probe Hermione's lapses out of and back into consciousness in the same way as the other works we have considered. Rather it is what lies between them, this time around, that proves more transfixing—an image of the unconscious Hermione which, I will argue, haunts the rest of the play, from Leontes' wayward hyperawareness in the first two acts, to Autolycus' dumbfounding of his victims in the fourth. Hermione's "coma," I will suggest, is the focal point of the play's sustained meditation on sensation—on both its overstimulation and its privation, two states which are intimately related throughout its five acts. Is it possible to be alive, and yet not feel? When, conversely, does excess of feeling turn into a kind of insentience? These questions, I will show, are raised in various guises throughout the play, offering not only a series of oblique references to Hermione's state, but also a running commentary on the behavior of the other characters as well, and finally a sustained reflection on the affective and intersubjective conditions of human consciousness.

When Hermione is resurrected in Act 5, the scene appears to dwell at much greater length on the reactions of Leontes and Perdita than on Hermione's own experience of the restoration to consciousness. Yet looked at carefully, Paulina's words of conjuration tell us something about Hermione's state as well:

> 'Tis time; descend; be stone no more; approach;
> Strike all that look upon with marvel—come,
> I'll fill your grave up. Stir—nay, come away,
> Bequeath to Death your numbness, for from him
> Dear life redeems you. You perceive she stirs. (5.5.101-103)[1]

For Hermione to come back to life, in Paulina's words, is for her to "be stone no more." Stoniness is a pervasive trope throughout early modern literature—not merely for death, however, but for a state of insentience and often, by extension, for the lack of pity.[2] Hermione's "numbness" is an absence of feeling, and it is from this state of insentience, rather than from death per se, that "dear life redeems" her. This is not to say that Shakespeare expects us now to grasp that Hermione has been alive all along—while some readers tend to assume as much, the text is ambiguous on this matter at best.[3] But while Paulina here treats Hermione's "numbness" as all but equivalent to death, there is nevertheless, in the phrasing and rephrasing of her conjuration, the implicit suggestion of a condition between death and life, in which the senses are inactive and yet the body is somehow alive. "Bequeath to Death your numbness, for from him / Dear life redeems you": the lines envision a kind of protracted contest between "Death" and "Dear life," suggesting, perhaps, a prolonged sleep. They closely recall Spenser's description of Guyon's awakening from his trance, which I discussed in the second chapter: "Life having mastered her senseless foe." Both Spenser and Shakespeare identify life with sensation, while suggesting that the absence of sensation does not necessarily amount to death—there may exist a

[1] I follow *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Stephen Orgel.
[2] "Stoniness stands both as the endpoint of biological life … and for a corresponding emotional and ethical condition of death-in-life: the insensitivity of the stony heart." See Jennifer Waldron, "Of Stones," 205.
[3] Ruth Nevo writers that "there is, of course, no miracle at all. Hermione, never dead, is not resurrected." See *Shakespeare's Other Language*. However, in his introduction to the Oxford edition Stephen Orgel treats Hermione's death as one of the play's "hard facts" (36), though he goes on to point out that "Shakespearean drama does not create a consistent world." Susan Snyder, in her introduction to *The New Cambridge Shakespeare* edition, suggests that "Shakespeare seems to want it both ways: as marvel and as something that can be explained in human terms." See *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Susan Snyder and Deborah T. Curren-Aquino.

state in which sensation is absent, and yet life and death are closely in contest, where one is not quite alive, and yet not completely dead.

Such a space has been glimpsed, more transiently, at several other moments in the work. In this very scene Leontes uses the trope of stoniness to describe Perdita's response to the vision of Hermione:

> Does not the stone rebuke me
> For being more stone than it? O royal piece!
> There's magic in thy majesty, which has
> My evils conjured to remembrance, and
> From thy admiring daughter took the spirits,
> Standing like stone with thee. (5.3.38-42)

The language here suggests the same dynamic that we saw in Spenser, in which amazement interrupts the flow of the vital spirits, inducing that stony condition Spenser calls a "stound"—a sense reinforced, here as in Spenser, by the proximity of "stone" and "standing" and their shared sounds. Insofar as the vital spirits are what sustain life itself, we can see that Perdita's "stound" does in fact constitute a kind of temporary death. And because we know that Perdita has not actually died, we might indeed be led to think that Hermione is in fact alive, simply caught up in a much longer "stound" than Perdita.

However that may be, there is a happy irony to Leontes' remarks in light of what is about to take place, and the play's abuse of the boundary between the literal and metaphorical senses of "stone" has a light-hearted tone in the context of its fantastical and ultimately comic ending. Hermione's awakening offers a powerful concluding counterpoint not only to her own "death," but to a series of scenes, from Leontes' delusion through Mamilius' death to Autolycus' tricks, in which sentience appears to be suppressed, suspended, or violently distorted. Yet these scenes, I would suggest, are more than casually or even thematically related, and they are not simply banished by the resurrection of Hermione. Rather they are caught up in a total economy, a zero-

sum game, visible elsewhere in the play as well, in which one figure's surplus of sentience (in this case Hermione's regaining of consciousness) is registered in a loss or disruption of sentience in others. This exchange of sentience is in some ways a reflection on the effect of theater itself. But its implications go deeper than that—it is as if sentience is not something we each possess in isolation from each other, but rather something that emerges only in a shared and permeable process, an ongoing "transmission of affect," in Teresa Brennan's phrase, in which one figure's sentient state is imbricated in that of those around him. By "the transmission of affect," Brennan writes, she "mean[s] simply that the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies that these affects entail, can enter into another."[4] In this chapter I will be arguing for such transmission in *The Winter's Tale,* and I will suggest that it pivots around the motif of the swoon and unconsciousness. Consciousness itself becomes implicated in transmission, emerging in *The Winter's Tale* only as a kind of counter in a total economy; this is to say that it is always accompanied, somewhere else, by a diminution or disruption of consciousness.

Like Book Two of *The Faerie Queene*, *The Winter's Tale* identifies "life" not with thought or passion, but with sentience, and yet it too does so through a series of dramatic inflections—from unsustainable extremes of sentience through numbness and back—which suggest that such an identification is as much an unattainable ideal as it is a basic condition. *The Winter's Tale* shows how that ideal can only be articulated in an interpersonal framework: how the vibrations of one person's consciousness continually reverberate in and for the minds of

[4] She writes: "I am using the term 'transmission of affect' to capture a process that is social in origin but biological and physical in effect. The origin of transmitted affects is social in that these affects do not only arise within a particular person but also come from without. They come via interaction with other people and an environment." See *The Transmission of Affect*, 3. A similar notion is proposed, in relation to the Shakespearean period in particular, in Drew Daniel, *The Melancholy Assemblage*, which reads early modern "melancholy as a multiplicity, an expressive array of materials and postures and cases distributed across the social surround" (7).

others. Thinking about consciousness in terms of transaction will allow us to conceive of it as a decentered and intersubjective phenomenon without, however, doing away with limits altogether and positing a sphere of unbounded affectivity. Indeed the play is not quite the unqualified celebration of sensory experience it has sometimes been taken for. Instead it is pulled between the organic sentience of the final acts and the insentient presence of the statue—the anonymous figure who does not see and feel, and yet seems to be endowed with some kind of spectral, ghostly life; that tension is articulated not only in the figure of Hermione, but in a number of dyadic social situations which I will now go on the explore. Though a work of literature, and one moreover which avoids even the kind of philosophical reflection that can be found in allegorical literary works, *The Winter's Tale* offers a sustained reflection on the position of sentience in the panoply of human capacities; such a reflection, it ultimately suggests, is impossible without also contemplating the accompanying possibility of—someone, somewhere—losing sentience altogether.

Sentience and Skepticism in Acts 1 and 2

It is not Hermione but Leontes in whom sentience and insentience converge most closely. At first, however, his condition seems to be entirely one of hyperactive sentience. His monologues in Act 1, in which his jealousy is first conceived, suggest a sudden access of physiological symptoms, an overpowering fit of pain resembling a heart attack, as well as a feeling which is reflexively felt in its happening :

> Too hot, too hot!
> To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods.
> I have *tremor cordis* on me; my heart dances,
> But not for joy, not joy…

> O, that is entertainment
> My bosom likes not, nor my brows. (1.2.107-118)
>
> Affection!—thy intention stabs the centre,
> Thou dost make possible things not so held,
> Communicat'st with dreams—how can this be?
> With what's unreal thou coactive art,
> And fellow'st nothing. Then 'tis very credent
> Thou mayst co-join with something, and thou dost,
> And that beyond commission, and I find it,
> And that to the infection of my brains
> And hard'ning of my brows. (1.2.137-144)

Leontes' reasoning throughout these speeches is famously tangled, yet underlying that tangle there is a fairly clear pattern of error. His first response to Hermione's successful persuasion of Polixenes comes not in the form of a thought or question, but rather as a violent lurch of inarticulate feeling: "Too hot, too hot!" Leontes' suspicions are not what gives rise to his passion; rather they are an attempt to rationalize a passion which pre-exists them. The contortion of what follows is largely explained by the fact that Leontes is aware of this situation, sufficiently self-conscious to recognize that a "gut feeling" is not in and of itself decisive evidence of anything, and yet insufficiently self-controlled to avoid taking it as such anyway.[5] His "*tremor cordis*," in other words, impinges on his reasoning almost in despite of the latter, as we see if we cut off his speech after "fellow'st nothing" and imagine him trying to dismiss his suspicions—almost a more natural conclusion to the speech. Leontes himself lays out for us the principle that he is following: "Affection! Thy intention stabs the centre," he says, as if his "affection" itself were an instrument capable of determining the truth of the situation.[6] Response

[5] Nevo notes "the degree of unaware awareness with which [the play's] characters are endowed. We have already heard Leontes struggling, half-knowingly, with his own conflicting modes of cognition." See *Shakespeare's Other Language*, 115.

[6] It ought to be noted that the meaning of these lines depends completely on how we punctuate the passage. I have followed contemporary practice in putting an exclamation mark after "Affection," and taking the line as an apostrophe to Leontes' own jealous imaginings, but the Folio puts a question mark after "Affection" and connects it to the preceding line: "May't be / Affection?" Such an acceptation

becomes judgment, in a temporal reversal most dramatically manifested when Leontes twice cites his own "brows" as a source not of visible reaction but of evaluation and insight. Like Othello before his faint, Leontes is determined to convert felt sentience into certain knowledge.

Leontes' dramatic invocation of his own "Affection!" hovers over much of what follows. It is this "affection," fallaciously understood by Leontes as a kind of emotional truth-radar, which becomes, in later scenes, a hyperactive mode of sentience—a sentience endowed with the powers of insight usually reserved, in the tripartite scheme inherited from medieval psychology, for the intellect. What happens, in other words, is that Leontes converts a hunch into sensory evidence, and he takes this evidence, in turn, for certain knowledge, slippages which are possible because affection and sentience lie next to each other on the Renaissance continuum of human faculties. Throughout, it is Leontes himself who, with unwitting irony, draws attention to the "instruments" he is using to evaluate the situation before him. Leontes' sense of certainty about his wife's adultery goes hand-in-hand with an intensified relationship to his own sensorium, and that coincidence is one we should pay attention to. He says to Antigonus:

> You smell this business with a sense as cold
> As is a dead man's nose; but I do see't and feel't
> As you feel doing thus, and see withal
> The instruments that feel. (2.1.150-154)

Leontes means that he has a hunch, a second sight or a sixth sense which Antigonus lacks. *As* you feel doing thus, he says, suggesting that his insight has the immediacy characteristic of the senses but that it is not quite identical to them; the "nose" would thus be a metaphor for this intuitive mode of insight. Yet his final invocation of the "instruments that feel" takes that metaphor back to the organs of sensation in a way that is defiantly literal and at the same time confoundingly self-referential. Leontes is as certain that his wife has betrayed him as he is that

---

would require a very different reading of the line; to my knowledge, however, no critic of the play has followed this version in his or her reading.

he sees and feels—more, he is as certain of her adultery as he is of the very fact that he has eyes and ears.

The instruments of sense are appealed to here as the most basic and self-evident of sense-data—surely if you are certain that you can see some object or other, then you must be even more certain that you have something that you can see that object *with*. Surely if you feel, you may be reflexively certain (here Leontes anticipates Descartes' reasoning in the *Meditations*) *that* you feel; that reflexivity becomes the source of a certainty which feeling alone is unable to provide. Hermione's adultery, Leontes declares, is not merely evident to the senses as some object that you see or feel, it is evident as the very *fact* that you see and feel—that, in other words, you are a being endowed with sense-organs to begin with. Leontes is trying to lay his claim on indisputable ground.[7] Yet there is a way in which this final, emphatic flourish inadvertently opens onto a bottomless uncertainty, an aporia that reveals the groundlessness of Leontes' suspicions. This is an aporia that we confront as soon as we try to get outside our own senses to confirm their soundness. For the instruments that feel—my ears and eyes, and to an extent also my nose—I actually cannot see. Only another is able to see them, and confirm for me (through his senses, incidentally) that they exist: a generalized "you," perhaps, or a you with whom I am in conversation—but not I. Surely this predicament is what underlies the pronominal ambiguity here: if the instruments that feel are Leontes', then the "you" must be Antigonus. Perhaps, then, there is a note of desperation here: it is as if Leontes has shifted suddenly from his

[7] Compare Drew Daniel's account of Biron thumping his chest to indicate the location of his melancholy in *Love's Labour's Lost*: "By shifting from oaths made with proverbial, received expression … to an ostensive gesture towards *this* paper and *this* body, Biron tries to drive some kind of barrier between the instability and potential falsehood of promissory language and the ontological bedrock of thingly existence …. the ontological security with which the breast can be thumped upon and pointed at is meant to secure an epistemological security about the emotions which supposedly reside there." See *Melancholy Assemblage*, 83.

point-of-view to that of another, desperately asking Antigonus to confirm the existence of something which Leontes himself cannot fully bring within his field of vision. In his manic invocation of "affection" and the "instruments that feel," in his search for a firm epistemological ground to be summoned entirely from within himself, Leontes has run up against the finitude of his own sensations, the point where those sensations necessitate the existence of a "you" who is not identical to "I"—where they necessitate, in other words, an intersubjective ground. In the absence of that ground, the "dead man's nose" may always be Leontes' own.

The image here is not of death *per se* but of the insentient organs of the dead body; as such it prefigures the sensory "numbness" of Hermione in the final Act. But it also harks back to the first Act, when—before he begins to suspect him of complicity—Leontes says to Camillo:

> Ha' you not seen, Camillo—
> But that's past doubt; you have, or your eyeglass
> Is thicker than a cuckold's horn—or heard—
> For to a vision so apparent Rumour
> Cannot be mute—or thought—for cogitation
> Resides not in that man that does not think—
> My wife is slippery? If thou wilt confess,
> Or else be impudently negative,
> To have nor eyes, nor ears, nor thought, then say
> My wife's a hobby-horse, deserves a name
> As rank as any flax-wench that puts to
> Before her troth-plight—say't, and justify'it. (1.2.254-275)

This speech marks the first appearance in the play of the "specter of insentience"—a hyperbolic figure of speech but one which, as we are seeing, hovers dangerously near the literal surface of the play. The syntax here is difficult, and at least two readings are possible. Leontes says that Camillo would have to be deficient in all of his senses not to see the fact of Hermione's adultery ("If you will confess the truth—and otherwise you'd impudently negative, as only someone without senses could be—then admit that she's a hobby-horse"); again Hermione's adultery is equated with the very existence of the senses. Or he says that if Camillo admits (as per the

preceding lines) that he has no senses after all, he must cede his judgment on this matter to Leontes ("If you *will* confess—and you'd be impudently negative not to—that you have neither eyes, nor ears, nor thought—then say, precisely since you *don't* know anything, that she's a hobby horse"). One would have to be blind not to see Hermione's guilt. Or, inversely and more subtly, precisely because one *cannot* see that guilt, because it is not something visible to the senses, but because the senses in their turn are profoundly unreliable, it must therefore be true—the senses being such fallible guides, whatever they disclose is actually the opposite of the case. If that second reading does more justice to the difficulties of the syntax, as I think it does, then we have to attribute to Leontes a grudging acknowledgment of how unreliable and how purely subjective the senses are, an acknowledgment which paradoxically becomes, in this speech and indeed throughout the first three acts, almost indistinguishable from his suspicion of Hermione. This, then, is one resolution to Leontes' skeptical crisis: to insist so much on the unreliability of the senses that in such insistence one finds a kind of certainty, a certainty that the senses *do* betray one and that therefore Hermione—who thus becomes a scapegoat for the unreliability of the senses writ large—must be to blame.

Leontes' excessive confidence in his own senses again and again abuts on its opposite, an intimation—at once fear and involuntary confession—that he is actually deaf and dumb. And in some ways that is precisely what jealousy, the fear of being made a cuckold, boils down to—an anxiety about being insensible to something taking place right under one's nose, so to speak. For at bottom Leontes has actually become profoundly mistrustful of his sensory apparatus: it is not, he suspects, giving him the whole picture. And in order to banish that discomfort, all he can do is attribute to the senses themselves a power of insight that they do not have. The reflexivity of his sensation, the way that Leontes is aware of his "affection" much as Othello is aware of his

"shadowing passion," becomes, precipitously, the source of such power.[8] In a sense this process mirrors, in condensed form, Descartes' sequence in the *Meditations*: from a crisis of doubt, through a reflexive acknowledgment *that* he thinks and feels, to a restoration of certainty in the external world and God. Leontes appeals to that reflexivity as the basis for a power of insight which would penetrate beyond what the unaided senses convey; thus he can insist, in the end, that he does "see and feel'it" even as he confesses, moments later, that his suspicion "lacked sight only." It seems that the feeling of feeling apprises Leontes of sensation's epistemological paucity even as it gives him an illusory means of overcoming it.

Leontes' predicament is rooted in the predicament of consciousness itself, the way it allows us to stand outside the flux of our sensations without, however, offering us any further content, without ever seeming to convey the truth, meaning, or underlying reality of those sensations. On the contrary in the measure that it makes us aware of sensations simply *as* sensations, as phenomena or appearances and not as thing-in-themselves, consciousness can be profoundly destabilizing. Meanwhile to the extent that consciousness, in *The Winter's Tale*, does rise above the level of a comparatively inarticulate affectivity, a capacity to feel and to feel ourselves feel—"Too hot! Too hot!", in Leontes' words—it runs that risk of confusing "reference which phenomenalism" Paul de Man identifies as the essence of ideology, the risk of taking subjective sensations for objective representations.[9] Leontes is responsible for a similar confusion when, in the speech to Camillo quoted above, he diagrams the ladder of the faculties, proceeding through a list which moves from sight to hearing to thought (all verbs in his speech) to the abstract, Latinate noun "cogitation," which, he says, "Resides not in that man that does not think." He does not merely utter a tautology here. "Thought" in his speech is a verb denoting an

[8] For the "precipitousness" of Leontes' skepticism, see Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, 197.

[9] *Resistance to Theory*, 11.

activity conceived along a continuum with speech and hearing; cogitation is a noun, an abstract mental power that transcends sensation and the particularity of a single thought. It would provide the firmness that the senses lack. Meanwhile, as thought aspires to the solidity of "cogitation," the external world, apprehended through the senses, is gradually reduced to nothing. The solipsist inverts our habitual skepticism, transferring the "nothingness" we typically attribute to mental figments to the external, physical world instead:

> Is this nothing?
> Why then the world and all that's in it is nothing,
> The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,
> My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings,
> If this be nothing. (1.2.289-293).

Of course, the expected answer to this series of rhetorical questions is "no." Yet the effect of Leontes' equating his own suspicions with the reality of the world outside him is to cast the shadow of ontological "nothingness" over both. Leontes would rather that the world not exist than that his own thoughts be as insubstantial as they are. Much like the specter of insentience, this "nothing" will haunt the rest of the play.

Consciousness in *The Winter's Tale* may never rise above a meaningless and depersonalized flux of sensation, and yet the vibrations of that flux manifest themselves precisely as subjective efforts to contain it, to dispose a shared experience of affectivity into fixed relations between a subject and an object of knowledge. I will be thinking in the next section about some of the further ramifications of such efforts, the way in particular that Leontes' hyperawareness, and his effort to convert it into certainty, reverberates in the sentient lives of all the characters around him. In the final two sections we will see how shared aesthetic experience might validate subjective perceptions without subjugating the objects of that experience to the demand for certainty.

Feeling Too Much

Leontes' fit sets in motion a series of events which culminate in Hermione's swoon and coma. After he rejects the oracle, a messenger comes and tells him that his son Mamilius has died: "The prince, your son, with mere conceit and fear / Of the Queen's speed, is gone." On hearing this, Hermione swoons; she is taken offstage, and shortly thereafter Paulina returns to tell Leontes that she too has died. One can truly speak of a circulation of affect here: Hermione's "speed" solicits strong emotion and then death in Mamilius, reciprocally sparking the same sequence in Hermione herself. When Paulina recounts all these events at the end of the scene, she lays out a causal chain in which Leontes' "affection"—what she names his "fancies"—is responsible for everything that follows:

> Thy tyranny,
> Together working with thy jealousies—
> Fancies too weak for boys, too green and idle
> For girls of nine—O think what they have done,
> And then run mad indeed, stark mad; for all
> Thy bygone fooleries were but spices of it. (3.2.177-182)

For Paulina it is Leontes' own delusion which has set this whole chain of events in motion, the circle of affect that lays low his wife and son: his overactive sentience has, as it were, successively negated that of everyone around him. If it was Leontes' "conceit" which set this cycle in motion, then justly enough Paulina envisions that it will finally circulate back to him: "And then run mad indeed, stark mad."

The sequence of events thus bears witness not only to the physiological power of conceit, but also to the way in which, in *The Winter's Tale*, that power is articulated interpersonally—the role of messengers here, the creation of distance through the displacement of these events to an offstage space, serve to underscore the sense of an affective network in which each individual's emotional state has consequences for those around him in a proximity that is only half-visible.

That network, established in a series of actions-at-a-distance operating through the invisible arteries of human affect, has an almost magical quality to it, an oracularity which the oracle itself had lacked: "Apollo's angry, and the heavens themselves / Do strike at my injustice," Leontes says, right as Hermione swoons. Over against the idea of a divine omniscience, and in some way usurping its place, there emerges a web of obscure interpersonal dependencies whose unfolding through time is the only thing that can bring Leontes to his senses. The middle acts of *The Winter's Tale* overwrite the idea of judgment and truth with a concept of an affective event which plays out on the border between consciousness and loss of consciousness, between knowledge and blindness, between self and other.

It is not so surprising, then, that this event should move Leontes to an awareness of his faults more than the oracle. We have witnessed throughout the first two acts his obsession with the power of affection, his fixation on "the instruments that feel," and the hypersensitivity he comes to feel that he possesses. If earlier in the play Leontes had falsely attributed to those instruments the power of *judgment*, here those same instruments, almost in rebuke, lay claim to a very different power: a fatal, physiological effectiveness enacted in what is almost an allegorical display of the condition of human mortality. Affection's "intention stabs the centre" in a way that is very different from what Leontes had imagined; it is as if Leontes is being punished for having believed that he could translate its operations into certain judgments.

This is to suggest that Mamilius's death and Hermione's swoon in response to the news of it can be seen as tragic offshoots of Leontes' own predicament, his own subjection to the inscrutable workings of "affection."[10] Though Leontes himself never swoons, his countepart Pandosto, in the novella by Robert Greene which was Shakespeare's main source, does.

[10] David Hillman has argued, along similar lines, "that there is in Leontes' mind an unconscious fantasy which appears to fuse or confuse his interior with that of his wife." See *Shakespeare's Entrails,* 158.

Pandosto's swoon marks the turning-point in Greene's work, and it anticipates Pandosto's suicide later on:

> As he was thus relating the whole matter, there was word brought him that his young son Gartiner was suddenly dead, which news so soon as Bellaria heard, surcharged before with extreme joy and now suppressed with heavy sorrow, her vital spirits were so stopped that she fell down presently dead, and could be never revived. This sudden sight so appalled the king's senses, that he sank from his seat in a swound, so as he was fain to be carried by his nobles to his palace, where he lay by the space of three days without speech.[11]

Again, we see the connection of swooning and the vital spirits which Shakespeare uses later on, in the statue scene; again we see that interpersonal dimension of affect with which, I have been suggesting, *The Winter's Tale* is deeply concerned. Indeed in this compressed account the circulation of emotion between Gartiner, Bellaria, and Pandosto (Mamilius, Hermione, and Leontes) is even more starkly obvious. In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare cuts Pandosto's swoon, and displaces Bellaria's death off-stage. Yet throughout the first three acts, Shakespeare fully demonstrates the power of conceit to usurp the other life-functions which causes Pandosto's swoon here and causes Othello, in a similar predicament, to swoon.[12] It is under the sway of his imagination that Leontes enters a kind of trance in the first act; at the beginning of Act 2, Scene 3, he seems to be suffering from insomnia: "Nor night nor day no rest." Thus when Mamilius and Hermione swoon, they can be seen as bearing out the consequences of Leontes' subordination of the body to a pathological—and apparently contagious—"affection," in whose circulation Paulina, too, gets caught: "Woe the while! / O cut my lace, lest my heart, cracking it, / Break too!" (3.2.170-172).

Such a reading may seem overelaborate, there being no way to "prove" a connection between Hermione and Mamilius' swoon and Leontes' own state. But the extremely rapid

[11] I follow the edition given in Appendix A of *The Winter's Tale,* ed. Pafford, 198.
[12] Cavell notes their similarity: "I take us here to be given a portrait of the skeptic at the moment of the world's withdrawal from his grasp, to match the portrait of Othello babbling and fainting." See *Disowning Knowledge*, 206.

succession of the events, the strangeness—somewhat elided by the rapidity—of the fact that it is a young boy who dies of grief, gives these moments a slightly unreal quality, creating a tableau which mirrors back to Leontes the circumstances of his own error, the way in which he allowed a conceit so completely to get the better of him. There is a sense, in other words, that Leontes himself has unleashed the power which now lays low his son and wife in quick succession; this is what he recognizes when he attributes these happenings to Apollo. Hermione's swoon suggests precisely the power of thought to wither up the rest of the bodily functions which both Leontes and Othello have borne out. In *The Winter's Tale*, however, that power is represented not in the isolation of a suspicious mind, but rather through a distribution of affect in which one figure's affective states enters into economic exchange with those around him or her: the underlying message is that sentience is something shared. Leontes himself, in fact, proves strangely insensitive and blockish throughout this scene: he is curiously unmoved by Mamilius' death, oddly confident that Hermione will recover, and merely irritated by Paulina's reproaches. When he finally acknowledges his folly, he does so not in a manner that is passionate and despairing, but rather in one that is quiet and subdued (consider his taciturn answers to Paulina and his longwinded but strangely muted acknowledgment of his mistakes); it is as if the wellsprings of his own feeling have been dried up by his long bout of jealous passion, and he lacks the emotional resources to respond adequately to what has happened, even as all those around him succumb, one by one, to the overmastering passion he has unleashed.

Hermione's swoon, a climax of emotion followed by a long interim of "numbness," is at the center of these transfers of sentience. Unlike Mamilius' death, and Hermione's own "death" a few moments later, her swoon takes place onstage, though it is still presented in a surprisingly oblique way. Paulina must point the distracted Leontes' attention to what is happening—almost

like a figure on the border of painting, calling the viewer's attention to an event which is half-hidden and yet of decisive significance. Her lines have a concision which give the scene the quality of an emblem-book, or perhaps of Mary's swoon as often depicted in images of the crucifixion[13]:

> PAULINA:
> This news is mortal to the Queen—look down
> And see what death is doing.
> LEONTES: Take her hence.
> Her heart is but o'ercharged; she will recover. (3.2.146-148)

It is left to our (or the director's) imagination to fill in the picture ominously hinted at by the idea that "death is doing" something to Hermione, something visible in the mute agony of her prostrate body, and yet too intimate, too horrible to describe in any detail. The remark evokes the presence of an almost allegorical figure of death, present in the helpless, even demonic contortions of the body. It is from this figure of death that "dear life" will "redeem" her much later, as if she had entered the domain of death without actually dying. Leontes' language, meanwhile, evokes the way he had spoken of himself in the first two acts, in which his own heart had been "o'ercharged," implying, once more, a continuity between his own "*tremor cordis*" and Hermione's faint here.[14]

The discrepancy between the two remarks may be narrowed by the fact that Hermione will, after all, eventually recover—in a sense both interpretations are correct. But the difference is not simply that Paulina perceives more gravity in the situation. Leontes describes the event in terms that are purely physiological and literal. Paulina, meanwhile—in keeping with her name and her role later on—offers an interpretation that has allegorical and Christian overtones: the

[13] For the iconography of the Virgin's swoon or *spasimo* and the controversy surrounding it, see Gary Kuchar, "Aemilia Lanyer and the Virgin's Swoon."
[14] Hillman notes Leontes' "ability to diagnose the interior condition of his wife's 'infected' (1.2.304) body as a mirroring of his own interior affliction." See *Shakespeare's Entrails*, 159.

swoon reveals the extreme weakness of Hermione's condition, which in turn suggests the human thralldom to death from which faith is to redeem us, the great theme of Paul's letters. For she does not merely say: "She's dying." Her phrase depicts death not as the simple termination or the absence of life, as a punctual event or privation, but rather as an active force, ongoing in its work, and situated squarely in the middle of human life. Where Iago, in the same position, had invoked epilepsy—and Leontes' remark works along the same, demystifying lines—Paulina's phrase is much more metaphysically resonant; death here is a condition of human being in the way that Pauline Christianity had uniquely identified.

And yet even Paulina's Christianizing concern with mortality remains tied to a vision of human beings as sentient, biological creatures—as, in other words, organisms. Mortality is an essential feature of organic life, and therefore of sentient life as well. It is for this reason that our keenest moments of sentient apprehension—what Claudio in *Measure for Measure* calls "this sensible warm motion"—are always tinged with an intimation of our decease. If consciousness seems like an especially acute or refined form of sentience, it is at the same time a renewed apprehension of our death. Precisely insofar as it is a sentient organism the human being is, equally, a being to whom "death is doing" something at all time. Sleep, and in particular the swoon, reveal in a powerful way this conjunction of sentience and insentience, of organic life and death, that is at the heart of our human being but that can only be experienced in the form of non-experience.

Divinity is present here in the guise of death, and death appears not simply as the termination of life, but rather as a specter of insentience hidden—and now suddenly revealed—at life's core. Divinity, death, and insentience are all working together, and together they offer a powerful rejoinder to Leontes' pathological conviction that the truth is something he can see and

smell. Hermione's swoon, and Leontes' response to it, point up the way that Leontes' hypersensitivity has become a kind of numbness. In the structure of the play, it is this event, and the death which leads to it, which replace the determination of guilt or innocence, truth or falsehood; Mamilius' death and Hermione's swoon interrupt her trial and offer something like a substitute judgment, which is in a sense a judgment of Leontes rather than of Hermione.

And yet the death and the swoon, though both so clearly brought about by conceit, do not provide a definitive answer to the torturous complexities and questionings to which conceit gave rise. Instead they provide a kind of dramatic *period* to those questionings, cutting them off not through some internal, logical untying but simply by juxtaposing with them the sheer intensity of affective, biological life. We saw exactly the same dynamic in the case of Orlando and Othello as well: their doubts are never resolved. Where we expect an answer we instead get a powerful but inscrutable physiological event, which is on the one hand continuous with a state of mental overstimulation, and on the other a total departure from that state, from the mind itself. And yet that physiological event does provide an answer of some kind: the power of the senses and the emotions to induce a massive bodily shutdown is itself a kind of angry, divine demonstration of those very *human* powers that Leontes had distrusted, and sought to surpass. These moments all offer juxtapositions of body and mind which are the opposite of reconciliations—the body remains a perpetual source of inscrutability in human affairs, and yet when *that* has been recognized, some sort of progress is made.

It takes a series of dramatic sensory overstimulations to recall Leontes "to his senses"; the result, however, is a state of sensory hibernation into which we all now enter, shepherded by the figure of Time. Leontes, too, will go into sensory hibernation now. Hermione's resurrection, as we have seen, represents the rehabilitation of the senses in a world where we have only seen

them abused. And yet the specter of insentience persists, in the very guise—artistic representation—through which the play now offers its redemption. If consciousness is always evoking a specter of insentience, it is perhaps because consciousness itself is always turning becoming into being, freezing sensation into imagery—a process most clearly evident in visual art.

Autolycus and the Redistribution of the Sensible

If the first half of *The Winter's Tale* explores the dynamic and intersubjective power of affect, it also shows what happens when that power is subordinated the demands of knowledge and belief, how when it is forced into a certain trajectory it ends up ramifying uncontrollably. It thus leaves open the question of how and whether we might experience that power as it is in itself, free from the compulsion to convert it into certainty. It is such a question which the second half of the play explores, and it requires the introduction of a new figure: Autolycus. Autolycus can be seen as "capturing" the unruly power of conceit to disrupt sentience; he does so through spectacles that focus attention, suspend his audience's sentient powers, and thereby preclude the self-induced spiral of Leontes' "affection," neutralizing the tension that impels experience into consciousness into knowledge. At the same time, Autolycus' intervention can be seen not simply as a freezing of sensation but rather as a Rancièrian redistribution of the sensible from the courtly world of Leontes' Sicilia to the rustic world of Autolycus and the Old Shepherd. "The distribution of the sensible," Rancière writes,

> reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed.[15]

[15] See Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 12. Rancière defines the distribution of the sensible as "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and

If Autolycus amasses a "share" of sentience far greater than his due, in doing so he nevertheless reveals that sentience has a mobility which is at least in principle open to rearrangement and therefore to equalization. Much like Burbage in Othello, he becomes the node for a distribution of affect emancipated from the bounds of discrete subjectivities, in which aesthetic response, inasmuch as that is what Autolycus solicits, is no longer the prerogative of an isolated subject but rather a state of sensory self-experience freed from the burden of identity. [16] In the process, the specter of insentience is not banished but avowed.

Autolycus is no ordinary cutpurse. His thievery relies on an ability to put his victims into something resembling a hypnotic trance, in which they are then easily robbed Shortly after we meet him in Act 4, Scene 3, he encounters the clown—the old shepherd's son. He pretends that he has just been robbed and beaten; by distracting the clown with this spectacle and eliciting his help, he is able to pick his pockets undetected. Later, in Scene 4, he does something similar while selling ballads. He possesses a power over others' senses which none of the play's other characters—except perhaps Paulina—can claim, and yet to which they are all, as we have seen, variously subject throughout the play. Autolycus himself offers a description of his method, in which he explicitly claims a power to stun his audience into insentience:

> My clown, who wants but something to be a reasonable man, grew so in love with the wenches' song that he would not stir his pettitoes till he had both tune and words, which so drew the rest of the herd to me that all their other senses stuck in ears—you might have pinched a placket, it was senseless; 'twas nothing to geld a codpiece of a purse; I would have filed keys off that hung in chains. No hearing, no feeling, but my sir's song, and admiring the nothing of it. (4.4.605-609)

---

exclusive parts. This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution."

[16] In Jennifer Waldron's terms: "Rather than opposing objective truth to private belief, the play presents faith as intersubjective and fully embodied." See "Of Stones," 216.

Autolycus' language here offers an oblique commentary on Leontes' predicament in the first half of the play, his fear of having "no hearing, no feeling," of being bewitched by the surface of things as if by a beguiling but ultimately deceptive work of art—while, so to speak, his pockets are robbed. We saw how delusional, how self-undermining that anxiety became. The second half of the play, by embodying the "specter of insentience" in the figure of Autolycus and his meaningless spectacles, frees it from the anxiety that arises when we attempt to connect it to knowledge.

We saw in the first half how Leontes' paroxysm of sensation, his sense of himself as being endowed with a kind of hyper-sensibility, seemed to usurp everyone else's power of sensing altogether—causing them to lapse into a swoon and die. Here too, in the pastoral world of Bohemia, sentience remains a zero-sum game, a two-way affair in which one figure's surplus of sentience is registered in another's deficit. While Autolycus' audience is deprived of their senses, he himself becomes endowed with a heightened sensory attunement conceived along exactly the same metaphorical lines as Leontes':

> I understand the business, I hear it. To have an open ear, a quick eye and a nimble hand is necessary for a cutpurse; a good nose is requisite also, to smell out work for th'other senses. (4.4.666-669)

It is as if he has stolen from his victims not only their money but their senses as well, amassing sentience for the enhancement of his own hyper-endowed faculties. For Autolycus that sharing of sentience which I described in the first three acts of the play explicitly becomes an economic opportunity—if there is something of the Robin Hood about him, it is not so much because he steals money, but because he steals sentience from those who are endowed with an excess of it, and in this way I think he acts as a corrective to the excesses of feeling that caused the tragedy of the first three acts, a lightning rod for affective forces that are otherwise uncontrollable and

random in their disruptive effects. The "distribution of the sensible" here takes on that sociological significance which is essential to Rancière's concept of it; pastoral is explicitly figured as a rerouting, a redistribution of affective economies which, when monopolized by the court, had proved deadly. Again, though Autolycus obviously represents an imbalance in that distribution, he does so in a way which endows it with a lability which, in the court, it had lacked. Autolycus' language here is strikingly reminiscent of Leontes' ("You smell this business"; "I do see't and feel't"), and yet where Leontes was determined to convert that "business" into knowledge, Autolycus is satisfied by the mere activity of sentient exchange as such, figured now in terms that are purely economic.

In the context of this redistribution the figure of the father-monarch is explicitly presented under the guise of the specter of insentience. In the middle of the act, the old shepherd has Perdita and Florizel "take hands" to formalize their betrothal. Before they do so, however, the disguised Polixenes intervenes to ask Florizel—his son—"have you a father?" When Florizel declares that he does, but that this father "neither does nor shall" know his engagement, Polixenes responds with that figure I have been calling the specter of insentience, here an image, surprisingly vivid, of a doddering old man who has lost the use of his senses and faculties:

> Is not your father grown incapable
> Of reasonable affairs? Is he not stupid
> With age and alt'ring rheums? Can he speak, hear?
> Know man from man? Dispute his own estate?
> Lies he not bedrid, and again does nothing
> But what he did being childish? (4.4.394-399)

As many readers have noticed, this whole situation comes quite close to that of Leontes, Hermione, and Polixenes himself in Act 1—the taking of hands, and the subsequent eruption of jealousy in particular replay the events of Act 1, Scene 2, very closely; both Polixenes and

Florizel are driven to flee as a result.[17] What is less often noticed is that in the course of these events, Polixenes too invokes the spectral presence of a figure who is completely insentient, just as Leontes had done in his speech to Camillo. Leontes, we saw, feared cuckoldry as a state of total sensory stupefaction, and in response laid claim to a delusional form of hyperawareness; Polixenes here similarly imagines that he is being treated as if he were no better than a man "incapable / Of reasonable affairs," "stupid / With age and al'tring rheums." Polixenes, however, is right in his suspicions; unlike Leontes, moreover, he has taken the step of developing a ruse to test them out. That difference—Polixenes' capacity to deploy the ruses of art, the ruses, that is, of Autolycus, which govern this second half of the play—again bespeaks a context governed by a logic of exchange and redistribution rather than knowledge and possession.

One might, of course, see Polixenes here simply as a repressive figure for the curtailing of natural instincts. And yet he calls attention to a very real deception that is taking place; the use of the figure of insentience may liken Polixenes to Leontes, but it also associates Florizel with Autolycus. Like Autolycus, like Leontes earlier in the play, Florizel too champions a state of extreme sensory awareness. "Be advised," Camillo says to him, to which Florizel responds:

> I am, and by my fancy. If my reason
> Will thereto be obedient, I have reason.
> If not, my senses, better pleased with madness. (4.4.478-482)

Once more we have a figure of extreme sentience juxtaposed with a figure all but completely deprived of it (though both here are figures of speech rather than states of the characters). The play of course does not endorse either Florizel or Polixenes here; if Polixenes seems excessively rigorous, Florizel seems no less intransigent in his willful "madness," and neither is terribly sympathetic. Though they smack of a young man's defiant hyperbole, his lines suggest that even

[17] See in particular Nevo's account in *Shakespeare's Other Language*, 98.

in the pastoral world of Bohemia the "distribution of the sensible" is prone to violent asymmetries.

Throughout the Act, the balance between sentience and insentience remains a highly volatile one. There are deeply unstable elements in this pastoral world; they are present in the guise of figures from different social classes, figures whose sensory dispensation is incompatible with the relatively stable economy of that world. Like Calidore's vision of the Graces in Book 6 of the *Faerie Queene*, the harmony of the scene is disrupted by a young man who has stumbled into it accidentally, and who seeks to "know" it too zealously; in both cases the vision is followed by a painful return to the harder conditions of reality. But in Shakespeare's case what this will mean is a return to mediation, an acknowledgment, in the final act, of the necessity of insentience.

Bequeathing Numbness

What I have been working towards is the notion that art itself is the culmination of the play's ongoing concern with states of sentience and insentience: art understood as a dynamic exchange between a subject and an object whose boundaries are rendered productively fluid in an exchange of sentience. In the final scenes art channels the specter of insentience for ends that are ultimately beneficial, neutralizing the threat implicit in the skeptical crisis by channeling the energy of affect which gave rise to that crisis into non-binding judgments. If, in these final acts, Autolycus represents a maximal attunement of the senses, then he is a counterpoint to the figure of Hermione, who we are soon to discover in a state of statuesque numbness. The statue shares with Autolycus' ballads, however, the power to rob the senses from those who behold it; indeed perhaps it is by doing so, by bequeathing her numbness not only to "death" but also to her

onlookers, that Hermione's own sentience is re-established. Both in statue form and when she is restored to life—indeed precisely in the transition between the two—Hermione demonstrates art's power to appropriate and contain the relationship between sentience and conceit whose disruptive effects we have tracked throughout this chapter and the last. By bequeathing numbness, Hermione, like Autolycus, counters the corrosive power of sensory overstimulation that was still present in Act 4.

It is not only, however, in the onlookers' stony wonder when faced with the statue that the final act registers the play's ongoing concern with distortions and disruptions of sentience. In the second scene, three gentlemen explain to Autolycus that Perdita's true identity has been discovered, thus resolving the problem of her betrothal to Florizel, and fulfilling part of the oracle from Act 3. All of this conclusive, supposedly wondrous action takes place off-stage, and we only hear about it through this report. Since Samuel Johnson the device has been criticized for its lack of immediacy, yet surely its wonder has something to do with its inaccessibility to our senses. Its invisibility is in fact rendered quite conspicuous: the Third Gentleman" says to Autolycus: "that which you hear you'll swear you see" before he explains what happened. In bypassing immediate presentation, the scene only highlights something which is, in fact, an essential feature of all representational art—for it is not ultimately clear that a "direct" theatrical presentation of these events would be, finally, any more immediate than the indirect presentation we get here.[18] Indeed the Third Gentleman goes on to contradict himself, suggesting the inadequacy of a non-sensual presentation: "Then have you lost a sight which was to be seen, cannot be spoken of." His contradictory statements serve to highlight something which the use of report itself has already implied: the non-sensory dimension of art, the part which is based on

[18] Leonard Barkan notes that "the resources of drama are abandoned here" and argues that "by withholding dramatic three-dimensionality Shakespeare is preparing us for a scene in which both three-dimensional media of sculpture and drama come into their own." See "Living Sculptures," 662.

"credit," on our accepting that a series of words on a page, or of brushstrokes on a canvas, *is* what it happens to resemble. That dimension, I have suggested, the essential "nothingness" of art, is exploited by Autolycus in the fourth act; his ballad is hilariously void of content, and he himself refers to his songs as "nothing." "Nothing" in this sense is the objective correlative of the state of sensory suspension into which Autolycus is able to hypnotize his victims: "admiring the nothing of it." In Act 4, Scene 2, that "nothing" extends its horizons to encompass the events of the play itself; in both cases it is presented as a question of the limits of the senses, art leading those senses on and yet ultimately leaving them behind, as the Third Gentleman does here. That, I would argue, is the crucial move of Act 5: an embrace of insentience. In that respect the use of report here is a corrective to the play's "Mount Acidale" in Act 4, to its vision of an unmediated fulfillment of the senses; art in the final act is not a dream of unmediated sensation but rather a corrective to that dream.[19] And in that sense it also a resolution to the crisis of skepticism, inasmuch as it represents an acquiescence in the inevitable subjectivity of sensation.

All of this is to suggest that Hermione's "coma" is more than a device introduced for the sake of the redemptive conclusion. Hermione was frozen in a state of reaction to the news of Mamilius' death, and her statue thus represents, in arrested, durable form, that mode of response I have been tracing throughout this dissertation, from Orlando "al sasso indifferente" ("indistinguishable from stone") through Spenser's "stounds" to Othello's trance. Hermione faints, and then appears to dies, not on seeing Mamilius die but merely on hearing the report of it, as here, too, our wonder seems to be augmented, not kept in check, by the mediated quality of

[19] In this sense my reading of the final Act is a resolutely Protestant one: see Huston Diehl, "'Strike All that Look Upon with Marvel'," and Jennifer Waldron, "Of Stones." Both Diehl and Waldron argue against Michael O'Connell's Counter-Reformation reading of Hermione's resurrection; Diehl writes that "Shakespeare, adapting to his stage Paul's distinction between the dead letter and the 'wondrous' spirit, invites his spectators to relinquish their trust in what they literally see" (30). For a deconstructive version of this argument—connecting the "faith Paulina appeals to us to awaken" to "the inescapable mediacy of language"—see Howard Felperin, "'Tongue-tied our queen?",16.

the events. In both instances, both subject and object fall outside the domain of the sensory; both flirt with the specter, insentient and insensible, of a nothing at the core of being. Hermione makes evident, in extreme form, the relinquishment of consciousness which art requires of us, the numbness, the sensory death which lies at the heart of artistic experience. The context gives the two events a very different valence yet the underlying emotional dynamics are the same.

Indeed the similarities between the demands made of us and of the characters in the first act and the last may, or should be, unnerving—wasn't the "crediting" asked of us in Act 5, Scene 2, the swearing that you see what you hear, the source of Leontes' suspicion and the whole cause of the tragedy in the first place? This ambiguity hangs over the conclusion of the play, over Paulina's pronouncement that "it is required / that you awake your faith." What differentiates such faith from Leontes' delusion earlier on—besides the fact, in itself contingent, that Hermione is able to make good on it? The fact that in responding a work of art we do not expect our subjective reaction to become objectively binding—that we do not, as Leontes did in Act One, insist on the assent of others to our judgment.

Thus the transcendence of sensation looks fundamentally different in the Fifth Act, forcing us to take seriously the persistence of the aesthetic "nothing," from Leontes' "Bohemia is nothing" to the "nothing" of Autolycus's ballads. While Leontes proves all too credent in something beyond his senses, he remains at the same time persistently skeptical of such a something—but the result is that he is forced to give that "beyond" the immediate, tangible reality of a sensory object. The final act challenges this primacy of the senses, even as it weakens the substantiality of the objects those senses would reveal. If the objective "thing" is the correlate of a fully active set of senses, then the nothing—Autolycus' nothing, the statue, a painting, a play—which art presents is the correlate of that altered mode of apprehension in which our

senses are no longer the only relays and arbiters of the world. While Leontes, too, had sought to transcend the senses, he could only do so by imagining such transcendence in terms that were themselves borrowed from sensation, and correspondingly by giving his imaginings the solidity, the "thingness," of objective reality, while reality itself he reduced to "nothing"; in doing so he reproduces the model of cognition according to whose standards he is delusional. For if objectivity is that which the subject apprehends, outside himself, through his senses, then conversely the imagination is delusional only when we assume that such objectivity is the only kind of reality the mind and its products might or ought to have—that is precisely the error Leontes makes when he says "Then 'tis very credent / Thou mayst co-join with something." Art instead allows that imagination to exist *on its own terms*, as purely subjective play.

Thus if the final acts of the play ask us to credit something beyond the senses, then it is not a "thing" at all—a thing which could only be conceived, after all, as an object of some kind of sensation. And in order for it not to be simply some supersensory thing, a different mode of apprehension must be involved, one attuned to and through the intersubjective distribution of affect.[20] In contrast to a world of dead thingness over against a sentient yet disembodied subject, the final act of the play asks us give ourselves over, at least for a time, to a space where sentience and insentience are all but indistinguishable. For if the statue of Hermione is more of a "thing" than Autolycus' ballads, the difference, I would suggest, is not as great as it appears. The play by no means leaves us with the idea that the statue of Hermione is an adequate substitute for the real thing—nor, for that matter, that the "real thing" is always better than the substitute. Rather, by staging her resurrection as an interchange of sentience, it offers a challenge to the logic on which

[20] The play, in other words, moves beyond the subject/object dichotomy altogether and in doing so repudiates the model on which sensation is based. David Hillman concludes: "we might think of Shakespeare's choice to make Hermione return as a statue as reaching towards a reconceptualization of the whole question of inner and outer….Perhaps 'joy' is precisely that: the transcendence of the whole apparent dichotomy between the outward and the inward." See *Shakespeare's Entrails*, 171.

that distinction is erected, establishing an ontological fluidity which enables that statue to be transformed into the real Hermione even as others assume her stony numbness.

Such a fluidity, I would suggest, embraces and reformulates as process what I have been calling consciousness, a mode of apprehension which exceeds sensation and yet does not offer us any kind of higher logical or metaphysical knowledge. Consciousness in this sense can only be activated through a suppression or interruption of the activity the senses (and thus through a kind of experience of non-experience); such disruption, moreover, emerges precisely when sensation is embedded in an interpersonal context, when it is able to be attuned to the emotional states of others, and becomes open to the "transmission of affect." It is sentience that is conceived in terms of a lone, isolated subject; consciousness, meanwhile, is a state activated in concert, in dynamic exchange with the beings around one.

Sentience is often treated as if it were equivalent to life; we sometimes use the word "sentient" as a synonym for "alive." And the final two acts of *The Winter's Tale* are in many ways a celebration of the sentient life, lived in a harmonious exchange, in which our senses are the intermediaries, with the spontaneous rhythms of the natural world. That celebration, however, is then laid aside in favor of a scene centered around the "numbness" of a statue, as we are once more returned to the spectacle of insentience. And that numbness is only the culmination of a series of moments throughout the play which glimpse the possibility of being alive and nevertheless caught, however briefly, in a state of stone-like insentience. Hermione's own reawakening, as we have seen, casts all those who behold it into a stone-like muteness. The heightening of sentience with which the play concludes, and which is always a part of aesthetic response, is at the same time a shutting down, a blockage of sentience altogether. Such a blockage, such a numbness, elicited by art, may actually lie closer to the heart of

consciousness—and thus of life, of the human—than sentience itself. Perhaps knowledge begins not in the senses but rather in the specters of insentience that always lie at their heart.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:

Anglicus, Bartholomaeus. *Bartholomaeus Anglicus on the Properties of Soul and Body: De Proprietatibus Rerum Libri III et IV*. Edited by James Long. Toronto: CMS, 1979.

Ariosto, Lodovico. *Orlando Furioso*. Edited by Lanfranco Caretti. Torino: Einaudi, 1971.

Aristotle. *On the Soul; Parva Naturalia; On Breath.* Translated by W.S. Hett. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957.

Barrough, Philip. *The Methode of Phisicke.* London: Thomas Vautrollier, 1583.

Batman, Stephen. *Batman upon Bartholome*. London: Thomas East, 1582.

Bedford, Thomas. *The Sinne unto Death: Or an Ample Discovery of That Fearful Sinne, the Sinne Against the Holy Ghost.* London: William Sheffard, 1621.

Bright, Timothie. *A Treatise of Melancholie.* London: Thomas Vautrollier, 1586.

Burton, Robert. *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Edited by Nicolas K. Kiessling, Thomas C. Faulkner, and Rhonda L. Blair. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989.

Calvin, Jean. *The Institution of Christian Religion*. Translated by Thomas Norton. London: Wolfe and Harison, 1561.

Crooke, Helkiah. *Microcosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man*. London: William Jaggard, 1615.

Cudworth, Ralph. *The True Intellectual System of the Universe.* London: Richard Royston, 1678.

Descartes, René. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Digby, Sir Kenelm. *Observations on the 22nd Stanza in the 9th Canto of the 2nd Book of Spencer's* Faery Queene. London: Daniel Frere, 1643.

Donne, John. *Songs and Sonets,* Edited by Theodore Redpath. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983.

Ficino, Marsilio. *Commentaire sur le Banquet de Platon*. Edited by Raymond Marcel. Paris: Belles Lettres, 1956.

---. *Commentaries on Plato*. Edited and translated by Michael J.B. Allen. I Tatti Renaissance Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

---. *Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love*. Edited and translated by Jayne Sears. Dallas: Spring Publications, 1985.

---. *Platonic Theology*. Edited by James Hankins and translated by Michael J.B. Allen. 6 vols. I Tatti Renaissance Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.

Florio, John. *The Essayes or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses of Lo: Michaell de Montaigne*. London: Edward Blount, 1603.

Galen. *Method of Medicine*. Edited and translated by Ian Johnston and G.H.R. Horsley. 3 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.

Goulding, Arthur, trans. *The xv. Bookes of P. Ouidius Naso, Entytuled Metamorphosis.* London, 1567.

Harvey, William. *The Anatomical Exercises.* London: Richard Lowndes, 1653.

Heywood, Thomas. *An Apology for Actors*. London: Nicholas Okes, 1612.

Hippocrates. *The Sacred Disease*. In *Hippocrates*, translated by W.H.S. Jones. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923.

Homer, *The Iliad*. Translated by A.T. Murray. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924.

Jones, Emrys, ed. *The New Oxford Book of Sixteenth-Century Verse.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Jorden, Edward. *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother*. London: John Windet, 1603.

Lillie, Charles, ed. *Original and Genuine Letters Sent to the Tatler and Spectator.* London: R. Harbin, 1725.

Lucretius. *De Rerum Natura.* Translated by W.H.D. Rouse. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924.

Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Alexander Campbell Fraser. New York: Dover, 1959.

Lyly, John. *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* and *Euphues and His England.* Edited by Leah Scragg. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003.

Mirandola, Pico della. *Syncretism in the West*: *Pico's 900 Theses (1486)*: *The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems*. Edited and translated by S.A. Farmer. Tempe: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1998.

Monte, Giovanni Battista da. *Consultationes Medicae.* Basel, 1572.

Montaigne, Michel de. *Essays.* Edited and translated by Donald Frame. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958.

---. *Les Essais*. Edited by Jean Balsamo, Michel Magnien, and Catherine Magnien-Simonin. Paris: Gallimard, 2007.

Quintillian, *Institutio Oratoria*. Translated by H.E. Butler. 4 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966.

Seneca. *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*. Translated by Richard M. Gunmere. 3 vols. London: Heinemann, 1917.

Sennert, Daniel. *Thirteen Books of Natural Philosophy*. London: Peter Cole, 1660.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Edited by G.R. Hibbard. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

---. *Othello*. Edited by Michael Neill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

---. *The Winter's Tale*. Edited by Stephen Orgel. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

---. *The Winter's Tale*. Edited by J.H.P. Pafford. London: Thomson, 2006.

---. *The Winter's Tale*. Edited by Susan Snyder and Deborah T. Curren-Aquino. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Sidney, Sir Philip. *Major Works*. Edited by Katherine Duncan Jones. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

---. *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*. Edited by Albert Feuillerat. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962-63.

Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene*. Edited by A.C. Hamilton. London: Longman, 2001.

Trevisa, John. *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of* Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum. Edited by M.C. Seymour. Oxford: Clarendon, 1975.

Secondary Sources:

Adamson, Jane. *Othello as Tragedy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

Adelman, Janet. "Iago's Alter Ego: Race as Projection in Othello." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 125-44.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience*. Translated by Liz Heron. New York: Verso, 1993.

Allen, Michael J.B. *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of His Phaedrus Commentary, Its Sources and Genesis.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

Alpers, Paul. *The Poetry of* The Faerie Queene. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967.

Altman, Joel. *The Improbability of Othello: Rhetorical Anthropology and Shakespearean Selfhood.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Ascoli, Albert. *Ariosto's Bitter Harmony: Crisis and Evasion in the Italian Renaissance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Aubrey, James R. "Race and the Spectacle of the Monstrous in *Othello*." *Clio* 22 (1993): 221-38.

Barkan, Leonard. "Living Sculptures: Ovid, Michelangelo, and *The Winter's Tale*." *ELH* 48 (1981): 639-67.

Barton, Anne. *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Bayley, John. *Shakespeare and Tragedy*. London: Routledge, 1981.

Beer, Marina. *Romanzi di Cavalleria: Il* Furioso *e il Romanzo Italiano del Primo Cinquecento.* Roma: Bulzoni, 1987.

Berger, Harry Jr. *The Allegorical Temper: Vision and Reality in Book II of Spenser's* Faerie Queene. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.

Blanchot, Maurice. *L'Entretien Infini.* Paris: Gallimard, 1969.

---. *The Infinite Conversation*. Translated by Susan Hanson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Braden, Gordon and William Kerrigan. *The Idea of the Renaissance.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

Brennan, Teresa. *The Transmission of Affect*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.

Bergson, Henri. *Le Rire: Essai sur la Signification du Comique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1940. Reprint, 2004.

Bonadeo, Alfredo. "Note Sulla Pazzia di Orlando." *Forum Italicum: A Journal of Italian Studies* 4, no. 1 (1970): 39-57.

Campana, Joseph. *The Pain of Reformation: Spenser, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Masculinity*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.

Cavallo, Jo Ann. "The Pathways of Knowledge in Boiardo and Ariosto: The Case of Rodamonte." *Italica* 79, no. 3 (2002): 305-20.

Carne-Ross, D.S. "The One and the Many: A Reading of *Orlando Furioso*, Cantos 1 and 8." *Arion* 5, no. 2 (1966): 195-234.

Cavell, Stanley. *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Cefalu, Paul. "The Burdens of Mind Reading in Shakespeare's *Othello*: A Cognitive and Psychoanalytic Approach to Iago's Theory of Mind." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 265-94.

Chesney, Elizabeth A. *The Countervoyage of Rabelais and Ariosto: A Comparative Reading of Two Renaissance Mock Epics.* Durham: Duke University Press, 1982.

Crane, Mary Thomas. "Marvell's Amazing Garden." In *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England,* edited by Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett Sullivan, 35-54. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007.

Damasio, Antonio. *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness.* New York: Harcourt, 1999.

Daniel, Drew. *The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life.* Translated by Anne Boyman. New York: Zone, 2001.

Dessen, Alan and Leslie Thomson, eds. *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama 1580-1642*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Dijkuizen, Jan Frans van. *Pain and Compassion in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012.

Diehl, Huston. "'Strike All that Look Upon with Marvel': Theatrical and Theological Wonder in *The Winter's Tale*." In *Rematerializing Shakespeare: Authority and Representation on the Early Modern English* Stage, edited by Bryan Reynolds and William West, 19-34. London: Palgrave, 2005.

Dolven, Jeff. *Scenes of Instruction in the Renaissance Romance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Döring, Tobias. "Writing Performance: How to Elegize Elizabethan Actors." *Shakespeare Survey* 58 (2005): 60-71.

Durling, Robert. *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965.

Eden, Kathy. *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Intimacy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Escobedo, Andrew. "The Sincerity of Rapture." *Spenser Studies* 24 (2009): 185-208.

Falco, Raphael. "Marsilio Ficino and the Vatic Myth." *MLN* 122, no. 1 (2007): 101-22.

Fallon, Stephen. *Milton Among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Felperin, Howard. "'Tongue-tied our queen?": The Deconstruction of Presence in *The Winter's Tale*." In *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, edited by Geoffrey Hartman and Patricia Parker, 3-18. New York: Methuen, 1985.

Frame, Donald. *Montaigne*: *A Biography.* New York: Harcourt, 1965.

Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Edited by James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1990.

Gallagher, Lowell and Shankar Raman, eds. *Knowing Shakespeare: Senses, Embodiment and Cognition*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010.

Garber, Marjorie. *Shakespeare After All.* New York: Pantheon, 2004.

Gascoigne. George. *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres.* Edited by G.W. Pigman. Oxford: Clarendon, 2000.

Gless, Darryl. *Interpretation and Theology in Spenser.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Grazia, Margreta de, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass. *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Hamlet in Purgatory.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

---. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Harvey, Ruth. *The Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. London: Warburg, 1975.

Heaton, Kenneth W. "Faints, Fits, and Fatalities from Emotion in Shakespeare's Characters: Survey of the Canon." *British Medical Journal* 333, no. 7582 (2006): 1335-38.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: HarperCollins, 1962.

Heller-Roazen, Daniel. *The Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation.* New York: Zone Books, 2007.

Harris, Jonathan Gil. "'Look not Big, nor Stamp, nor Stare': Acting Up in *The Taming of the Shrew* and the Coventry Herod Plays." *Comparative Drama* 34, no. 4 (Winter 2000-2001): 365-98.

Harrison, Timothy M. "Adamic Awakening and the Feeling of Being Alive in *Paradise Lost*." *Milton Studies* 54 (2013): 29-58.

Henry, Michel. *Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*. Translated by Douglas Brick. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

Hillman, David. *Shakespeare's Entrails: Belief, Skepticism, and the Interior of the Body.* Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007.

James, William. *Essays in Psychology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Art*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.

Jay, Martin. *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

Joseph, B.K. *Elizabethan Acting*. 2nd ed. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Kerrigan, William. *The Prophetic Milton.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974.

Klibansky, Raymond, Fritz Saxl, and Erwin Panofsky, *Saturn and Melancholy: Studies in The History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art.* New York: Basic Books, 1964.

Knight, G. Wilson. *The Wheel of Fire.* London: Oxford University Press, 1930.

Kristeller, Paul Oskar. *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*. Translated by Virginia Conant. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1964.

Kritzman, Lawrence. *The Fabulous Imagination: On Montaigne's Essays*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

Kuchar, Gary. "Aemilia Lanyer and the Virgin's Swoon: Theology and Iconography in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*." *English Literary Renaissance* 37, no. 1 (2007): 47-73.

Kuzner, James. *Open Subjects: English Renaissance Republicans, Modern Selfhoods, and the Virtue of Vulnerability*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011.

Leavis, F.R. "Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Hero." In *Shakespeare: Othello. A Casebook*, edited by John Wain, 123-46. London: Macmillan, 1971.

Lewis, C.S. *Spenser's Images of Life*. Edited by Alistair Fowler. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967.

---. *Studies in Words*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Lyons, John D. *Before Imagination: Embodied Thought from Montaigne to Rousseau*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

MacLachlan, Hugh. "The Death of Guyon and the Elizabethan Book of Homilies." *Spenser Studies* 4 (1983): 93-114.

MacPhail, Eric. "Ariosto and the Prophetic Moment." *MLN* 116, no. 1 (2001): 30-53.

Malabou, Catherine. *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage*. Translated by Steven Miller. New York: Fordham University Press, 2012.

Man, Paul de. *The Resistance to Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Marinelli, Peter. *Boiardo and Ariosto: The Origins of* Orlando Furioso. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987.

---. "Shaping the Ore: Image and Design in Canto 1 of the *Orlando Furioso*." *MLN* 103, no. 1 (1988): 31-49.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald Landes. London: Routledge, 2012.

---. *Signes.* Paris: Gallimard, 1960.

Montano, Rocco. "La Follia di Orlando." In *Saggi di Cultura Umanistica*, 163-92. Napoli: Quaderni di Delta, 1962.

Nakam, Géralde. *Montaigne et Son Temps: Les Événements et Les Essais*. Paris: Nizet, 1982.

Neill, Michael. *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1997.

Newman, Karen. "'And Wash the Ethiop White': Femininity and the Monstrous in *Othello*." In *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, edited by Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor, 143-62. New York: Methuen, 1987.

Nevo, Ruth. *Shakespeare's Other Language.* New York: Methuen, 1987.

Paster, Gail Kern. *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Pechter, Edward. *Othello and Interpretative Traditions.* Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999.

Pertile, Giulio. "Anatomy of a Stound: Allegory and Physiology in Book II of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*." Forthcoming in *English Literary Renaissance* 44.3 (2014).

Platt, Peter. *Reason Diminished: Shakespeare and the Marvelous.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

Popkin, Richard. *The History of Skepticism from Savonarola to Boyle*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Translated by Gabriel Rockhill. New York: Continuum, 2006.

Quint, David. *Montaigne and the Quality of Mercy: Ethical and Political Themes in the Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Rosenberg, Marvin. "The 'Refinement' of *Othello* in the Eighteenth-Century British Theatre." *Studies in Philology* 51, no. 1 (1954): 75-94.

Rzepka, Adam. "Rich Eyes and Poor Hands: Theaters of Early Modern Experience." In Gallagher and Raman, *Knowing Shakespeare*, 154-71.

Sanctis, Francesco de. *Storia della Letteratura Italiana*. Edited by Gianfranco Contini. Torino: UTET, 1968.

Santoro, Marco. *Ariosto e il Rinascimento.* Napoli: Liguori, 1989.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Schoenfeldt, Michael. *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

---. "Shakespearean Pain." In *Shakespearean Sensations: Experiencing Literature in Early Modern England*, ed. Tanya Craik and Katharine Pollard, 191-207. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Searle, John. “The Mystery of Consciousness.” *The New York Review of Books*. November 2, 1995.

Serverius, Cristina. “The Birth of Consciousness out of Conscience in Giordano Bruno's *Heroic Frenzies* and William Shakespeare's *Hamlet.” Exemplaria* 24, nos. 1-2 (2012): 130-45.

Silberman, Lauren. “Spenser and Ariosto: Funny Peril and Comic Chaos.” *Comparative Literature Studies* 25, no. 1 (1988): 23-34.

---. “*The Faerie Queene* Book II and the Limitations of Temperance.” *Modern Language Studies* 17, no. 4 (Autumn 1987): 9-22.

Snow, Edward. “Sexual Anxiety and the Male Order of Things in *Othello.*” *English Literary Renaissance* 10 (1980): 384-412.

Skura, Meredith Ann. *Shakespeare the Actor and the Purposes of Playing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Spearing, A.C. *Medieval Dream-Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Starobinski, Jean. *Montaigne in Motion*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

Stoppino, Eleonora. *Genealogies of Fiction: Women Warriors and the Dynastic Imagination in the* Orlando Furioso. New York: Fordham, 2012.

Sullivan, Garrett, Jr. *Sleep, Romance, and Human Embodiment: Vitality from Spenser to Milton*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Taylor, Charles. *The Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Teskey, Gordon. *Allegory and Violence.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.

---. “Death in an Allegory.” In *Imagining Death in Spenser and Milton*, edited by Elizabeth Bellamy, Patrick Cheney, and Michael Schoenfeldt, 65-77. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Thomson, Peter. “Rogues and Rhetoricians: Acting Styles in Early English Drama.” In *A New History of Early English Drama*, edited by John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan, 321-25. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Tilmouth, Christopher. *Passion’s Triumph over Reason: A History of the Moral Imagination from Spenser to Rochester.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Trevor, Douglas. “Sadness in *The Faerie Queene*.” In *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, edited by Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson, 240-52. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Türk, Johannes. “Approaching Death: Accident, Citation, and Singularity in Montaigne’s ‘De l’Exercitation.’” *Yearbook of Comparative Literature* 57 (2013): 230-39.

Valesio, Paolo. “The Language of Madness in the Renaissance.” *Yearbook of Italian Studies* 1 (1971): 199-234.

Verbeke, Gerard. *L’Évolution de la Doctrine du Pneuma du Stoicisime à S. Augustin*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1945.

Waldron, Jennifer. “Of Stones and Stony Hearts: Desdemona, Hermione, and Post-Reformation Theater.” In *The Indistinct Human in Renaissance Literature*, edited by Jean E. Feerick and Vin Nardizzi, 205-27. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012.

Wells, Marion. *The Secret Wound: Love-Melancholy and Early Modern Romance.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.

Windeatt, Barry. “The Art of Swooning in Middle English.” In *Medieval Latin and Middle English Literature: Essays in Honour of Jill Mann*, edited by Christopher Cannon and Maura Nolan, 211-230. Cambridge: DS Brewer, 2011.

Witmore, Michael. “Shakespeare, Sensation, and Renaissance Existentialism.” *Criticism* 54, no. 3 (2012): 419-26.

---. *Shakespearean Metaphysics*. London: Continuum, 2008.

Wofford, Susanne Lindgren. *The Choice of Achilles: The Ideology of Figure in the Epic*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992.

Yates, Frances. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.

---. *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age.* London: Routledge, 1979.