

Forms of Sentience in Early Modernity

by

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Abstract

My dissertation examines the relationship between affect and biological life by exploring how Michel de Montaigne, William Shakespeare, John Donne, and John Milton articulated the feeling of being alive. This phenomenon, which I call sentience, is at the heart of recent debates in philosophy and the cognitive sciences, but I argue that early modern literature plays a central role in developing a language adequate to its expression. I focus on written depictions of threshold experiences when this feeling slips into the historical record: altered states of consciousness, episodes of suspended animation, and moments of radical awakening. Although I adumbrate the theoretical history of sentience—a scattered lineage stretching from Aristotle to Antonio Damasio and other current thinkers—my focus is on first-person accounts of this phenomenon. I draw a methodological distinction between attempts to *explain* sentience and attempts to *express* it. There were many early modern categories that expounded how sentience might work: the common sense, humors, animal spirits, vital heat, and so on. These are akin to the current invocation of hormones, homeostasis, and other principles that may have explanatory purchase but never address how it feels to be alive. Since my dissertation seeks to shed light on how early moderns experienced sentience, I anchor my analysis in passages where writers express the felt qualities of vitality in language that is not inscribed in explanatory categories. I focus on two strategies that Montaigne, Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton used to express the feeling of being alive. First, since sentience has no inherited system of images and phrases (as do such senses or passions as vision and melancholy), grammar became a primary tool for verbalizing the feeling

of being alive. Second, because sentience is all but inexpressible, those who put it into words appropriated other discourses—including theology and philosophy—and repurposed them to register subtle distinctions in affect and sensation. Organized around an analogy to the life cycle—beginning with birth and then moving through death to re-birth—each of the five chapters focuses on a different aspect of sentience: its relationship with death, personhood, temporality, effort, and other living beings.

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Introduction

Early Modern Sentience and Historical Experience

Two assumptions underpin this dissertation. First, if you are reading these words, you are alive. Second, if you are alive, you are aware of your own life. You, the reader, are an organism endowed with biological life and this life is given to your awareness experientially. The link between these assumptions is more obvious in languages other than English.¹ In German, for instance, *Erleben* (experience in the sense of living through), emerges directly from *Leben* (life). In French, *vivre* (to live) splits into the present participle *vivant* (organism) and the past participle *vécu* (lived experience).² Such linguistic connections suggest an entanglement of life and experience, but how precisely is the awareness of life given to experience? Right now, I am focusing on typing, sitting up straight, using the correct conventions of spelling and punctuation, crafting crisp sentences, and so on, but I am not *directly* aware of my life, the brute fact of living that subtends my ability to write this dissertation. The awareness of life is not something that preoccupies us or demands our attention, but this experience is nevertheless there, beneath the surface of our daily activities—a background hum of felt vitality that only rarely snaps into focus, a minimal sensation operative behind our perceptions, our passions, and our thoughts in much the same way that ambient sound persists beneath music as it plays. Following the lead of the philosopher Evan Thompson, I call this phenomenon *sentience*, and in so doing I tie a very specific meaning to a word that can be and has been used in a variety of ways.³ Although I will explore questions of terminology in more detail below, for now it suffices to say that by defining sentience as

¹ English does not advertise the link between experience and life. The roots of *experience* stem from the Latin *experiri*, which means to try or put to the test, and it was in this sense of experimentation that the word was first used in English. Wierzbicka notes that the globally influential concept of *experience* is in fact peculiarly English in *Experience, Evidence, and Sense* (25-93), but the meaning of the word severs it from the life that makes it possible. When philosophers writing in English want to stress that the experience under discussion is bound up with everyday life, they often resort to calling it “lived experience,” a formulation used to capture a specificity readily available in other languages.

² For a slightly different point about this linguistic connection, see Barbaras, “Life, Movement, and Desire,” 3-4; and Fuchs, “The Feeling of Being Alive,” 149-50

³ Thompson, *Mind in Life*, 354.

the feeling of being alive, I couple the naming of a phenomenon with considerations of experiential access. If, in everyday life, one does not directly experience sentience but only more elaborate combinations of affective and cognitive states, then sentience is a feeling the presence of which one does not feel, at least on a regular basis. In this dissertation, I attend to a variety of threshold experiences—moments where one is overwhelmed or threatened—through which the feeling of being alive is disclosed. I argue that one of the important ways we become aware of sentience is in such threshold states as suspended animation, encounters with illness and death, and the blurred zone between deep sleep and awakening. In my sense of the term, sentience is the felt experience of life that emerges when other forms of experience fall away.

“Forms of Sentience in Early Modernity” explores how four sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers—Michel de Montaigne, William Shakespeare, John Donne, and John Milton—expressed this phenomenon. Since sentience is a ubiquitous but nevertheless unfamiliar and often unexpected form of awareness, it is exceedingly difficult to conjure into language. I argue that early modern literature developed two main strategies to express the feeling of being alive. First, since sentience has no inherited system of images and stock phrases (as do such well-known senses or passions as vision and melancholy), grammar became a primary tool for verbalizing the feeling of being alive. Second, because sentience is all but inexpressible, those who put it into words appropriated other discourses—including theology, philosophy, and law—and repurposed them to register subtle distinctions in affect and sensation. Of course, a wide variety of historical periods and a diverse array of traditions around the globe have attempted to express the basic felt quality of life. For example, there is a rich body of Western mystical literature running from late antiquity and through the Middle Ages that discusses what I call sentience and adumbrates how to cultivate it experientially.⁴ Likewise, in the nineteenth century, the *Lebensphilosophie* of Wilhelm Dilthey and other prominent German thinkers was grounded in detailed discussions of a term coined by

⁴ See Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*; and Geybels, *Cognitio Dei experimentalis*.

Immanuel Kant: *Lebensgefühl*, the feeling of life.⁵ One could also turn to the *élan vital* of Henri Bergson, a wide variety of phenomenological descriptions ranging from Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger to Michel Henry and Renaud Barbaras, or the radical empiricism of Gilles Deleuze and Brian Massumi. Although I acknowledge and discuss these and other reflections on the topic across a range of historical periods, my dissertation is dedicated to an account of sentience in early modernity.

I focus on early modernity for three interconnected reasons. First, I argue that writers in the late sixteenth century developed an immanent way of framing and interpreting sentience. If, in earlier texts—mystical, theological, philosophical—the feeling of being alive was often understood as an opening onto transcendence and (perhaps) the divine, a number of early modern writers began to locate sentience in the immanence of felt bodily tissue, in living flesh. For example, Montaigne describes his encounter with sentience by appropriating a discursive structure established by Saint Augustine and used by centuries of mystics to describe ecstatic contact with the divine.⁶ What was once the felt presence of God becomes, in Montaigne’s hands, the vague hum of one’s bodily organs at work. Early modernity marks the historical point at which a new, more secular interpretation of sentience enters into dialogue with dominant, theologically-inflected interpretive modes. I do not invoke the concept of the secular in order to construct what Charles Taylor calls a “subtraction story,” in which sentience serves as yet another way of narrating how divinity was naturalized and pushed to the side in early modernity.⁷ Rather, I follow Brian Cummings’s *Mortal Thoughts* in tracing the complexity of the relationship between what we would now call the secular and the theological as they both, often simultaneously, contribute to how early moderns expressed and understood the feeling of being alive. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the emergence—however hesitant, fragile, and contested—of a semantic sphere within which sentience was grounded in immanence, a sphere that interacted with and inflected the ongoing

⁵ On the relationship between Kant and Dilthey on the topic of life, see Makkereel, “The Feeling of Life.” I have written on the relationship between Kant’s notion of *Lebensgefühl* and Adam’s awakening in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. See Harrison, “Adamic Awakening.”

⁶ I discuss this process in Chapter 2.

⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 22, 26-29.

legitimacy of other pre-existing and co-existing spheres that highlighted the continuing importance of transcendence.⁸ Such scholars as Stephen Fallon, John Rogers, and Garrett Sullivan have treated the relationship between life or vitality and early modern literature.⁹ Existing scholarship has not, however, dealt in any meaningful way with sixteenth- and seventeenth- century articulations of how it *feels* to be alive. Sentience is a previously unrecognized theme in early modern letters; it provides an unfamiliar window through which to see the period anew. In addition to generating fresh ways of looking at such historical and cultural processes as secularization, sentience offers a new angle of vision on more traditional historical problems: early modern selfhood, embodiment, inwardness, sensation, and emotion.

“Forms of Sentience in Early Modernity” also contributes to current and ongoing research on the topic of sentience in neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy. Even if they do not always use my chosen term, a number of important figures in the contemporary study of mind—Antonio Damasio, Evan Thompson, Matthew Ratcliffe, and Daniel Dennett, among others—treat sentience at length.¹⁰ The uncertainty surrounding this new topic is signaled in the first collection of essays dedicated to the topic (*Feelings of Being Alive*, published in 2012). The German philosophers Joerg Fingerhut and Sabine Marienberg open this volume with a declaration of ignorance: the “topic seems to be one that has to be grown and developed anew and addresses a phenomenon that is not yet covered by any standard characterization.”¹¹ As a minimal feeling that might constitute the basic threshold of awareness, sentience stands at the border of anonymous, unfelt vital processes and conscious awareness. A firm grasp of sentience is thus important to current cognitive studies that seek to understand how human consciousness relates to brain states and biological activity. I argue that the deep link between embodiment and sentience that was articulated in the sixteenth and

⁸ For an articulation of such pre-existence and co-existence, see Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*, 18-19.

⁹ Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers*; Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution*; and Sullivan, *Sleep, Romance and Human Embodiment*.

¹⁰ See, for example, Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*; Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being*; Thompson, *Waking, Dreaming, Being*, 299-304; Thompson, *Mind in Life*; and Stern, *Forms of Vitality*. Dennett dismisses sentience in fascinating ways in *Kinds of Minds* (57-65, 93-97).

¹¹ Fingerhut and Marienberg, “How it Feels to Be Alive,” 8.

seventeenth centuries presents the nascent flickering of an understanding that underpins current cognitive studies and demarcates their object of inquiry from other approaches—religious practices, new-age spirituality, and so on—that also have an abiding interest in sentience but approach the topic in quite different ways. Early modernity provides a major historical bedrock from which the presuppositions employed by current scientists and philosophers emerged. The study of how early moderns expressed sentience can enhance the self-awareness of an important and ongoing research program.

Montaigne, Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton possessed a set of linguistic and conceptual resources different from those employed today. By exploring how they developed a language adequate to the articulation of sentience, I hope to enrich and nuance the way we grasp and delimit this phenomenon in the twenty-first century. Philosophers already appeal to literary works—all of them from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—in order to reaffirm the existence of their topic when they discuss the feeling of being alive.¹² By unearthing an archive of pre-Enlightenment literary examples, I hope both to provide more sources of evidence for this project and to nuance current accounts of sentience by revealing a number of the innovative and unfamiliar channels through which it achieves linguistic expression. Early modern writers open up ways of thinking about sentience that can and should inform how we approach this phenomenon in the twenty-first century.

My third reason for focusing on early modernity is what I see as a deep homology between then and now. Life is central to how we in the twenty-first century understand ourselves and our world. As a conceptual category, political figure, scientific muse, technological frontier, and ethical dilemma, life is a force that organizes much of what is distinctive about our contemporary moment. Examples are easy to find. Advances in computation and robotics herald the development of artificial intelligence at the same

¹² See, Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being*, 61-68; and Thompson, *Waking, Dreaming, Being*, 299-304.

time as synthetically engineered life forms are beginning to emerge.¹³ Genetic manipulation has enabled the appearance of new varieties of vegetables, fruits, and animals—from disease resistant plants to cats that glow in the dark.¹⁴ Biotechnologies have redefined how children are conceived, how health is preserved, and how death is declared.¹⁵ What once seemed to be the firm boundaries separating the animate from the inanimate are today blurred and all but invisible. Life now possesses enhanced visibility and occupies a prominent place in contemporary debates, and it owes this centrality in large part to the fact that its conceptual coherence has become unmoored and has revealed new depths of instability.¹⁶

If this uncertainty is the wide cultural context within which the study of sentience in the sciences of mind gains its urgency today, the upwelling of concern about the same phenomenon in early modernity emerges from a homologous background. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, life was emerging as a topic of inquiry in the inchoate natural sciences. The study of the soul—long nurtured by Platonic, Aristotelian, Scholastic, and Patristic thought—was embroiled in turmoil that would eventually see the emergence of life as a category of study in its own right.¹⁷ If biology was still centuries away, life itself was nevertheless an important scene of inquiry, and was discussed by physicians, alchemists, astronomers, botanists, philosophers, and many others, a good number of them adhering to doctrines that would today be considered vitalistic.¹⁸ Although accounts of the Scientific Revolution traditionally focus on developments in physics and astronomy, the study of living creatures was also in the midst of a violent upheaval, the pieces of which are only now being assembled by

¹³ For robotics and artificial intelligence, see Christian, *The Most Human Human*. For the synthetic generation of life, see Regis, *What is Life?*

¹⁴ See Anthes, *Frankenstein's Cat*.

¹⁵ In general, see Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself*. On the new fuzziness surrounding the declaration of death, see Teresi, *The Undead*; and Sachs, *Corpse*. For an historical account of this fuzziness, see Bynum, *Christian Materiality*.

¹⁶ In a fascinating formulation, the French biologist Michel Morange claims that the concept of life has undergone a recent “resurrection.” See Morange, *Life Explained*, 1.

¹⁷ See Des Chene, *Life's Form*; and Des Chene, *Spirits and Clocks*.

¹⁸ A number of scholars are currently challenging the suggestion made by Foucault: “[u]p to the end of the eighteenth century, in fact, life does not exist: only living beings.” *The Order of Things*, 175.

historians of science, medicine, and philosophy.¹⁹ At the same time, the dissemination of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* and other rediscovered ancient texts prompted renewed reflection on the possibility that death might be nothing less than annihilation, that earthly life might be the only sort of life there is. When these more conceptual problems are coupled with larger social issues such as rapid urbanization and colonization along with the diseases that accompanied them, the terrible violence and death produced by the wars of religion, or the rapid development of hotly contested techniques in husbandry and agriculture, it is not inaccurate to claim that early modernity was involved in a momentous transition in how life was apprehended and understood.²⁰

Since discussions of sentience both then and now emerged from cultures in which the meanings of life were and are unfixed or precarious, a consideration of how attention to sentience relates to the cultural upheavals of early modernity can help us grasp what is at stake in the study of sentience today. In *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy*, Donna V. Jones argues that *Lebensphilosophie* and the vitalist movements of the early twentieth century focused on the felt quality of life as a way of responding to cultural pressures, raising the banner of life against mechanistic, deterministic, and rational accounts of the world. Like Jones, I seek to place historical accounts of felt vitality in relation to the cultural tensions that produced them, but I also aim to make meaningful connections between past and the present. By disentangling the stakes of sentience in early modern culture, I work to shed light on why the phenomenon possesses urgency today. This juxtaposition of past and present will, I hope, enable me to make not only historically-specific claims about the expression of sentience, but also transhistorical claims about how humans verbalize and even experience the basic feeling of being alive. This feeling is the subject of Daniel Heller-Roazen's magnificent study, *The Inner Touch: Archeology of a Sensation*. Ranging across many centuries and multiple languages, this book traces the fate of an Aristotelian concept that would come to be called the common sense or *sensus communis*, a faculty distinct from the familiar five

¹⁹ See Wolfe, "Why Was There No Controversy"; Smith, *Divine Machines*; and Hirai, *Medical Humanism and Natural Philosophy*. These scholars build on Roger, *Les sciences de la vie*.

²⁰ For an ecological take on some of these issues, see Watson, *Back to Nature*.

senses—a form of awareness through which one is able to sense that one senses, feel that one feels, and encounter the fact of one’s life or existence. Although “Forms of Sentience in Early Modernity” is deeply indebted to Heller-Roazen’s groundbreaking work, my approach differs in a number of significant ways. *The Inner Touch* is structured as a delicate chain of philologically-exemplary texts, the suggestive interpretation of which is, for the most part, made to stand in place of any direct claims about causation or historical connection. My focus on a particular historical period enables me both to make arguments about the past and to address the importance of cultural context. Heller-Roazen also privileges philosophical explanations of the *sensus communis*, accounts that describe how this faculty might work. My dissertation is organized around a methodological distinction between *explanation* and *expression* (a relationship I will discuss below) that leads me to bracket philosophical explanations of the sort Heller-Roazen employs in favour of literary attempts to express sentience. Finally, while *The Inner Touch* is, for the most part, coy about connections between past and present, I stress that relationship in order to make claims about sentience that, although rooted in textual analysis, attempt to address the phenomenon itself. If the felt awareness of life is an experience shared (however tenuously) by early moderns and present day readers alike, then a study of sentience in early modernity should be able to enrich the ways we describe how our own lives feel.

Models of Sentience: Feeling the Unfelt

Sentience constitutes the basic background feel of our everyday lives but remains for the most part covered up under more elaborate emotional and cognitive states. For the writers I consider in this dissertation, this feeling only discloses itself to awareness in unusual circumstances. Such a formulation implies that sentience is, by and large, unfelt. In order gain a firmer grasp of the conceptual and phenomenological issues involved in this seeming paradox, I turn here to two early modern writers with contrasting views: Walter Charleton, a seventeenth-century English natural philosopher, and Montaigne, a late sixteenth-century French chronicler of the self. Do unfelt feelings count as feelings? If our bodies generate sensations of which we are unaware, by what criteria or terminology could we discuss or judge such sensations? These are the questions against

which Charleton stumbles in *The Natural History of Nutrition and Life* (1656), one of the earliest English treatises to discuss life in a manner that resembles what would, centuries later, become biology. Charleton's detailed treatment of digestion, which draws on William Harvey's recent discoveries about the circulation of blood, argues that the viscera contract themselves, expel and resist substances that irritate them, and are capable of "self-Restitution." Although these claims may seem fairly banal, Charleton inserts a lengthy "Digression" to defend them against the potential objections of readers, who, he claims, are most likely asking themselves: "Doth not this Irritation and Spontaneous Contraction of Membranous and Nervous parts, when they are molested, imply a certain sense in them, distinct from the Sense of Feeling or Touching, and independent upon the Common Sense, or Brain?" Charleton immediately translates this question into an explicit objection. "But we are not conscious to ourselves of any such sense within us (as we are of all our Animal senses) whereby those parts are made sensible of their irritations," the imagined reader continues, "and therefore it seems, you have imagined one sense more than Nature hath made."²¹ Defending his position, Charleton contends that there is a category of embodied motions that physicians call "Natural," whose motions are "not instituted by the Will; but [are] done even against it," and cannot be modified by effort because they operate in response to "some sense, naturally inhaerent in the parts moved." To elucidate his claim, Charleton invokes examples: during "swooning fits," the heart "agitate[s] itself" to get rid of what it "sense[s]" as harmful; the stomach expels its "enemies" through vomiting; the flesh contracts and swells against such "poysonous puncture[s]" as bee stings and snake bites; and the womb responds to stimuli that remain unfelt.²² Such phenomena attest to the existence of a form of sensation or feeling that is not given directly to experience.

Following the authority of the Aristotelian common sense, Charleton claims that when we perceive the world around us through the familiar five senses, we do not perceive that we see or hear through our eyes or ears. We sense and judge what we sense through the

²¹ Charleton, *Natural History*, 159.

²² *Ibid.*, 120-21.

“mediation of another internal sense,” the *sensus communis*, which Charleton aligns with the brain. The “Natural sense” is beyond this familiar economy of feeling, beyond any conscious coordination or synthesis:

we have a certain sense of Feeling, which is not referrible to the Common sense, nor communicated to the Brain, and of which we take no cognisance, but by the various effects and commotions that it causeth in our bodyes. For, in this Sense, we do not perceive that we feel; but as it fares with men distracted, or otherwise agitated with any violent passion of the Mind, who neither feel pain nor take notice of objects offered to their senses: so it is with us in this Sense, which operating without our knowledge, is therefore to be distinguished from the Animal sense, and may be properly enough called a Sensation without Sense.²³

The natural sense operates beneath the surface of embodied awareness in a closed loop, without any point of access through which the organs of consciousness—mind, brain, *sensus communis*, or any other similar principles—could apprehend the feelings that it feels. In Charleton’s view, the natural sense is coterminous with life. One does not need consciousness to live; those who suffer from “swooning fits” are unconscious but alive, as are creatures like sponges and earthworms. Life requires only a basic sensitivity: “Nor can we, indeed, otherwise discern what is Animate and sentient, from what is Inanimate and void of sense; but only by some Motion excited in it, by something molesting and irritating it: which Motion doth continually both follow and argue sense.”²⁴ This motion can only “argue sense” because it remains inaccessible to articulate awareness in two distinct ways. First, we must infer that those creatures that move themselves are living and sentient, since we cannot directly know what they experience. Second, human beings may be articulate and aware, but they cannot experience the sense “argue[d]” by the involuntary motions of their own bodies. Although sentience is derived from the Latin *sentire* (to feel), Charleton holds that in its most fundamental state—that shared by all “Animate and sentient” creatures—it is in fact unfelt.

²³ Ibid., 122-23.

²⁴ Ibid., 121.

If Charleton argues that unfelt feeling remains unfelt, Montaigne suggests there are moments when it emerges into awareness. Sometime during the late 1560s, Montaigne fell from his horse and nearly died. Lying battered on the ground, he felt himself slipping away: “It seemed to me that my life was hanging only by the tip of my lips.”²⁵

Approximately four years later, he composed “De l’exercitation,” a work that describes this accident in one of the most extensive autobiographical narratives of the *Essais*.²⁶

Reflection on this accident leads Montaigne to conclude that feeling is coterminous with life; so long as one lives, there remains a minimal level of felt awareness. At the same time, Montaigne understands his accidental loss of consciousness as a dissolution of personhood, a splitting apart of body and soul. Since some form of feeling persists even when there is not, strictly speaking, a person there to feel, Montaigne posits the existence of impersonal feeling, a phenomenon for which he provides an evocative example:

“There are many animals, and even men, whose muscles we can see contract and move after they are dead. Every man knows by experience that there are parts that often move, stand up, and lie down, without his leave. Now these passions which touch only the rind of us cannot be called ours. To make them ours, the whole man must be involved; and the pains which the foot or the hand feel while we are asleep are not ours.”²⁷ While we sleep, our limbs may “feel” pain, but because such feelings “touch only the rind of us”—our *escorce*—it would be improper to call them ours. Feelings only belong to us when they involve the “whole man,” the *homme y soit engage tout entier*. A pain in the hand of a sleeping man is much like the twitching muscles of a corpse or the involuntary movement of an unruly penis, at least insofar as all three do not belong to the whole man. If a hand feels pain, but the person with whom it is integrated is sleeping and unaware of

²⁵ Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. Frame, 269; Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. Balsamo, Magnien, and Magnien-Simonin, 392: “Il me sembloit que ma vie ne me tenoit plus qu’au bout des lèvres.” Hereafter, when quoting Montaigne I provide two sets of references: first, Frame’s translation (F), which I occasionally modify, and second, the Balsamo, Magnien, and Magnien-Simonin edition (BMS). Arabic numerals refer first to books, second to chapters, and third to pages.

²⁶ For the dating of “De l’exercitation,” see Montaigne, *Les Essais*, ed. Villey and Saulnier, 370.

²⁷ F.2.6.271; BMS.2.6.394: “Il y a plusieurs animaux, et des hommes mesmes, après qu’ils sont trespassez, ausquels on voit resserrer et remuer des muscles. Chacun sçait par experience, qu’il a des parties qui se branslent, dressent et couchent souvent sans son congé. Or ces passions qui ne nous touchent que par l’escorce, ne se peuvent dire nostres: Pour les faire nostres, il faut que l’homme y soit engagé tout entier: et les douleurs que le pied ou la main sentent pendant que nous dormons, ne sont pas à nous.”

the pain, then to who or what does that pain belong? Although this question may seem like the cousin of the unobserved tree falling in a forest, it is in fact quite serious because it addresses the preconditions for the existence of feeling. In this passage, Montaigne argues that only the whole man, that is, only a person—a fusion of body and soul—is capable of feeling. And yet the hand nevertheless feels pain, despite the fact that sleep has separated it from the person to whom it belongs. This hand, which feels pain that remains unfelt, occupies the same zone as those aspects of embodied life that Charleton places under the rubric of the “Natural sense.”

What is exceptional about Montaigne’s account is that he claims to have experienced this normally unfelt feeling in the period following his accident. For several hours, his companions believed him to be dead, until he began to vomit. If his friends see a body wracked with agony, Montaigne contends that his “condition was, in truth, very pleasant and peaceful.” When he was placed in bed, he “felt infinite sweetness.” Yet this feeling is hardly vivid enough to justify the name: “I felt no affliction either for others or myself; it was a languor and an extreme weakness, without any pain. ... It would, in truth, have been a very happy death; for the weakness of my understanding kept me from having any judgment of it, and that of my body from having any feeling of it.”²⁸ A weakness of both understanding and body divides Montaigne’s person; he feels an “infinite sweetness,” but has no awareness of his body’s torments. Montaigne claims that he was unable to *juger* or *sentir*, the same terms he uses to depict the comatose, who have no “reflections to torment them, nothing able to make them judge and feel the misery of their condition.”²⁹ Although these patients occasionally make movements or sounds, such signs do not prove that they possess a “whole life” or *vie entiere*.³⁰

²⁸ F.2.6.272; BMS.2.6.395: “Cependant mon assiette estoit à la vérité très-douce et paisible; je n’ayoy affliction ny pour autrui ny pour moy: c’estoit une langueur et une extreme foiblesse, sans aucune douleur. Je vy ma maison sans la recognoistre. Quand on m’eust couché, je senty une infinie douceur à ce repos ... C’eust esté sans mentir une mort bien heureuse: car la foiblesse de mon discours me gardoit d’en rien juger, et celle du corps d’en rien sentir. Je me laissy couler si doucement, et d’une façon si molle et si aisée, que je ne sens guere autre action moins poissante que celle-là estoit.” In the Bordeaux Copy, “molle” is changed to “douce.”

²⁹ F.2.6.270; BMS.2.6.393: “discours qui les tourmentast, et qui leur peust faire juger et sentir la misere de leur condition.”

³⁰ F.2.6.271; BMS.2.6.394. Translation modified.

They are in states akin to “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 only the edges of the soul.”³¹ The relationship drawn here between the “whole life” and what touches the “edges of the soul” is another version of what Montaigne characterizes as the dynamic between the “whole man” and processes that “touch only the rind of us.” Sensations felt by the hands of sleepers or comatose patients occupy only the “edges of the soul,” an ambiguous impersonal zone of involuntary vitality. The ambiguity of this condition is removed when Montaigne once again becomes whole. After lying in bed for several hours, he regains his “powers” [*forces*] and his soul reconnects with his body: “I felt myself all of a sudden caught up again in the pains, my limbs being all battered and bruised by my fall.”³² Montaigne lives through an experience of dissolution that grants him fleeting access to feelings that do not truly belong to him. When his constitutive parts are eventually reunited into a whole man or whole life and he is once more able to genuinely feel [*je me senty*] Montaigne is left with a sense of an impersonal felt state that he must now reconstruct. The feeling that Montaigne encounters at the edges of consciousness is, I suggest, nothing less than sentience.³³

Whereas Charleton’s third-person medical and philosophical account locates unfelt feeling beyond the reach of human awareness—a phenomenon that must be reconstructed based on signs that “argue for” its existence—Montaigne’s first-person description suggests that this feeling can indeed enter the field of experience and become explicitly felt, if only barely. These accounts of minimal feeling represent two ways of approaching sentience in early modernity. They also mirror a number of similar positions advocated by current thinkers. In the contemporary study of affect, for example, a number of theorists and scientists are exploring Charleton’s hypothesis of a “Sensation

³¹ F.2.6.271; BMS.2.6.394: “le beguayement du sommeil, avant qu’il nous ait du tout saisis, de sentir comme en songe, ce qui se faict autour de nous, et suyvre les voix, d’une ouye trouble et incertaine, qui semble ne donner qu’aux bords de l’ame.”

³² F.2.6.272; BMS.2.6.395-96: “je me senty tout d’un train rengager aux douleurs, ayant les membres tous moulus et froissez de ma cheute.”

³³ I offer a detailed account of this claim in Chapter 2.

without Sense.” Drawing on Baruch Spinoza and Gilles Deleuze, Brian Massumi contends that affect is autonomous, that it is an intensity that never enters the sphere of consciousness. Yet we are always aware, Massumi claims, of the “escape” of affect from conscious awareness; this “escape” is an absence that “cannot but be perceived.” Much like Charleton’s natural sense, Massumi’s affective escape is “continuous, like a background perception that accompanies every event, however quotidian.” Even though we do not feel affect directly, this unfelt feeling is nevertheless conspicuous through its very absence. Affect’s escape from direct awareness is, for Massumi,

nothing less than the *perception of one’s own vitality*, one’s sense of aliveness... One’s “sense of aliveness” is a continuous, nonconscious *self-perception* (unconscious self-reflection). It is the perception of this self-perception, its naming and making conscious, that allows affect to be effectively analyzed—so long as a vocabulary can be found for that which is imperceptible but whose escape from perception cannot but be perceived, as long as one is alive.³⁴

In this formulation, the “sense of aliveness” is a perception of the imperceptible, which hovers forever beyond awareness in an unreachable zone, escaping consciousness but leaving traces of its intensities in disparate bodily manifestations. Like Charleton before him, in Massumi’s view, one cannot encounter the feeling of being alive directly.

Massumi’s approach shares much with current work in the neurosciences and other disciplines concerned with the nature of feeling. For instance, Antonio Damasio has developed an influential typology of affective states in which a formulation similar to Charleton’s “Sensation without Sense” figures prominently.³⁵ Damasio draws a distinction between emotions (physiological events that take place in the body, below the threshold of first-person awareness), feelings (unconscious states through which a given organism represents emotions to itself), and feelings made conscious (states that emerge when feelings are apprehended by first-person awareness). Contrary to everyday language, which assumes that feelings are simply and straightforwardly felt, for Damasio

³⁴ Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 97. Italics in the original.

³⁵ Charleton, *Natural History*, 123.

feelings are by definition unfelt until they impinge on awareness, which is far too limited a capacity to attend to all of the feelings constantly at work in the body. Damasio is unapologetic about the difficulties presented by his terminology: “Someone may suggest that perhaps we should have another word for ‘feelings that are not conscious,’ but there isn’t one.”³⁶ Damasio’s formulation may draw on Freud’s career-long exploration of the psychic phenomena captured in the paradoxical notion of unconscious emotions or feelings [*Unbewußte Gefühle*], but his ideas are also recapitulations of early modern notions such as those presented by Charleton.³⁷

Yet however much Damasio insists on unfelt feeling, he nevertheless holds that the feeling of life *can* be felt. There may be many truly unfelt feelings or affects, but Damasio contends that one can feel the sense of aliveness, which Massumi frames as a perpetual absence. Damasio describes what he calls “background feeling,” a sensation that “we experience most frequently” but of which “we are only subtly aware.” A manifestation of “body states,” background feeling “is not the Verdi of grand emotion, nor the Stravinsky of intellectualized emotion but rather a minimalist in tone and beat, the feeling of life itself.” In this account, the “feeling of life itself” does impinge upon awareness, but is only delivered to awareness “subtly.”³⁸ In *Mind in Life*, Evan Thompson employs the resources of phenomenology to build on Damasio’s work, and equates “the feeling of being alive” with “sentience.”³⁹ Not reducible to the external senses or traditional affective states, sentience subtends and pervades all experience. As a “primitively self-aware liveliness or animation of the body,” sentience is the “affective backdrop of every conscious state.”⁴⁰ Sentience is the basic, felt phenomenon in which one’s life becomes manifest to oneself through the process of living.⁴¹ Yet despite this ubiquity, sentience is difficult to discuss because it is the state from which daily

³⁶ Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*, 36-37.

³⁷ For a discussion of Freud’s unfelt feeling, see Johnston and Malabou, *Self and Emotional Life*, 75-117.

³⁸ Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 150.

³⁹ Thompson, *Mind in Life*, 354. For an alternative formulation, see Sheets-Johnstone, “Animation.”

⁴⁰ Thompson, *Mind in Life*, 161, 354-55.

⁴¹ Although the phenomenologist Michel Henry prefers the Heideggerian language of *auto-affection* over the term *sentience*, my formulation draws on his work. See Henry, *L’essence de la manifestation*; and Henry, “Phenomenology of Life.”

activities, projects, and desires emerge. David Rosenthal provides a useful vocabulary for addressing this difficulty. Absorbed in everyday life, I am aware in a “transitive” way. I am conscious *of* a tool, a task, a memory, or a work of art. Sentience is “intransitive” because it is not consciousness or awareness *of* any particular thing or event.⁴² These two aspects of awareness are normally linked. When I see a pen, I am transitively aware of it as a thing I can use, but also intransitively aware of my experience of seeing. Sentience is a background awareness intransitively imbricated with the awareness *of* things in the world that motivates daily activities. The early modern writers to whom I attend in this dissertation describe moments when the intransitivity of sentience is able, however briefly and fleetingly, to occupy awareness. These writers depict moments when transitive consciousness recedes.

The noun *sentience* first enters the English language in the early nineteenth century.⁴³ Its emergence coincides with what philosophers tend to see as the serious debut of the concept in the writings of Francois-Pierre-Gonthier Maine de Biran, whose corpus is littered with descriptions of this phenomenon, which he describes as “a kind of vague and obscure feeling [*sentiment*], tied to every kind of animal and organic life, which for the human animal does not differ from the feeling of the existence or the presence of the extension of his body.”⁴⁴ Yet an interest in sentience as a phenomenon predates its introduction as a term of art and its philosophical clarification in the nineteenth century. As Charleton attests, early modern English writers were fascinated by the category of the “sentient”—a thing endowed with sensation or feeling—and the term became increasingly integral to natural philosophical discussions as the seventeenth century progressed. For example, Thomas Hobbes made the term central to his discussion of

⁴² The distinction between transitive and intransitive consciousness is basic to the current literature on consciousness. The terms are employed in Rosenthal, “A Theory of Consciousness,” 737-39. The distinction in question causes philosophical difficulties, some of which are addressed in Zahavi, *Subjectivity and Selfhood*, 17-30. I owe the link between sentience and intransitive consciousness to a conversation with Evan Thompson. For a very clear discussion of intransitive consciousness, see Thompson, *Mind in Life*, 264-65.

⁴³ *OED*, “sentience,” n. (1839).

⁴⁴ Qtd. in Heller Roazen, *The Inner Touch*, 235. For a detailed analyses of Maine de Biran’s position, see Merleau-Ponty, *The Incarnate Subject*, 61-86; and Henry, *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*. For an discussion of sentience contemporary with Maine de Biran, see Hegel, *Lectures*, 125-52.

embodied knowledge in *De corpore* (1655). In his 1656 English translation of that text, Hobbes defines the term that he would use repeatedly and influentially: “The Subject of Sense, is the Sentient itself, namely some living Creature.”⁴⁵ Hobbes’s definition cuts two ways. The “Sentient” is both the “subject” of sensation and a “living Creature.” Syntactically positioned between sensation and life, the sentient is the body where these two phenomena meet. In other words, Hobbes’s imbrication of life and sensation within the sentient already contains the notion of sentience as felt aliveness. Although the word *sentience* was not yet coined, the phenomenon was available to experience and to theoretical knowledge, albeit in a form that differs from current discussions.⁴⁶ To recover the early modern linguistic resources through which sentience was verbalized is to gain a new appreciation of the phenomenon itself.

Expression, Explanation, and Phenomenology

A central concern of “Forms of Sentience in Early Modernity” is the relationship between experience and language. How do human beings verbalize what happens to them? What are the strategies they use to bring opaque, vague, and slippery experiences into language? Sentience is a litmus test for these questions. As we have already seen, this phenomenon names the texture of feeling in general, an affective background from which specific types of sensation and emotion emerge. Experience is normally filled with disparate sense impressions and affective registers: lights, forms, sounds, smells, pain, pleasure, textures, joy, sadness, excitement, boredom, and so on. With their diverse intensities and varied shades, these specific valences of lived experience overshadow or cover up the background hum of existence, the simple feeling of being alive. It is only very rarely that sentience is disclosed as a phenomenon to which one can explicitly attend. But even if one can attend to sentience, verbalizing it requires considerable linguistic ingenuity. The writers I study in this dissertation use a number of strategies to bring sentience into language. In this section, I adumbrate the general category of

⁴⁵ Hobbes, *Elements of Philosophy*, 292.

⁴⁶ Michel Henry makes a similar observation about the unconscious: “Even from the simply historical point of view, the repeated formulation of the psychical unconscious in these different circumstances [Henry’s argument moves from Descartes, through Leibniz, Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, to Freud] should give us pause. It cannot be simply an occasional discovery or the invention of a particular moment.” *Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 9.

verbalization under which all of these more specific strategies fall, a discursive mode that I call *expression*. I then touch briefly on the specific expressive strategies explored in this dissertation.

I draw a methodological distinction between attempts to *express* sentence and attempts to *explain* it. These terms represent two very different ways of relating a given experience to language. Take the often repeated but still useful example of the rising sun. The experience of watching the sun move upwards across the brightening sky could be expressed in terms of its relation with a perceiver: an orange sphere rises above a stable, unmoving, and dark horizon, spreading a steadily increasing light as it moves ever higher. Of course, the same experience could be explained very differently: the earth rotates on its axis as it spins around the sun, and it is in fact the movement of the ground beneath one's feet that brings the sun into view each morning. However commonplace this example may be, it emphasizes the often radical disjunction between expressing and explaining the same experience. Bracketing the senses of the term that relate to gesture and image, I take *expression* to be a form of spoken or written linguistic utterance that relates a given experience from the position of the person who is undergoing or has undergone that experience. I justify this use of the word by appealing to its Latin origins, in which *exprimere* means to press out. Expression is the act of pressing the phenomenal qualities of a given experience out, as it were, through the sieve of language and into the sphere of interpersonal communication. Explanation, by contrast, traces its etymological roots back to the Latin *explanare*, which means to make level or smooth out. If explanation flattens the subjective qualities of experience in order to attribute causation or produce enhanced intelligibility, expression revels in the idiosyncrasies of the first-person position. Although the rising sun is perhaps a uniquely clear instance of the differences between these two modes of utterance, the example elucidates a distinction that I contend adheres to experience in general.

My articulation of this distinction is a response to a recent trend in literary studies that seeks to provide an historical account of how emotions, sensations, and other forms of affective life “may have been experienced differently by early modern subjects.”⁴⁷ Often called historical phenomenology, the groundbreaking and brilliant work in this vein by such critics as Bruce R. Smith, Gail Kern Paster, Michael Schoenfeldt, and Mary Floyd-Wilson aims to recover what it was like to experience the self and the world in early modernity.⁴⁸ In this dissertation, I extend the insights of these critics by attempting to reverse the relationship that they establish between the historical past and phenomenological analysis. Practitioners of historical phenomenology use the discourses of Galenic medicine, humoral psychology, and neo-Aristotelian soul theory, among others, to show how early modern embodied experience was different from our own. For example, Paster seeks “to discover the phenomenological character of early modern experiences” by determining what it “may have felt like” to inhabit a “penetrable body” traversed by “animal spirits” and possessed of a “heart whose blood did not yet circulate.”⁴⁹ By drawing, in Smith’s words, on “the same sorts of materials used in new historicism” and placing particular stress on the “stories” that early moderns told themselves “about what was happening in their bodies and brains when they looked, listened, read, and loved,” historical phenomenology attempts to access early modern experience through period-specific explanations of that experience.⁵⁰ My contribution to this vibrant field of scholarship is to suggest that explanation does not and cannot get to the heart of what it was like to undergo a particular experience.

In making this suggestion, I evoke the critique of Richard Strier, who argues: “To think that people, then or now, directly experience (or experienced) their emotions in terms of scientific theories about the physiological bases of emotions seems to me a category

⁴⁷ Paster, Rowe, and Floyd-Wilson, “Introduction,” 3.

⁴⁸ Among the most important texts in this field are Smith, *Acoustic World*; Smith, *Key of Green*; Smith, *Phenomenal Shakespeare*; Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*; Paster, *Humoring the Body*; and Floyd-Wilson and Sullivan, *Environment and Embodiment*. For a review article on historical phenomenology, see McDowell, “The View from the Interior.”

⁴⁹ Paster, *Humoring the Body*, 20.

⁵⁰ Smith, *Phenomenal Shakespeare*, 33-34.

mistake of a rather major kind.”⁵¹ Although Strier’s assertion—made in the context of a discussion on early modern embodiment—is, I believe, fundamentally true, it is perhaps slightly too strong, since the critics associated with this school of thought provide arguments for the ways that discourses designed to explain phenomena *can* illuminate lived experience. For example, Michael Schoenfeldt’s *Bodies and Selves*, one of the foundational books for this style of criticism, argues that Galenic physiology provided a “near-poetic vocabulary of felt corporeal experience” through accounts that “describe not so much the actual workings of the body as the experience of the body.”⁵² Although theories about bodily operations “vary enormously across time and culture,” the “explanations made available” by Galenic physiology nevertheless are based upon a “cogent experiential basis and [a] profoundly sentient terminology.”⁵³ In other words, the language inherited from Galen’s writings is attuned to the pitch of lived experience. Yet despite the rich and at times concrete vocabulary that connects, say, the feeling of being angry with a humoral quality like heat, Strier’s point holds true. Just as I never directly experience a hormonal imbalance (although I may explain my mood or behaviour by means of such an imbalance), so no early modern ever directly experienced an overabundance of bile or a rush of animal spirits through the veins (despite the fact that these principles may have explained aspects of everyday life).

What, then, is the nature of the relationship between experience and explanation? In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James provides a model for thinking through this relationship. He separates “core experiences”—“the recesses of feeling, the darker, blinder strata of character [where] we catch real fact in the making and directly perceive how events happen”—from what he calls “over-beliefs,” narratives or theories that people weave around a more basic experience.⁵⁴ In James’s view, one takes what one feels and then interprets that feeling in light of available cultural resources. Yet, as Matthew Ratcliffe contends, “contingent conceptual systems shape the ways in which we

⁵¹ Strier, “Two Responses,” 17.

⁵² Schoenfeldt, 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁴ James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 501-02.

experience things, rather than just being laid *on top* of pre-given experiences.” Put more strongly, “over-beliefs are not optional add-ons to an experience comprised of pre-conceptual feeling.”⁵⁵ Historically contingent explanatory schemes inflect experience and shade how we feel and think: my experience of watching the sun rise cannot be disentangled from my knowledge of the earth’s rotation, and this makes my view of the sun’s movement quite different from someone with no knowledge of the heliocentric cosmos. Given this intertwining of experience and culturally-specific explanatory schemes, it is undoubtedly the case that Galenic physiology and other systems were imbricated in the tissue of early modern lived experience.

I build on this point, which quietly underpins nearly all work in historical phenomenology, by arguing that early modern people did not experience the world solely in terms of these systems. Explanatory schemes may color experience but they certainly do not exhaust the richness of one’s perceptual and affective engagements. Although the critic cannot simply disregard patterns of explanation (as if James’s over-beliefs could be peeled away to reveal the pure pre-conceptual feeling beneath), he or she can select historical evidence that better captures the complexity of life as it is lived. In this dissertation, I focus on textual moments that express experience. I avoid those moments that seek to explain experience or that rely overtly on explanatory categories in order to express it. For example, in the first chapter I argue that Adam’s account of his awakening in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*—“As new waked from soundest sleep / Soft on the flowery herb I found me laid / In balmy sweat”⁵⁶—provides a window into the richness of historical experience that is far more suggestive than the explanatory language of faculty psychology that Adam uses to diagnose the cause of Eve’s dream:

But know that in the soul
Are many lesser Faculties that serve
Reason as chief; among these Fancies next
Her office holds; of all external things,

⁵⁵ Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being*, 275.

⁵⁶ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 8.253-55. All subsequent citations are presented parenthetically.

Which the five watchful Senses represent,
 She forms Imaginations, Aerie shapes,
 Which Reason joyning or disjoyning, frames
 All that we affirm or what deny, and call
 Our knowledge or opinion; then retires
 Into her private Cell when Nature rests. (5.100-09)

Although Milton's invocation of the relationship between reason, fancy, and sleep may tell us something about how he understood the workings of the mind, it says very little about how he and his contemporaries may have experienced themselves and the world. I argue that first-person expressions of experience provide more nuanced and complete ways of accessing lived experience in early modernity. Adam's account of his awakening sheds light on early modern sentience in a way that avoids such explanatory doctrines as the common sense, the humors, animal spirits, vital heat, and other similar concepts. Through Adam's story, Milton attempts to express what it feels like to be alive.

In expressing sentience, Milton and the other authors I study in this dissertation invite their readers to test the experiences described in their texts with the feeling of their own lives. By providing a reported or imagined account of felt vitality, they perform the function that Victor Shklovsky famously ascribes to the work of art, which exists, he claims, so "that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things."⁵⁷ Taking Shklovsky's observation a step further, I suggest that the texts upon which I focus aim not only to allow their readers to "recover the sensation of life," but also work to provide a language through which the feeling of being alive can be apprehended, described, and brought into the focus of thought and attention. To adopt the terms established by Anthony J. Steinbock in his work on the mystical tradition, the writers I study "provide a point of access for phenomenological description."⁵⁸ As Steinbock contends, the "phenomenological effort in description is not only 'to describe faithfully' but to attempt to *evoke* the phenomena in such a way that others might more easily

⁵⁷ Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," 12.

⁵⁸ Steinbock, *Phenomenology and Mysticism*, 32.

see/experience for themselves (with no guarantee that they will), or to read or hear the descriptions so that we might ‘see’/‘experience’ for ourselves (with no guarantee that we will).”⁵⁹ In this study, I seek to unpack the expressive efforts of Montaigne, Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton as they evoke the phenomenon of sentience in their readers, and I do so in the hope that my own hermeneutical work will, in turn, evoke the experience of sentience in my readers. My dissertation focuses not on the writer or the character who is expressing sentience, but rather on the experience itself. I build on the practice of historical phenomenology, which seeks to understand how people in the past may have experienced the world differently, but I extend and reorient its methodologies. I read the traces of the past *as* phenomenological evidence that sheds light on possible variations of sentience by framing it in terms foreign to current cognitive scientists and philosophers.

The writers upon which I focus employ two major strategies in order to express sentience.⁶⁰ First, when diction fails, they turn to grammar; they experiment with syntactical modes of expression. For instance, I argue that Shakespeare manipulates pronouns and the infinitive mood so as to wrench sentience into language. Likewise, Donne uses the modal auxiliaries *can* and *cannot* in creative ways to express the intransitive feeling that accompanies all action but nevertheless resists verbalization. In focusing on grammatical usage, I participate in a recent turn towards grammar in early modern studies.⁶¹ New studies of grammar in the period show how linguistic categories were engrained in cultural habits, a move that follows Brian Cummings’s brilliant demonstration that the cultures of early modernity were thoroughly grammatical—that cross-linguistic investigations into and comparisons across grammars infused the theology, philosophy, and literature of the Reformation.⁶² Lynne Magnusson notes that

⁵⁹ Ibid., 34.

⁶⁰ In examining verbal strategies for expressing sentience as opposed to focusing on the vocabulary or diction associated with vital feeling, I adopt a different approach from earlier studies that sought to show how early modern English registered the nuances of first-person experience. See, for example, Ferry, *The ‘Inward’ Language*.

⁶¹ See, for example, Percival, *Studies in Renaissance Grammar*. Attention to grammar in early modern England is often coupled with a focus on pedagogy and grammar-school education. See, for instance, Enterline, *Shakespeare’s Schoolroom*; and Wallace, *Virgil’s Schoolboys*.

⁶² Cummings, *Literary Culture of the Reformation*.

the “relation between grammar and early modern drama is overdue for renewed analysis.”⁶³ My dissertation follows this suggestion and applies it to drama, poetry, and prose, but it also follows a specific critical agenda and shows how grammatical categories were implicated in the expression of lived experience and were used to render opaque forms of feeling discernible. I advocate an oblique approach to writing the history of human experience. The study of grammatical usage can, I claim, generate insights into the history of lived experience that differ in significant ways from the direct study of subjectivity, inwardness, embodiment, the senses, or the emotions.

In addition to grammatical experimentation, the writers I study also express the feeling of being alive by taking up pre-established discourses and using them for their own purposes. Although, in the course of this dissertation, we will see conceptual structures from philosophy, scientific inquiry, and the law wrenched from their original contexts into the sphere of vital feeling, the discourse upon which Montaigne, Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton most consistently draw is theology.⁶⁴ They take structures of thought and animate them from within. For example, Donne adopts the notion of *conatus* or effort developed by Augustine, defended by Erasmus, and critiqued by Luther. Donne shows how *conatus* operates not as a theological concept but as a vital aspect of everyday experience made glaringly manifest through encounters with illness. The figure of Augustine looms large in this project, and each of the chapters deals in some way with his reception in early modernity. The centrality of Augustine to my project should not be surprising, especially given his historical importance as one of the major voices shaping Western notions of selfhood.⁶⁵ What is surprising is the degree to which the writers studied here change, modify, and rewrite both Augustine’s descriptions of the self and the theology that surrounds these descriptions.⁶⁶ Although Augustine is famous for his accounts of inner experience, his discussions of sentience do not capture the valences of

⁶³ Magnusson, “A Play of Modals,” 69.

⁶⁴ For the relationship between theology and literary expressions of inwardness, see Maus, *Inwardness and Theater*.

⁶⁵ The secondary literature on Augustine and selfhood is voluminous. For a pithy treatment of the important issues, see Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self*.

⁶⁶ On the wider context of Augustinian appropriation, see Stock, *After Augustine*.

vital feeling that Montaigne, Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton seek to express. They adopt Augustine's treatments of the *cogito*, death, ecstasy, and the will, among others, but change each of these topoi in radical ways, sometimes rendering the bishop's transcendent structures of thought completely immanent and sometimes finding new experiential valences in seemingly objective theological gestures. Making something new out of pre-existing discursive structures, the writers I study created a linguistic space adequate to the expression of sentience.

Organizational Principles

The five chapters of this dissertation are not organized according to the usual principle of historical progression. Instead, they are presented according to an analogy with the life cycle, moving from birth, through several confrontations with illness, mortality, and death, to rebirth or resurrection. My first chapter explores how, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton imagines the birth of human awareness in Adam's account of his awakening. Placing Adam's story within a tradition exemplified by Augustine and Descartes, I demonstrate how Milton draws on and rewrites his sources in order to lend sentience a human voice. In the feeling of being alive Milton finds a phenomenon that exceeds and provides the conditions for the *cogito*. The second chapter treats Montaigne's near-death experience in "De l'exercitation." Arguing that this essay marks a watershed in the history of expressing sentience, I show how Montaigne introduces a notion of sentient immanence into a primarily transcendent discursive heritage. In the third chapter, I turn to *Measure for Measure* and explore how Shakespeare encodes the relationship between vital feeling and mortality through his use of the infinitive. Tying Elizabethan grammar school training to the soliloquy as a philosophical genre, the chapter contends that Shakespeare uses the resources of the law to pry the felt presence of life free from the specific forms—monk, nun, sovereign, and so on—into which that life is molded. The fourth chapter studies Donne's *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, which give an account of how it feels to suffer illness. I argue that when Donne's everyday abilities have been stripped away by sickness, he discovers an awareness of his own life. Encoding this vitality in patterns of modal verbs, Donne establishes a connection between being alive and an irreducible sense of effort. The fifth chapter explores how one interacts with the

sentience of other creatures by analyzing *The Winter's Tale*, a play in which a group of characters are forced to recognize life where they least expect to find it, in the long-dead Hermione's statue. My attention to Shakespeare's grammar shows how the recognition of life is encoded in the minutia of language. Shakespeare uses subtle variations in animate and inanimate pronouns (*it, she, her*) and other devices to suggest that the recognition of the statue's fantastically recovered life precedes the explicit interpretation of such vital signs as breath, pulse, color, and warmth.

As the dissertation moves through this analogical life cycle, each chapter focuses on a different threshold experience: Adam's sudden emergence out of non-existence and into life, Montaigne's brush with a state of suspended animation, Claudio's confrontation with his own quickly approaching death, Donne's sickbed paralysis, and Hermione's return to the living either from stone or prolonged hibernation. By arranging the dissertation in this thematic manner, I am able to focus on the specific and unique valences of each authors' account of sentience. Milton uses the figure of Adam in order to think sentient life in a pure sense detached from any dialectic relationship with death. Montaigne's account of sentience reveals the impersonal aspects of this phenomenon, how it lies before and beyond any individual self while simultaneously being deeply entangled with questions of personhood. In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare expresses sentience as a feeling that is deeply invested in futurity and possibility. Donne finds in the feeling of being alive a sense of effort that persists even when all other bodily capacities have withered and atrophied. And Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* expresses the conditions of possibility for discovering the presence of sentient life in others. Despite the ahistorical arrangement of the chapters, I nevertheless pursue an historical and philological argument, which acts as a counterpoint to the large philosophical questions that motivate the dissertation's explicit organization. The chapter on Montaigne opens up historical questions of immanence, transcendence, and secularity that form one of my central arguments. By focusing on how each of these texts oscillates between the immanent and the transcendent, the secular and the theological, I examine how sentience became a site of cultural contestation and discovery in early modernity. When expressing how it feels to be alive, Milton, Shakespeare, and Donne needed to position themselves

vis-à-vis these polarities. By unpacking the complex negotiations at play in each of these depictions of sentience, I ground a phenomenologically-inflected examination of existential issues in careful analysis of the historical contingencies that necessarily provide the context of significance within which even the most transhistorical of phenomena must be understood.

Chapter 1

Adamic Awakening and the Expression of Sentience

Alone in Eden, Adam invites speculation. Naked, newly created, and without precedent, he encourages numerous traditions to imagine the human condition in its purity, stripped of historical and social contingencies. He acts as a cultural myth that enables the erasure of culture. Adam occupies a privileged position in the writings of pre-modern philosophers, scientists, poets, and playwrights.¹ Modern thinkers have inherited this legacy by continuing to take Adam as an exemplary figure in their work. To take one example, in 1910, the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset composed an essay entitled “Adam in Paradise,” in which he employs Adam to express the essence of the human condition: “Adam in paradise is life, pure and simple.”² For Ortega, Adam opens a general philosophy of life based on a living body’s encounter with an unfamiliar world. Adam allows Ortega to develop an account of life as it is experienced naively, in a state that is “pure and simple,” free from the sediment of scientific explanation. To understand life as it is lived, Ortega imagines Adam. The inspiration for his project may have derived from *Paradise Lost*, an epic poem in which John Milton imagines Adam by coming to an understanding of life. In his attempt to inhabit and express Adam’s experience, Milton articulates the basic structures of human vitality.

Engaged in a prolonged discussion with the angel Raphael, Adam relates his “story” (8.205), a first-person narrative describing how he awoke, explored his environment, met God, and participated in the creation of Eve. Michael Lieb contends that to “engage

¹ For general overviews of Adam in early modern Europe, see Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought*; and Crowther, *Adam and Eve in the Protestant Reformation*. For the role that conceptions of Adam played in early modern philosophy and the development of science, see Webster, *The Great Instauration*, 465-83; Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science*, 205-49; and Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*. For a focused study on Leibniz’s notion of Adam as “concept,” see Mates, *The Philosophy of Leibniz*, 138-46. For how Adam’s presence in early modern natural philosophy interacted with literary production, see Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England*. See also Arikha, “Adam’s Spectacles.”

² Ortega y Gasset, “Adán en el Paraíso,” 480: “Adán en el Paraíso es la pura y simple vida.” For Ortega’s use of Adam, see Graham, *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Life*, 113-20; and Gonzalez, “Biographical Life and Ratio-Vitalism.”

Adam's account, his story, is to involve oneself in the phenomenon of personal experience, the narrative of selfhood 'writ large.' It is to turn inward toward self and to experience with the teller the intimate details of his life."³ Milton extends to his readers an invitation to participate in the original moments of human existence. This invitation is implicit in the opening line of Adam's story: "For man to tell how human life began / Is hard" (8.250). The subject of this narrative is the beginnings of "human life," a topic simultaneously personal and general. Adam's story applies to his individual experience of vitality and to the shared future of humanity as a species. In describing how "human life began," Milton enters into Edenic experience and encourages his readers to grasp their own lives anew by seeing through Adam's eyes and feeling through his skin. I argue that at the center of Adam's account is a basic awareness of life, a feeling of being alive that forms the background for his encounters with both himself and the world around him. As Daniel Heller-Roazen has recently demonstrated, waking from sleep is a privileged experience from which to observe and gain access to a pre-personal sense of existence that is normally hidden behind the alertness of fully awakened attention.⁴ In the words of Paul Valéry, "One should not say *I wake* ... but There is waking [*Il y a éveil*le]—for the *I* is the result."⁵ Valéry uses an impersonal construction to emphasize how sometimes at the moment of awakening one cannot yet clearly differentiate between subject and object. Such moments present themselves simply as a happening or felt occurrence. I follow Evan Thompson's lead, and suggest that this pre-reflective happening expresses the feeling of being alive.⁶ It is this feeling that Milton's Adam experiences when he awakens into human awareness. Despite Milton's historical distance, he was responding to issues similar to those that motivate those philosophers and scientists currently working on sentience. An important component of the present-day exploration of vital feeling is an attempt to overcome the residual influence of Descartes that still lurks behind problems related to the mind-body split.⁷ Thinkers are turning to what Hans Jonas calls the "living middle"—the zone of affective life that

³ Lieb, "Adam's Story," 22.

⁴ Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch*, 73-77.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶ Thompson, *Waking, Dreaming, Being*, 299-304.

⁷ The most expansive and influential recent treatment is Thompson, *Mind in Life*.

connects rational thought and bodily being, *cogito* and *sum*—in order to surpass the legacies of Cartesian dualism.⁸ As Stephen Fallon has shown, Milton’s poetry is highly invested in the notion of life, and this investment is in part a response to Descartes’s dualist metaphysics.⁹ I submit that Milton’s description of Adamic awakening in *Paradise Lost* turns to the feeling of being alive for the same reason that motivates current thinkers: to cultivate an understanding of human life that responds to reductionist accounts by attempting to grasp that life in its complexity, as it is actually experienced.

Although Milton’s Adam cannot know “himself beginning,” he nonetheless emerges into the world equipped with the capacities for physical movement, personal reflection, analytic thinking, and linguistic expression. Unlike human infancy, the “beginning” Adam describes is possessed of an immediately clear awareness. He apprehends his nature without cultural or historical mediation, without the slow growth of biological development. Since he has not developed habits of attention that privilege certain elements of his experience over others, he notices and describes the felt aliveness that supports and lies behind all other activities. In this chapter, I attend closely to the verbal strategies Adam employs in his story. I argue that Adamic awakening discloses the feeling of being alive. To throw the content of Milton’s account into relief, I compare it to John Dryden’s appropriation of the same speech in *State of Innocence*, an operative retelling of *Paradise Lost*. If Dryden’s Adam seeks to know his being, Milton’s is more interested in feeling his life. In order to isolate the meaning of these four terms, I examine the relationship between being and life in the Genesis tradition—the patristic and early modern biblical commentaries, hexameral epic poetry, and drama that Milton inherited.¹⁰ Adam’s focus on sentience in *Paradise Lost* draws on and plays off these contexts, but also negotiates with a tradition of philosophical exercise exemplified by Augustine and Descartes. Positioning Adam’s account of awakening against the exercises propounded by these thinkers and their relationship to the Delphic injunction—“know thyself”—I further investigate a historical understanding of feeling that is central

⁸ Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 22.

⁹ Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers*. For Milton’s vitalism, see Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution*.

¹⁰ I take the phrase “Genesis tradition” from Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*.

to Miltonic sentience. I then turn to the corporate identity implicit in the figure of Adam. It was common for early modern writers to claim, with Thomas Browne, that Adam “yet lives in me.”¹¹ Connecting this sense of corporate identity with Milton’s depiction of Adamic awakening, I argue that Adam’s speech is phenomenological, an attempt to awaken readers to their own felt experience of sentience. I conclude by demonstrating how Milton’s effort to think Adam’s sense of vitality prefigures and lays down the conditions of possibility for current attempts to develop a phenomenology of life.

What Happens When Adam Wakes Up?

Milton’s Adam begins his story with a caveat: “For man to tell how human life began / Is hard; for who his own beginning knew?” (8.250-51). With this rhetorical question, he links “human life” to the limits of self-knowledge. Adam differentiates his personal perspective from all others; his account must be rooted in *his* life. Earlier in the text, Raphael describes Adam’s creation in language taken from a mixture of Genesis 1:26 and 2:7: “[God] formed thee, Adam, thee O man / Dust of the ground, and in thy nostrils breathed / The breath of life; in his own image he / Created thee, in the image of God / Express, and thou becam’st a living soul” (7.524-28).¹² Raphael explains how “human life began,” providing Adam with a reliable version of events. The reliability of the angel’s account stems from his authority, not from his status as an eyewitness, since he was “absent” on the day Adam was created (8.229). Adam follows Raphael’s narrative insofar as he highlights what the angel flags as extraordinary—the fact that, once infused into a body, the “breath of life” creates a “living soul.” At the same time, Adam differentiates himself by relying on his own memory: “Thee I have heard relating what was done / Ere my remembrance: now hear me relate / My story, which perhaps thou hast not heard” (8.203-05). Yet despite his desire to give a personal account of his origins, Adam cannot know his “beginnings.” His description of lived experience

¹¹ Browne, *Religio medici*, 86.

¹² Raphael harmonizes Genesis 1:26—“Let us make man in our image”—with 2:7—“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” For the issues behind Milton’s treatment of scripture, see Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*, 9-25. For the harmonization of Genesis, see Nyquist, “The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity,” 102; and Williams, *The Common Expositor*, 67.

supplements Raphael's external observations, but cannot replace them. The two narratives are necessarily complementary.¹³

The opacity of origins is a theme repeated throughout *Paradise Lost*, most notably when Satan argues against Abdiel: "who saw / when this creation was? rememb'rest thou / Thy making, while the maker gave thee being? / We know no time when we were not as now; Know none before us, self-begot, self-raised / By our own quickening power" (5.856-61). While Satan uses this inability to know in order to claim a lack of dependence, Adam's description of his inability to attain complete self-knowledge recognizes the state of dependence into which he has emerged. In this way, Adam's story conforms, as Barbara Lewalski argues, to the generic "prototype" provided by Augustine's *Confessions*.¹⁴ In fact, Augustine articulates the precise nature of Adam's problem:

What, Lord, do I wish to say except that I do not know whence I came to be in this mortal life or, as I may call it, this living death? I do not know where I came from. But the consolations of your mercies upheld me, as I have heard from the parents of my flesh, him from whom and her in whom you formed me in time. For I do not remember.¹⁵

Augustine knows he emerged into earthly life, but he does not know from where he came. Others have told him about his time in the womb, his birth, and how God sustained his infancy, but he cannot personally remember these events.¹⁶ Like Adam, Augustine knows of his birth only through a narrative produced by witnesses; he knows he smiled

¹³ Charles Munroe Coffin suggests that the abbreviated nature of Raphael's account simply "makes room" for Adam's extended account. "Creation and the Self," 5. I contend that no Raphael's account, no matter how full, could never remove the "room" necessitated by Adam's subject position.

¹⁴ Lewalski, *Paradise Lost and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms*, 211. See also Lieb, "Adam's Story," 23-24. For an argument that Adam's "spiritual autobiography" stems from Milton's exposure to the Arabic mystical-philosophical tale *Hayy bin Yaqzan*, see Sid-Ahmad, "Ibn Tufayl's Hayy and Milton's Adam."

¹⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Chadwick, 1.6.7. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent English quotations of *Confessions* are from the Chadwick translation. All references to the original Latin of Augustine's works are to Migne, ed., *Patrologia Cursus Completus*.

¹⁶ This observation is repeated throughout Western literature. For example, Marcel Proust writes: "Those years of my earliest childhood are no longer a part of myself; they are external to me; I can learn nothing of them save—as we learn things that happened before we were born—from the accounts given me by other people." *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 3, 6. For a philosophical treatment of this inability to remember, see Leder, *The Absent Body*, 59-62.

as an infant because that is what he was “told.”¹⁷ If “human life” begins as an opaque blur that cannot be known from within, then Adam’s earliest experiences differ from his descendants by degree, not in kind. It was only “little by little” that Augustine “began to be aware” [*paulatim sentiebam*] of where he was.¹⁸ There is no such process of acclimatization for Adam—his birth is coterminous with maturity, his awareness immediate—but, as his rhetorical question implies, he nevertheless cannot know “himself beginning.” No one can “tell how human life began” because no one can acquire first hand knowledge of their own beginnings. At the same time, Adam’s urge to tell his story from the moment he first remembers insists that self-knowledge depends on a personal understanding of one’s origins. It is not enough to have heard from others about one’s creation.

Human self-knowledge is therefore necessarily incomplete, built on the inability of memory to probe deeper into the moment when “human life began.” Adam registers the opacity of origins by beginning his account with a truncated simile:

As new waked from soundest sleep
Soft on the flowery herb I found me laid
In balmy sweat, which with his beams the sun
Soon dried, and on the reeking moisture fed.
Straight toward heav’n my wondering eyes I turned,
And gazed awhile the ample sky, till raised
By quick instinctive motion up I sprung,
As thitherward endeavoring, and upright
Stood on my feet. (8.253-61)

Adam likens his emergence into life to the everyday activity of waking, but also registers a profound difference between the two. Coupled with the superlative *soundest*, the preposition *as* conjures an unnamable state that can be likened to but also outstrips the deepest possible sleep. Adam compares waking from “soundest” sleep to finding himself

¹⁷ *Confessions* 1.6.8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

“laid” on the “flowery herb,” but the syntactical position of *as* simultaneously links sleep to the state of non-awareness that makes it impossible to know one’s beginning. Adam’s *as* distinguishes his description from Eve’s parallel account of her original awakening:

That day I oft remember, when from sleep
I first awaked, and found my self reposed
Under a shade of flowers, much wondering where
And what I was, whence thither brought, and how.
Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound
Of waters issued from a cave and spread
Into a liquid plain, then stood unmoved
Pure as the expanse of heaven; I thither went
With unexperienc’t thought, and laid me down
On the green bank, to look into the clear
Smooth lake, that to me seemed another sky. (4.449-59)

Eve’s claim that she awakens “from sleep”—a statement that may be read as literal or metaphorical—differs from Adam’s use of simile to suggest that he awakens from a state akin to but different from sleep. Susannah Mintz argues that Adam’s simile suggests he cannot “capture an experience on its own terms nor follow Eve’s more transformative impulse.”¹⁹ I contend that Adam is simply attending to the opacity of origins, and that the subtly different styles of description employed in these passages need not imply gender-based judgments.²⁰ Eve’s identification of sleep with primordial awakening directly expresses how her experience felt. Adam’s simile combines this attention to felt experience with a descriptive exactitude that registers differences between categories of experience. By varying these two accounts in slight but significant ways, Milton asks readers to consider the rhetorical strategies available for the description of pre-reflective experience. If there are two ways of describing the experience of Edenic awakening, what is the relationship between language and experience such that this variation is

¹⁹ Mintz, *Threshold Poetics*, 54.

²⁰ For discussions of the gender dynamics implicit in these accounts, see Assmann, “Engendering Dreams”; Lieb, “Adam’s Story”; MacCallum, *Milton and the Sons of God*, 131-38; Mintz, *Threshold Poetics* 33-67; and Nyquist, “The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity.”

possible? That both Adam and Eve relate events prior to the utterance or hearing of speech only heightens the stakes of Milton's rhetorical choices. Both Edenic stories posit a mythic pre-linguistic moment that is itself encoded in language.

Milton conveys the feeling of Edenic awakening through a formulation shared by both Adam and Eve. The former describes his entrance into awareness reflexively: "Soft on the flowery herb I found me laid" (8.254). The latter recalls her experience in similar terms: "I first awaked, and found my self reposed / Under a shade of flowers" (4.450-51). There are important differences between these descriptions, most notably the gendered implications of Adam waking in sunlight and Eve in shade. However, Milton's repetition of the verb *find* in each account suggests a shared human experience upon which the dynamics of sexual difference are subsequently built. Adam's "I found me laid" encodes the strangeness of an unprecedented opening onto self-awareness. Adam-as-subject finds Adam-as-object passively "laid" on the ground; the me is both "found" by the I and "laid" by something other than the I. Eve uses a nearly identical formulation to slightly different effect. When she claims "[I] found my self reposed," the self-assured leisure of "reposed" plays off the recognition of belatedness implicit in Adam's "laid" in much the same way that Eve's reflexive "my self" softens her partner's use of the accusative object "me." Yet despite these differences, both speakers claim that they "found" themselves. What sort of reflexivity is implied here? What does it mean to find oneself? The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines this formulation as "to perceive oneself to be in a specified place or position, or condition of body or mind."²¹ True enough: Adam and Eve "find" their bodies lying on or beneath flowers. Yet how does this finding take place? What sort of perception is involved? I suggest that to find oneself means to feel oneself, an assertion born out by the fact that "find" can mean to "suffer," to "feel," or to "perceive."²² This connection is supported by the shared sense of the expressions "to find one's feet" or "to feel one's feet," two early modern formulations that mean to be

²¹ *OED, find*, v. I 5c.

²² *OED, find*, v. I 7a-c.

“conscious of one’s powers.”²³ *Find* traces its ancestry back through Old English to disparate variations of Old German, and the same productive ambiguities are at work in the German verb. For example, in *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger claims that the human being “finds itself” [*es befindet sich*] in what it does.²⁴ For Heidegger, the “primary orientation” of human being is “not a *knowing*, but a *finding oneself*.”²⁵ Thrown into a world, one finds oneself like Adam, caught up in a pre-existing situation. One orients or attunes oneself to this situation by means of what Heidegger calls *Befindlichkeit*, a word literally translated as “the feeling in which one finds oneself.”²⁶ Heidegger capitalizes on the linguistic richness of *find* to express how it is through feeling that one finds oneself in a world. Employing a similar strategy, Milton depicts Adam and Eve finding themselves by feeling their lives.

A common critical position asserts that the first thing Adam does upon awakening is stare in wonder at the heavens. Usually pairing this direct and ostensibly immediate vision of light—“Straight toward heaven my wondering eyes I turned”—with Eve’s mediated and more earthly encounter with a “lake” that “seemed another sky,” critics tend to see Adam’s awakening as a direct and masculine movement into rationality.²⁷ Implicitly continuing a tradition of biblical commentary begun in the first century CE by Philo Judaeus, these critics depict Milton’s Adam as a figure of reason and Milton’s Eve

²³ *OED*, *find*, v. I 4; *feel*, v. II 6d.

²⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 55. The German is taken from *Sein und Zeit*, 119.

²⁵ Kiesel, *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time*, 300. Kiesel is quoting from a course on Aristotle Heidegger delivered in the summer semester of 1924.

²⁶ The term *Befindlichkeit* is used in Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 172. I take this very exact translation from Smith, *The Hermeneutics of Original Argument*, 18. The term is notoriously difficult to translate into English, and is rendered as variously as “state of mind,” “attunement,” “affectedness,” and “primordial affection.” For a recent summary of the problems it presents to translators, see Ratcliffe, *Feelings of Being*, 47.

²⁷ Coffin claims that Adam’s “first gesture,” which he interprets as eyes opened heavenwards and an upward leap, “signals a rapport with heaven.” “Creation and the Self,” 5-6. Froula presents an influential version of this claim. Her argument is summarized in her claim that Adam “leap[s] upright to apostrophize a transcendent sky while Eve, supine, gazes into a ‘sky’ that is to Adam’s as her knowledge is to his.” “When Eve Reads Milton,” 330. Froula’s argument draws on Quilligan, *Milton’s Spenser*, 227-28. Lieb likewise contends that Adam springs up “immediately” and that he “immediately” beholds the sun. “Adam’s Story,” 25, 30.

as a figure of sensuality.²⁸ Yet despite the fact that Adam claims his “wondering eyes” turned “Straight toward heaven,” the first few lines of his account are inscribed not in the rational vocabulary of sight, but in the sensual register of touch.²⁹ Adam prioritizes feeling both sequentially and thematically: “Soft on the flowery herb I found me laid / In balmy sweat” (8.253-55). Milton prefigures the doubleness of a reflexive awareness that finds itself in an unfamiliar world through the word *soft*, which mediates between self and world by simultaneously describing the tactile quality of the “flowery herb,” the delicate texture of newly created skin, and the loving care with which Adam was “laid” upon the vegetation. *Soft* describes the complexity of the relationship between feeling body and felt world. Later in his story, Adam uses the same word to emphasize the tactile nature of experience: “there gentle sleep / First found me, and with soft oppression seized / My droused sense, untroubled, though I thought / I then was passing to my former state / Insensible” (8.287-91). As waking awareness fades, grammatical agency shifts, and Adam (who had only just “found” himself “laid”) is now “found” by sleep, an event that causes him to feel a “soft oppression.” Milton describes the capacity to register a change from “droused sense” towards a state that seems “Insensible” by using the adjective *soft*—the word with which Adam opens his narrative and that expresses the basic feeling behind waking experience.

Adam is also covered in “balmy sweat,” a liquid that lingers upon the skin through which it emerges. Michael Schoenfeldt claims it is “deeply significant” that “the first thing the first human does, even prior to consciousness, is sweat.”³⁰ Milton’s Adam awakens in sweat, caught up in life processes that precondition the possibility of awareness. This ecstatic embodied structure, where life exceeds the boundaries of awareness, runs

²⁸ For the tradition of commentary that read Adam and Eve allegorically as rational mind and senses, see Harrison, *Fall of Man*, 23-25.

²⁹ For the associations traditionally linked to sight, see Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 21-82. For an examination of the early modern understanding of touch, see Harvey, “The ‘Sense of All Senses’”; and Harvey, “The Portal of Touch.” The Milton critic who best expresses this element of Adam’s story is Hugh MacCallum, who contends that in the beginning of the account, “Tactile, thermal, and olfactory sensations dominate, and bring a fugitive awareness of self that gives way almost at once to wonder as he gazes awhile at the expanse of heaven above him.” *Milton and the Sons of God*, 132.

³⁰ Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves*, 142.

throughout Adam's story. Adam is constantly before, beside, and beyond himself in a manner that mirrors Milton's depiction of the cosmos. The "balmy sweat" merges with Adam's depiction of cosmic interaction as an energetic exchange in which the sun "drie[s]" his skin and feeds on the "moisture" (8.255-56).³¹ The cosmos is engaged in an economy of excess without which consciousness could not exist: the sun's continual gift of light and warmth provides the conditions for life—earlier, Adam explains to Eve that the sun "with kindly heat" supports "life / In nature and all things" (4.666-68)—and life in turn provides the conditions for awareness. The importance of Adam's sweat lies also in its adjacency to flesh. Adam's sweat embeds his body in an ambient environment that makes its presence felt through an accumulation of tactile impressions: the softness of flowers, the dampness of sweat, the warmth of the air, and the power of the sun's "beams" as they dry his skin. Milton's description of Adam's immersion in a felt world places the first man in the primal human situation, in the buzz of lived bodily contact with an immersive environment. That Adam's first encounter with the sun is not primarily a visual affair is in keeping with Milton's treatment of his own blindness, in which he says of the sun: "thee I revisit safe, / And feel thy sovereign vital lamp; but thou / Revisit'st not these eyes" (3.21-23).³² Imagining Adam's experience of the sun, Milton draws on his familiarity with the feeling of beams brushing against flesh.

The membrane of Adam's skin registers layers of external tactile sensations, but it also encloses within its folds a realm of inner affectivity. The early stages of Adam's account trace a dialectical interplay between outer and inner tactility as it negotiates with and exceeds the boundary of the skin.³³ Moving from external sensation to inner affection, Adam recounts how after gazing at the "ample sky" he is "raised / By quick instinctive motion" to stand upon his feet (8.258-59). The word *quick* refers both to the speed of his movement and to life. Stemming from the Old English *cwicu*, which means *alive*, the

³¹ For a detailed examination of the sun in this scene, see Hartman, "Adam on the Grass with Balsamum."

³² Elizabeth D. Harvey makes a similar observation in reference to *Samson Agonistes*: "We are made to *feel* rather than see the difference between sun and shade—a distinction that becomes one of temperature rather than light." "*Samson Agonistes* and Milton's Sensible Ethics," 660.

³³ Hugh MacCallum sees the "rhythm of the episode [as] a characteristic one in which a tendency outward to nature is played off against an inward, self-oriented movement." *Milton and the Sons of God*, 133.

English *quick* brings together the concept of motion with vital, spontaneous movement.³⁴ The spontaneity at work here is registered by Milton's use of *instinctive*. Early modern English lexicographers associated *instinct* with an "inward motion, or stirring."³⁵ In his 1695 commentary on *Paradise Lost*, Patrick Hume similarly glosses "quick instinctive motion" by recalling the Latin *instinctus*, which he translates as "a natural Perswasion, and inward Motion."³⁶ *Instinctus* is a participial form of the Latin *instinguo*, which means to prick or urge. The word was used in antiquity to denote both poetic inspiration and the libidinal power of sexuality; it only became associated with the innate responses of animals in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, who claims that the sheep flees the wolf by means of an *instinctus naturale*.³⁷ In *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas also claims that human beings apprehend the need to worship God by means of a similarly innate "divine instinct" [*instinctu divino*] that induces [*inducerentur*] them heavenwards like a "private law."³⁸ Although Adam's "instinctive" movement upwards draws on Aquinas's notion of an inborn need to worship, it also resonates with the numerous accounts of instinct produced by natural philosophers during Milton's lifetime.³⁹ For my purposes, it suffices to note that all accounts agree that instincts are affective and given to experience through feeling. Adam's "quick instinctive motion" is a bodily activity that manifests the stirring of life he cannot help but feel.

On his feet, Adam surveys his surroundings. His account moves from a visual description of his environment and an expression of how it feels to observe such beauty, through an exploration of his own body and its motility, to a declaration of his ignorance about his

³⁴ *OED*, *quick*, adj., n.1, and adv. I owe this etymological connection to Harvey, "Feeling to the Quick."

³⁵ Cawdrey, *A Table Alphabetical*, *instinct*.

³⁶ Hume, *Annotations on Milton's Paradise Lost*, 234.

³⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.83.1. In English, the sentence reads: "For the sheep, seeing the wolf, judges it a thing to be shunned, from a natural and not a free judgment, because it judges, not from reason, but from natural instinct." On the history of the term *instinct*, see Diamond, "Gestation of the Instinct Concept."

³⁸ I-II q.103.1. Translation modified. For Aquinas's notion of human "natural inclination" as it relates to the good, see I-II q.94.2. In his commentary on Galatians, Aquinas claims that grace is capable of working through an *instinctum interiorum* (1.4) and that humans are drawn to God by *naturali instinctu* (2.4). *Opera Omnia*, vol. 13.

³⁹ On seventeenth-century discourses on instinct, see Wild, "Marin Cureau de la Chambre on the Natural Cognition of the Vegetative Soul." For the connection between Adam's prelapsarian knowledge and instinct, see Harrison, *Fall of Man*, 155-56.

nature and whereabouts. He then speaks for the first time, reasons that he must be created by a superior being, and asks the living world around him if it can relate how he came to be there in its midst:

about me round I saw
 Hill, dale, and shady woods, and sunny plains,
 And liquid lapse of murmuring streams; by these,
 Creatures that lived, and moved, and walked, or flew,
 Birds on the branches warbling; all things smiled,
 With fragrance and with joy my heart overflowed.
 My self I then perused, and limb by limb
 Surveyed, and sometimes went, and sometimes ran
 With supple joints, and lively vigour led:
 But who I was, or where, or from what cause,
 Knew not; to speak I tried, and forthwith spake,
 My tongue obeyed and readily could name
 What ere I saw. Thou sun, said I, faire light,
 And thou enlightened Earth, so fresh and gay,
 Ye hills and dales, ye rivers, woods, and plains,
 And ye that live and move, fair creatures, tell,
 Tell, if ye saw, how came I thus, how here?
 Not of myself; by some great maker then,
 In goodness and in power preeminent;
 Tell me, how may I know him, how adore,
 From who I have that thus I move and live,
 And feel that I am happier than I know. (8.261-82)

In this passage, Milton explores three aspects of lived experience: first, the overlapping of life and movement; second, the way life processes exceed conscious awareness; and third, the way feeling intertwines a living body with sensory apprehension of the world, affective awareness, and the production of knowledge.

Adam's account pays particular attention to the entities that most resemble himself, those

“Creatures that lived, and moved” (8.264). Human life seeks out life, and marks entities as living by noting spontaneous movement.⁴⁰ Adam sees his own “quick instinctive motion” reflected in other creatures. This mirroring of Adam’s life and that of other animals is solidified in his first speech act, when he inquires of the “fair creatures” that “live and move” if they can tell him “From whom I have that thus I move and live” (8.276-81). The chiasmic arrangement of life and movement in this passage stresses the kinship that links Adam to the other creatures. The pairing of living and moving also gestures towards a variety of traditions. Most notably, Genesis conflates movement and life, describing the “moving creature that hath life” and “every living creature that moveth.”⁴¹ From Aristotle’s *De anima* onwards, it was commonplace to claim that the identifying feature of life—the property that allows observers to distinguish the living from the nonliving—is self-movement: the ability of living bodies to perform such processes as digestion, growth, bodily locomotion, sensation, feeling, and thought.⁴² For example, Aquinas claims that in order to “distinguish living from lifeless things,” one must determine the identifying feature of life, that by which “life is manifested first and remains last.” For Aquinas, “an animal begins to live when it begins to move itself.”⁴³ In the intellectual ferment of the seventeenth century, the Aristotelian tradition was overrun, but even those thinkers who undermined the principles of Aristotle’s thought continued to link life and motion. For instance, Thomas Hobbes opens *Leviathan* with a definition of life, claiming that “life is but a motion of the limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principal part within.”⁴⁴ The link between living and moving was indisputable, and Adam recognizes the fundamental property of life both in himself and other creatures.

Moving through his environment, Adam assesses his situation: “all things smiled, / With fragrance and with joy my heart o’erflowed” (8.265-66). Gazing at creation, he feels his

⁴⁰ The necessity of the relationship between the living being that knows and the life that is known is encapsulated in Hans Jonas’s pithy claim: “life can be known only by life.” *The Phenomenon of Life*, 91.

⁴¹ Genesis 1:20-21. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations are taken from the KJV.

⁴² For revisionist discussions of the Aristotelian view of life and its influence, see Garrido, *On Time, Being, and Hunger*; and Thacker, *After Life*, 1-24. See also Polansky, *Aristotle’s De Anima*, 171-87.

⁴³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I q.18.1. For another version of the same argument, see Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I 97.3.

⁴⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 3.

disposition change, and is saturated with the simple “joy” of living in a living world. The near identity between Adam’s emotional response and the world affecting him is registered in Milton’s syntax, which renders Adam’s experience of joy as being one with the “fragrance” of the world that causes that joy. When Adam views things in the world, he feels himself more strongly. In this pre-reflective moment, Adam is caught up in his surroundings, in a mode of engagement prior to any strict separation between subject and object. He then renders this implicit self-awareness explicit and addresses his position as subject: “My self I then perused, and limb by limb / Surveyed” (8.267-68). In a compressed reflexivity that echoes his initial “I found me laid,” Adam attends to himself, surveying the limbs whose movements manifest his life. Yet his attention does not linger in this reflexive mode. In order to know himself, Adam moves: he “sometimes went, and sometimes ran / With supple joints, and lively vigour led” (8.268-69). Adam is “led” by his “lively vigour.” The life that animates his body runs ahead of his intentions. Just as his life processes manifested in sweat prior to his acquisition of self-awareness, so he feels drawn into the world by a life that is within him and yet ecstatically outstrips him.

Adam’s early experiences frequently involve this feeling of self-transcendence, of a life prior to and deeper than his capacity for conscious articulation. These feelings are related to his realization that he “came” to be “Not of [him]self,” but “by some great maker” in “goodness and in power pre-eminent” (8.277-79). Building on his exploration of his body and ability to move, Adam tries to determine “who [he] was, or where, or from what cause,” all of which he “knew not” (8.270-71). He progresses towards an acknowledgement of divinity, but his belief in a “maker” greater than himself is grounded in his experience of lived plenitude. When Adam addresses the sun, earth, and all the creatures that “live and move” in an open question about his origins, he puts into words this transcendent aspect of embodied life: “Tell me, how may I know him, how adore, / From whom I have that thus I move and live, / And feel that I am happier than I know” (8.280-82). The impulse to know and adore a creator is correlated with an embodied feeling that simultaneously grounds happiness and surpasses cognitive comprehension. Here, Milton isolates the feeling of being alive. In this formulation, feeling emerges from moving and living, and then subsequently subtends emotion and

knowledge. One feels happy and one knows that one feels happy, but the feeling that reveals happiness surpasses knowledge precisely because it is experientially prior to and deeper than one's capacity to know. Adam feels life pounding beneath conscious reflection, and recognizes that he is unable to translate that life into knowledge.

Milton explicitly figures knowledge as an inadequate basis for approaching the experience of "human life": Adam feels happier than he knows (8.282); he "Knew not" who or where he was (8.271); and he walks he "knew not whither" in search of answers (8.283). Likewise, Milton depicts self-awareness as prefigured and preconditioned by the vital processes that cause the body to sweat (8.255), to spring up with "quick instinctive motion" (8.259), and to be "led" by "lively vigour" (8.269). Adam's account highlights not the knowledge of self, but the feeling of self. To be sure, Adam desires to know "who" he is and to what "cause" he owes his existence (8.270), but any knowledge he acquires emerges from a prior feeling of life that underpins the desire to know. For Milton, the rational, knowing soul depends on the vegetative and animal souls that pertain to the life of the body.⁴⁵ When Adam awakens, he moves hierarchically through diverse forms of life, from plant through to human.⁴⁶ "Soft on the flowery herb" (8.254), Adam comes into awareness with his skin covered in a dew-like sweat that implicitly allies his still-immobile body with vegetation. His body produces "balmy sweat" (8.254) in the same way that "rich trees wept odorous gums and balm" (4.248). When he stands with "quick instinctive motion," and feels his life, his body, and his surroundings with an innate "lively vigour" (8.259-69), Adam occupies the mobile and sentient zone associated with animal life. Here, Milton follows an ancient definition of the animal as *vivens sentiens* (a living, feeling thing), which he employs in his *Art of Logic*.⁴⁷ His emphasis on the feeling of life in this section corresponds to Adam's animal nature. However, as Milton's predecessor Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas puts it in the

⁴⁵ For a detailed look at early modern conceptions of the vegetative, animal, and rational souls, see Des Chene, *Life's Form*.

⁴⁶ The parallel with Raphael's much-discussed "one first matter all" speech is unmistakable.

⁴⁷ Milton uses this expression in his *Institution of the Art of Logic*: "*animal est corpus sentiens; corpus sentiens est vivens*" (466).

Semaines, Adam has “more soul than to suffice to live.”⁴⁸ In other words, Adam is also endowed with reason, a rational soul that moves beyond animal demands. When Adam first speaks, he ascends into a more rational form of life. Adam’s desire to know “who [he] was” and “from what cause” he came elevates him towards the space of reason reserved for humanity (8.270). Yet as Adam’s description of his awakening makes clear, human reason is underwritten by felt aliveness.

The distinctiveness of Milton’s account is clarified when placed alongside John Dryden’s *State of Innocence*, an opera that appeared ten years after the publication of *Paradise Lost* and transformed its epic source into a drama written in rhymed couplets. Dryden’s libretto simplifies its source.⁴⁹ Nowhere is the freedom Dryden takes more evident than in the speech Adam gives upon awakening. Described by the stage directions as “newly created,” Adam speaks:

What am I? or from whence? For that I am
I know, because I think; but whence I came,
Or how this Frame of mine began to be,
What other Being can disclose to me?
I move, I see; I speak, discourse, and know,
Though now I am, I was not always so.
Then that from which I was, must be before:
Whom, as my Spring of Being, I adore.⁵⁰

Dryden’s speech throws Milton’s Adam into relief. Most obviously, this figure is Cartesian in a way that his predecessor was not. He immediately and intuitively grasps the implications of the *cogito*, ascertaining the epistemic certainty of his being from the fact that he thinks. For both poets, the moment when Adam awakens is an opportunity to examine the fundamental principles and stakes of human self-awareness. Dryden provides a ready-made philosophical answer to these issues, and allows Adam to emerge

⁴⁸ Du Bartas, *Du Bartas, His Divine Weekes and Workes*, 165.

⁴⁹ For the relationship between *Paradise Lost* and *State of Innocence*, see Maltzhan, “Dryden’s Milton”; and Dodds, ““To change in scenes and show it in a play.””

⁵⁰ Dryden, *The State of Innocence and Fall of Man*, 2.1.1-8.

into the rational modernity of the *cogito*. Unlike Milton's Adam, Dryden's never once uses the language of vitality. He adheres strictly to the vocabulary of being, and is concerned with his "I am," with how "this Frame of mine began to be." Assuming that some other "Being" must be able to "disclose" this information to him, he is certain only that he now *is* and that he has not always been. Moving, seeing, speaking, and, most importantly, knowing: all are derivative of and subordinate to being.

These two accounts of Adamic awakening, written less than a decade apart, place human origins in different ontological registers. They separate being from life in order to cultivate divergent understandings of what, at the most fundamental level, it means to be human. Although being and life are famously difficult to pry apart—Aristotle, for instance, claims that "Being, for the living, is life"⁵¹—Milton and Dryden offer up a case study in how favoring one ontological term over the other produces strikingly different anthropologies. Each fundamental category requires an alternative mode of apprehension. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam's version of his beginnings highlights not the *knowledge* of being but the *feeling* of life—what I am calling sentience. "For man to tell how human life began / Is hard" in part because life as it is lived is something one feels, not something one knows. Milton stresses feeling because his focus is *life*. Following Descartes, Dryden stresses knowing because his focus is *being*. These basic words are bundles of overlapping conceptual baggage as well as markers of the most basic elements of human experience.⁵² They are necessarily at the core of any description of the human condition. That Milton stresses life and Dryden being is telling, for these two terms play an important role in Genesis and in the subsequent tradition of commentary and imaginative rewritings upon which both poets draw. To imagine Adamic awakening is, I suggest, to grapple with the relationship between being and life.

⁵¹ Aristotle, *De anima*, 415b13. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Aristotle are taken from *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Barnes. Many centuries later, Friedrich Nietzsche repeated Aristotle's sentiment in similar terms: "Being—we have no other way of imagining it apart from 'living.'" *The Will to Power*, 312.

⁵² On the complex relationship between being and living in Western philosophy, see Thacker, *After Life*; and Franck, "L'Etre et Le Vivant."

Being, Life, and the Genesis Tradition

Knowing and being, feeling and living: taken together, these terms form the building blocks of one of the West's major hierarchical schemes, a steady movement up a scale from being; through life to feeling or sensation; and on to the pinnacle of knowledge, understanding, or intellect.⁵³ Seventeenth-century writers inherited this structure from a number of intellectual traditions. Aristotle's *De anima* delineates three types of soul, each of which is based on being, the modalities of which Aristotle explored in the *Metaphysics* and *Physics*.⁵⁴ The nutritive soul, possessed by plants and responsible for basic life processes, was nested within the sensitive or animal soul capable of perception and passion, which, in turn, supported the cognitive operations of the rational soul.⁵⁵ All three souls figured in human life. An analogous tradition figured humans as the microcosm. For example, William Basse employed the hierarchy to apprehend human greatness in *Helpe to Discourse* (1619): "some creatures *are* onely, as *Starres*; some *are* and *live*, as *Plants*; some *are*, *live*, and have *sense*, as *Beasts*; some *understanding*, as *Angels*: all these concur in man."⁵⁶ This scale was also available to seventeenth-century English writers through Platonism, recently revitalized by Marsilio Ficino and his followers.⁵⁷ Yet the principles of Platonic thought were integral to Christian Europe much earlier, through Augustine, who was steeped in the work of the Neoplatonic philosophers Plotinus and Porphyry.⁵⁸ Succinctly summarizing a position he repeats frequently, Augustine writes in a sermon: "we have existence in common with sticks and stones, life in common with trees, sense in common with beasts, understanding in

⁵³ The classic study remains Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*.

⁵⁴ For the dependence of *De anima* on Aristotle's discussions of being, see Polansky, *Aristotle's De Anima*, 6-26. For early modern commentaries on *De anima*, see Des Chene, *Life's Form*.

⁵⁵ For a detailed description of this model of the soul, see Park, "The Organic Soul." For the early modern reception of Aristotle, see Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance*. For Aquinas's influential rendition of this scheme, see Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, 254-283. The tripartite soul also played an important role in literary production. See, for instance, Arthur Golding's insistence that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* be read as a series of allegories on the Aristotelian soul, in his prefatory letter to the Earl of Leicester. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Golding, ll. 21-62.

⁵⁶ Basse, *A Helpe to Discourse*, 10-11.

⁵⁷ For early modern English Neoplatonism, see Lobsien, *Transparency and Dissimulation*.

⁵⁸ For Augustine and Platonism, see, for example, Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self*, 31-62; and Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 65-75. For Plotinus's hierarchy of states, see Hadot, "Etre, Vie, Pensée chez Plotin et avant Plotin," 28-33.

common with angels.”⁵⁹ The hierarchy of being, life, feeling, and knowing was a foundational element of early modern thought.

Being and life are the preconditions for human awareness. Sensation and intellect are distinct forms of human apprehension. As Milton and Dryden demonstrate, the chain of being is reflexive. Sensation and intellect are capable of turning in on the basic states that subtend their ability to apprehend. In other words, self-awareness is acquired when the hierarchy folds in upon itself. Dryden’s Adam brings the outer limits of the scheme together in order to know his being. Milton’s Adam folds the two middle terms inwards so that he can feel his life. These differing accounts demonstrate how the two seemingly indivisible terms that make up a living being are easily split apart in the reflexive activity of self-conceptualization. In this section, I show how the Genesis tradition introduces and analyses the distinction between being and life that demarcates these two versions of Adamic awakening. For this tradition, it is in part the ability to separate being from life that distinguishes human beings from other creatures.

Among other things, *being* encompasses all that has, does, or will exist. I use the term insofar it is isolable. That is, I employ *being* to refer to such things as Basse’s stars and Augustine’s stones—things that *are* but do not live, sense, or know. I follow ancient and early modern traditions of scriptural commentary by contending that between the molding of earth into human form and the inspiration of divine breath, Adam’s body existed but did not live. In making this claim, I draw a line between the state of being and the process of living, a division that runs counter to current trends in the historiography of premodern ontology.⁶⁰ Such claims are also at odds with many formulations of the established critical orthodoxy that sees Milton as an “animist materialist” or a thoroughgoing “vitalist.”⁶¹ Critics often phrase their understanding of Milton’s

⁵⁹ Augustine, Sermon 43.2, in *Sermons* 20-50.

⁶⁰ For the most authoritative historical account of the life inherent in all matter, see Bynum, *Christian Materiality*.

⁶¹ The “animist materialist” position was most persuasively established in Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers*, and has since spread throughout Milton criticism to the point where it has become orthodoxy. In recent years, some scholars have tried to move away from this position. See, in particular,

philosophical commitments in strong language. For example, Stephen Fallon claims that for Milton, “soul, and the life which springs from it, are not anomalies in a dead material world; instead, life is the usual condition of matter.”⁶² I suggest that the process of Adam’s creation troubles such strong claims. If most matter is already living, why does *Paradise Lost* insist that God needed to administer the “breath of life” to Adam’s body?

In *De doctrina christiana*, Milton defines “the death of the body” as “the loss or extinction of life.”⁶³ In Milton’s view, a living human body is an inseparable intertwining of body and soul.⁶⁴ Yet he writes: “as to the body, no one doubts that it suffers privation of life.”⁶⁵ Living body and soul are moments of each other, and they are inseparable in both life and death; when the body dies, so does the soul. The “lifeless body” [*corpus exanimum*] is, Milton claims, akin to a “stone” [*lapides*] insofar as both entities are deprived of soul or life.⁶⁶ Milton’s thought draws a distinction between things that *are* and things that *live*, a distinction that is important for understanding Adam’s creation. Things that simply are, like the earth from which Adam’s body is formed, may possess the properties and tendencies that enable life to emerge, but they are not themselves living. Such a claim does not imply that Milton followed thinkers like Hobbes in viewing matter as simply dead, inert, or mechanical. Period commentators speculated that one of the reasons Adam was made of earth was that, unlike the heavens, earth was “capable” of life and sense.⁶⁷ Yet there is a profound difference between being capable of life and

Trubowitz, “Body Politics in *Paradise Lost*”; and Sugimura, *Matter of Glorious Trial*. However, the position is so taken for granted that a recent article justifies a study of hair in *Paradise Lost* because such a study “illustrates the value of exploring how Milton’s animist materialism affects his depiction of material objects and physical gestures.” Dobranski, “Clustering and Curling Locks,” 349.

⁶² Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers*, 107.

⁶³ Milton, *De doctrina christiana*, 217.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 233. The Latin reads: *at corpus exanimum non dormit, nisi et lapides quoque dormiunt*. I modify Sumner here, since he translates *lapides* as “inanimate matter.” The distinction between living bodies and stones here militates against any strong claims for absolute vitalism in Milton. For the tradition of living stones that Milton’s phrasing steers his ontology away from, see Plumpe, “Vivum saxum, vivi lapides.”

⁶⁷ See Williams, *The Common Expositor*, 70. For an account of the Reformation interest in Adam’s body, see Crowther, 52-98.

actually possessing life, and this difference troubles the critical orthodoxy that Milton presupposed, in Stephen Fallon's words, "the vitality of *all* matter" and that "*all* corporeal substance is animate, self-active, and free."⁶⁸ Raphael's much-cited speech on the hierarchy of existence insists on this point: God "created all / Such to perfection, one first matter all, / Indued with various forms, various degrees / Of substance, and in things that live, of life" (5.471-74). Everything may be made of "one first matter," but that matter need not be living. Milton's matter is not living being; it is being in general.⁶⁹ Everything that is created emerges from and subsists in matter. For Milton, matter is functionally synonymous with being as the fundamental ontological category of his cosmos. Milton's treatment of Adam's creation in Genesis 2:7 is a key point of entry into determining the nature of the relationship between being and life.

In the Genesis tradition, when non-human creatures are created, their being and life are immediately and inseparably bound together. In contrast, Adam's existence is predicated on a distance between these terms, a temporal lag that opens up a space for the reflexivity upon which self-knowledge depends. Part of this difference is due to the two versions of creation provided in Genesis. In the earlier Priestly version, human beings are created in much the same manner as the other creatures. To be sure, there are important differences between man and animal highlighted in the Priestly account. Most notably, while the creation of the other creatures is mediated by preexisting elements—the "waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life" and the "earth bring[s] forth the living creature after his kind"—God creates man in his "image" and "likeness" directly, and gives his unmediated work "dominion" over the other denizens of air, water, and earth.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the basic formula describing the origins of human beings is the

⁶⁸ Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers*, 107, 181; emphasis mine. Rogers argues that Milton presents two ontologies: an "*all-encompassing* animist materialism asserted in the theological treatise [*De doctrina christiana*]" and the "hierarchical vision, relayed by Raphael in Books Five and Seven of the poem, of a scale of nature that situates rarefied over gross matter." *The Matter of Revolution*, 129; emphasis mine. Yet Milton never argues for let alone commits to an "all-encompassing animist materialism."

⁶⁹ Here, it is important to keep *matter* and *body* distinct, as Donnelly in "'Matter' versus Body" suggests that Fallon does not.

⁷⁰ Genesis 1:20; 1:24; 1:26. For an account of how early modern commentaries approached these differences, see Williams, *The Common Expósito*, 58-59.

same as that pertaining to other creatures: “male and female created he them” describes the origins of humanity in a similar fashion to “God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth.”⁷¹

In Genesis 2:7, the Jahwist writer provides a different version of human origins: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”⁷² The Jahwist account inserts a space between bodily being and the life of a living soul. For Milton and his predecessors these two versions could be harmonized in various ways. As Mary Nyquist notes in a different context, early modern exegetes tended to see the Priestly and Jahwist accounts as “one story told in two different ways, once, in the first chapter of Genesis, in epitome, and then, in the second chapter, in a more elaborated form.”⁷³ For example, Calvin writes of Genesis 2:7 that Moses “nowe expoundeth” that which “he had omitted before in the creation of man,” namely “that his bodie was taken out of the earth.”⁷⁴ The more expansive Jahwist account was read back onto the earlier Priestly account in a way that transformed the more gradual process of Adam’s creation into a unique mark of human identity. Man received the divine attention required for a staggered step-by-step creation.

Du Bartas provides an illustration of this interpretive expansion.⁷⁵ The 1578 *Sepmaine* distinguishes the making of Adam from that of other creatures. In Joshua Sylvester’s 1604 English translation, God “both at-once both life and body lent / To other things; but when in Man he meant / In mortall limbs immortal life to place, / He seem’d to pause [*delay*], as in a weighty case: / And so at sundry moments [*moment divers*] finished / The Soule and Body of Earth’s glorious head.”⁷⁶ The plants and animals that populate the

⁷¹ Genesis 1:27; 1:21.

⁷² For a general account of the Priestly and Jahwist versions of the creation story as they pertain to Milton, see Evans, 9-25.

⁷³ Nyquist, “The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity,” 102. For an earlier analysis of the same exegetical strategy, see Williams, *The Common Expositor*, 67.

⁷⁴ Calvin, *A Commentarie*, 57.

⁷⁵ For the relation between Milton and Du Bartas, see Taylor, *Milton’s Use of Du Bartas*.

⁷⁶ Du Bartas, *Du Bartas, His Divine Weekes and Workes*, trans. Sylvester, 208. The French is taken from *The Works of Guillaume de Salluste, sieur Du Bartas*, vol. 1, 6.470-76.

earth emerged simultaneously into bodily being and life. These two fundamental categories are so intertwined as to be indistinguishable, a fact emphasized by Sylvester's repetitive "both at-once both," a translation of Du Bartas's *tout d'un coup*.⁷⁷ Blurring the adjectival and adverbial uses of *both*, Sylvester fully integrates life and body. The divine attention lavished upon man, however, separates life from being. God "tookst Earth" and "So tempered'st it, that of the very same / Dead shape-less lump didst *Adam's* body frame."⁷⁸ Made of dust, Adam's body lies inert on the ground—possessed of being, devoid of life—while Du Bartas conducts a lengthy anatomical blazon of its external and internal parts. Eventually leaving such description to physicians, Du Bartas relates how "Life to his lovely Picture to confer, [God,] breathing, sent as from the lively Spring / Of his Diviness some small Riverling, / Itself dispersing into every pipe / Of the frail Engin of this earthen Type." God's breath infuses Adam's bodily being with the tributary of human life, a property that partakes of God, just as "in Spring-time from one sappy twig / There sprouts another consubstantial sprig."⁷⁹

Du Bartas inherited the being-life distinction and the notion of a temporal delay from a tradition of commentary on Genesis 2:7. Earlier hexameral writers "considered," in St. Ambrose's words, "the precise order of [Adam's] creation,"⁸⁰ but no writer before Augustine dwelt at length upon the separation of being and life at the heart of human origins. In *De Genesi ad litteram* (c.415), Augustine emphasizes the split between human bodily being and life by separating the topics into two books. Like "the beasts," man was molded into shape from "the slime of the earth."⁸¹ Augustine is uncertain about the exact nature of Adam's body, but he is absolutely sure that this body is prior to life, a property that only emerges along with God's breath.⁸² Inspiring into Adam's nostrils, God gives his new creation an almost unnamable property: "a thing which is not a body, nor God,

⁷⁷ The "at once" formula was used repeatedly. For example, Bishop Joseph Hall claims: "other creatures thou madst by a simple command; man, not without divine consultation: others at once; man thou didst first form, then inspire." Qtd. in Williams, *Common Expositor*, 68.

⁷⁸ Du Bartas, *Du Bartas, His Divine Weekes and Workes*, 158.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁸⁰ Ambrose, *Hexameron*, 6.7.40.

⁸¹ Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 6.12.22; 6.13.23.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 7.1.1-2.

nor life without sensation [*vita sine sensu*], which apparently exists in trees, nor life without a rational mind [*vita sine rationali mente*], but a life now inferior to that of the angels [*vita nunc minor quam Angelorum*], but destined to be one with their life if in this world it lives according to the will of the Creator.”⁸³ Plants and animals come into the world with both being and life because, as the Priestly account suggests, they are made through and by the earth and water of that world. Human life partakes of heavenly stuff; it is only presently [*nunc*] less than that of angels. For Augustine, the possibility of ontological ascent is predicated on a disjunction between human life and human being.

Milton drew his understanding of biblical creation from scripture, patristic exegesis, and earlier hexameral poetry, but he was also influenced by early modern biblical commentaries.⁸⁴ These works frequently located human uniqueness in Adam’s staggered creation. For example, Calvin outlined the “purpose” of this process, namely:

to put a difference between man and brute beastes. For these had their beeing out of the earth in a moment. But in that, man was fashioned by little and little, his dignitie herein is shewed to be special. For why doth not God command him to come out of the earth alive straight away, but only bycause he might by a certeine privilege excel all the things which he brought out of the earth.⁸⁵

Being created “little and little” is a sign of human privilege. The quality that separated humans from animals must therefore rest within that temporal lag. For Calvin, there were “three degrees” in the creation of Adam: “firstly, that he was a dead body made out of the ground; secondly, that he was endowed with a living soule, whereby he had vitall motion; and thirdly, that God ingraved his image in this soul, whereunto he is joined to immortalitie.”⁸⁶ In the period, there were ongoing debates about what sort of soul God gave to Adam. Summarizing this controversy in *Hexampla in genesin* (1605), Andrew Willet claims that some followed Plato and Origen, contending that soul was created before body. Some followed Aquinas, and claimed: “Adams bodie and soule were

⁸³ Ibid., 7.21.30.

⁸⁴ For Milton’s relationship with early modern commentaries, see Williams, “Milton and the Renaissance Commentaries on Genesis.”

⁸⁵ Calvin, *A Commentarie*, 57.

⁸⁶ Calvin, *A Commentarie*, 58.

created in the same instant together.” However, the most popular exegetical strategy was that established by Calvin, the transformation of Genesis 2:7 into a tripartite process. In Willet’s words, “mans creation is set forth in three degrees: the forming of his bodie, the giving of his life, the endewing of him with a reasonable soule created after God’s image.”⁸⁷ Adam is separate from other creatures in two ways. He possesses a reasonable soul akin to God’s image and his body was formed before it was infused with life.

Following this interpretive tradition, Milton distinguishes the types of life possessed by animals and humans. In Raphael’s account of creation, God commands the earth to “bring forth soul living in her kind,” and she obeys: “her fertile womb teemed at a birth / Innumerable living creatures, perfect forms, / Limbed and full grown” (7.451-56). The various animals emerge from the soil, possessed simultaneously of being and life. Milton stresses this unity by claiming that the “grassy clods now calved, now half appeared / The tawny lion, pawing to get free” (7.463-64).⁸⁸ Elsewhere, Milton associates the term *clod* with bodily being. After the fall, speculating on the nature of death, Adam wonders if “the spirit of man / Which God inspired, cannot together perish / With this corporeal clod” (10.784-86). The animals emerge from such clods as living creatures. By way of contrast, Adam’s body occupies a zone of lifeless being before it too becomes animate. According to the archangel, first God “formed thee, Adam, thee O man / Dust of the ground” (7.524-25). Molded of earth, Adam’s body is given form and being. Raphael’s repetition of the pronoun *thee*, which flanks the proper name, suggests that this shaped dust already *is* Adam. Raphael continues: God “in thy nostrils breathed / The breath of life; in his own image he / Created thee, in the image of God / Express, and thou

⁸⁷ Willet, *Hexapla in Genesin*, 32.

⁸⁸ Rogers claims that this episode is one of “the poem’s scandalous expressions of creaturely self-generation.” *Matter of Revolution*, 125. Placed in the context of the hexameral tradition, however, Milton’s lion takes on a more orthodox mien. Like all of the other non-human creatures of the sixth day, it is, in the words of Genesis 1:24, part of the living menagerie that the “earth bring[s] forth.” Although wrapped in dramatic language, Milton’s depiction follows an ancient tradition of scriptural exegesis.

becam'st a living soul" (7.525-28). Milton depicts Adam's creation as the fusion of a preexisting body with new life.⁸⁹

In a section of *De doctrina christiana* most often read as a justification for the inseparability of matter and life,⁹⁰ Milton grapples with the complexities of human origins. He begins by arguing that Genesis renders "groundless" the "preexistence" of soul.⁹¹ Having established the order of creation, Milton continues:

Man having been created after this manner, it is said, as a consequence, that 'man became a living soul'; whence it may be inferred (unless we had rather take the heathen writers for our teachers respecting the nature of the soul) that man is a living being [*hominum esse animal*], intrinsically and properly one and individual, not compound or separable, not, according to the common opinion, made up and framed of two distinct and different natures, as of soul and body, but that the whole man is soul, and the soul man, that is to say, a body, or substance individual, animated, sensitive, and rational; and that the breath of life was neither part of the divine essence, nor the soul itself, but as it were an inspiration of some divine virtue fitted for the exercise of life and reason, and infused into the organic body [*corpore organico infusam*]; for man himself, the whole man, when finally created [*cum ipse homo factus denique, ipse, inquam, totus homo*], is called in express terms 'a living soul.'⁹²

Critics who argue for Milton's animist materialism are correct to see this passage as evidence for the indivisibility of the created human being. However, not enough attention has been paid to the process of creation that Milton highlights at the beginning and end of this passage: Adam is called "a living soul" only when he is "finally created." In other words, although Adam becomes a living being or *animal* that is not "separable" or "compound," but "properly one and individual," he was not always so. When Adam is

⁸⁹ For details on the debate about the nature of God's image, see Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought*, 9-15. Milton argues that it is in "the soul of man" in which the human "likeness to God principally consists" in *De doctrina christiana* (37-39).

⁹⁰ See Fallon, 99; Rogers, 106.

⁹¹ Milton, *De doctrina christiana*, 39.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 39-41.

created, an act of divine “inspiration” yokes two properties that will, from henceforth, become inseparably one. At the moment of creation, however, a formed body lay limply awaiting divine breath. The indissoluble bond between human being and human life is thus predicated on an unavoidable separation that holds temporal and conceptual priority.

I emphasize the separation between being and life in the various exegetical traditions surrounding Genesis because this separation is implicated in the questions of human self-awareness implicit in Adamic awakening. In *Paradise Lost*, as Raphael transitions from the creation of the animals to “the masterwork” of the sixth day, a creature “endued / With sanctity of reason,” the archangel stresses that God intended Adam to be “self-knowing” (7.505-10). As Milton and Dryden’s very different accounts of Adamic awakening suggest, there are diverse ways of figuring and formulating what it means to be “self-knowing.” I suggest that the separation between being and life in Adam’s creation opens a space for these modes of apprehension. Milton follows Genesis and the Western philosophical tradition in associating life with constant self-movement. Like the biblical account, which conflates movement and life—the Priestly version describes the “moving creature that hath life” and “every living creature that moveth”⁹³—Milton’s Adam addresses the “fair creatures” that “live and move” (8.276). This relationship between life and motion raises epistemological difficulties. Montaigne isolates the problem: “Life is a material and corporeal movement, an action which by its very essence is imperfect and irregular.”⁹⁴ The living processes of generation, digestion, growth, locomotion, and decay repulse certain knowledge with their unpredictability.⁹⁵ Life is flux. In the seventeenth century, knowledge of living bodies was most often acquired through an examination of unmoving corpses.⁹⁶ For the Western philosophical tradition familiar to Milton, knowledge is in a profound way based upon a lack of

⁹³ Genesis 1:20-21. See also 1:28.

⁹⁴ F 3.9.756; BMS 3.9.1034: “La vie est un mouvement materiel et corporel: action imparfaicte de sa propre essence, et desreglée.”

⁹⁵ For a philosophical and historical account of attempts to know life, see Canghulhem, *Knowledge of Life*. For a contemporary iteration of the notion of life as error, see Foucault, “Life.”

⁹⁶ On anatomical knowledge, see Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*.

motion, upon the absence of change associated with intelligible being.⁹⁷ In *Paradise Lost*, as the image of the “tawny lion, pawing to get free” (7.464) suggests, the being of animals is inseparable from their life. The step-by-step process involved in human creation installs in the heart of Adam’s life the stillness of being required for “self-knowing.” The gap between being and life that distinguishes human and non-human in the Genesis tradition is the space of reason required for truly reflexive thought.

Dryden’s Adam moves directly into this elevated mode of self-apprehension. In contrast, Milton’s Adam adopts a slower, more tentative movement towards self-knowledge. As I argued above, his story of awakening centers of the postponement of knowledge: he “knew” not “himself beginning” (8.250); he “Knew not” “who [he] was, or where, or from what cause” (8.270-71); he can only desire to “know” his maker (8.280); and he feels that he is happier than he knows (8.282). In *Paradise Lost*, Adam may be possessed of the ability to know and he quickly becomes a creature that knows, but when he first awakens his self-awareness is powered not by cognitive knowledge but by embodied sentience. Milton employs Adam’s awakening as a privileged perspective through which to explore the full complexity of the human experience, an important part of which is the feeling of being alive that animates and underpins bodily movement. Before engaging in the ratiocination that traditionally separates human beings from other creatures, Adam feels the “quick instinctive motion[s]” (8.259) that unite him with the rest of sentient creation. If the gap between being and life implicit in human creation enables self-knowledge, Milton allows Adam a dalliance with a life he can only feel before he moves on towards a being he can only know.

⁹⁷ The relationship between stasis and knowledge extends deeply into Western thought, and was mobilized by Plato in such dialogues as *The Sophist* against the threat of universal mobility posed by Heraclitus and his followers. Even the atomistic philosophy proposed by Democritus and taken up by Epicurus and his followers, which seems to promote absolute mobility, insists on the eternal nature of the atoms themselves, thereby establishing the stasis necessary for knowledge. I take the basic claims of this argument from Fagot-Largeault, “Le devenir indispensable un problème aussi vieux que la philosophie.”

Feeling, Knowing, and the Adamic *Cogito*

To know about Adam is to begin to know oneself.⁹⁸ So goes a common argumentative thread that runs through the Genesis tradition. For example, when, in the posthumously published *Il mondo creato* (1607), Torquato Tasso arrives at the creation of Adam, he heralds the passage from animal to human life by claiming that, as he writes, he hears a voice “rebounding in [his] heart” with the words, “Man, know thyself!”⁹⁹ Tasso inherited the association of the Delphic injunction with Adam from Du Bartas, who opens his discussion of human creation with a bold claim: “Ther’s under Sun (as Delphos God did showe) / No better knowledge, then *Our Self to knowe*.”¹⁰⁰ Expanding on this link between Delphos and Adam, Du Bartas and Tasso establish the conditions behind the need to begin the search for self-knowledge with Adam and not with oneself. They contend that just as the eyes see whatever is within the visual field “but not themselves,” so “this our mind can comprehend all things” in creation “but not itself, nor can it understand / what its own being is” without assistance.¹⁰¹ The field of visual or mental presence opened by the eye or the mind relies—as a condition of its possibility—on a prior and constitutive absence.¹⁰² However, just as the eyes can “show themselves” in a reflective surface, so can the process of knowing oneself be enhanced through an understanding of Adam. It is no accident that in 1667, the year Milton published *Paradise Lost*, the theologian Thomas Bradley delivered a sermon at Oxford entitled *Nosce te ipsum: Comparison between the First, and the Second Adam*.¹⁰³

In their accounts of Adamic awakening, both Milton and Dryden employ discursive conventions associated with procedures for gaining self-knowledge. Dryden’s Adam

⁹⁸ For a general discussion of the relationship between self-knowledge and Adam in early modern Europe, see Crowther, *Adam and Eve in the Reformation*, 52-98.

⁹⁹ Tasso, *Creation of the World*, 6.1577.

¹⁰⁰ Du Bartas, *Du Bartas, His Divine Weekes and Workes*, 155.

¹⁰¹ Tasso, *Creation of the World*, 6.1588-98. Du Bartas’s version is pithy: “Yet wot I well, that as the Ey perceives / All but it self, even so our Soule conceives / All save her owne selfs Essence” *Du Bartas, His Divine Weekes and Workes*, 165.

¹⁰² For a phenomenological treatment of this observation, see Leder, *The Absent Body*, 11-17.

¹⁰³ Sawday has noted the link between Milton’s Adam and the Delphic injunction. “Self and Selfhood in the Seventeenth Century,” 45.

wakes alone and speaks directly in a soliloquy, asking and answering his own questions. He articulates his experience as it occurs, and Dryden gives the impression that Adam's words are the spontaneous verbal reflections of a being who has only just "beg[u]n to think and know."¹⁰⁴ Milton's Adam is more deliberate. Situated near the end of a long discussion with the angel Raphael, Adam's description of his awakening in *Paradise Lost* is figured not as immediate cogitation, but as recollection. He uses his memory to probe his earliest experiences, and brings into language a narrative that allows him "still longer to converse" with Raphael (8.252). If Lewalski and Lieb are correct in arguing that Adam's story in *Paradise Lost* is modeled on the *Confessions*, then both Milton and Dryden employ genres initiated by Augustine—soliloquy and spiritual autobiography—in order to bring the experience of Adam's self-awareness into language.¹⁰⁵ Since Augustine is singularly important in his influence on Western thinking about personal identity, it is likely not a coincidence that these attempts to imagine the originary moment of human self-awareness are inscribed in Augustinian generic conventions.¹⁰⁶

Lewalski contends that Adam's "proposal" to deliver his story in *Paradise Lost* "affirms the Socratic precept that self-knowledge is the highest wisdom."¹⁰⁷ By connecting Adam's narration of his own experience to the Delphic injunction, Lewalski draws attention to the labour involved in his "story." I suggest that Milton's Adam undertakes what the philosopher Pierre Hadot calls a "spiritual exercise," an effort of self-cultivation advocated by Socrates in such dialogues as the *Alcibiades*, performed systematically by Stoic and Neoplatonic thinkers, and wedded to narrative and confessional introspection by Augustine.¹⁰⁸ In Augustine's hands, both the soliloquy and what has come to be called

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 2.1.24.

¹⁰⁵ Augustine invents the word *soliloquia* to describe a formal discussion with oneself. For details, see Stock, *Augustine's Inner Dialogue*. For Milton's broad-ranging use of soliloquy in both poetry and prose, see Stevens, "Milton's Janus-Faced Nationalism." For a more extended discussion of soliloquy, see Chapter 3 below.

¹⁰⁶ The literature on Augustine and the self is voluminous. See, for example, Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 127-42; and Cary, *Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self*.

¹⁰⁷ Lewalski, 211.

¹⁰⁸ The authoritative description of these practices is found in Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 81-125. For Augustine's influential adaptation of the spiritual exercise, see Stock, *After Augustine*, 8-23; and Stock, "Self, Soliloquy, and Spiritual Exercises."

“spiritual autobiography” were exercises that located and strengthened an inner self. Memory is key to Augustine’s approach. For him, the shaping of narrative involved an arduous process of ordering and discovery. Augustine claims that he finds his “own self hard to grasp.” He has “become for [him]self a soil which is a cause of difficulty and much sweat.”¹⁰⁹ The earth Adam must till after the fall is here transmuted into a recalcitrant interiority that requires cultivation. Augustine *is* in some sense his memory—“It is I who remember [*ego sum, qui memini*]”—and he finds himself within his memory: “There also I meet myself and recall what I am.”¹¹⁰ Despite its difficulties, the exercise of querying memory to narrate a life is a productive labour that nurtures self-awareness. Although Dryden’s soliloquy shares the Augustinian heritage by virtue of its discursive form, his articulation of Cartesian doctrine seems to slip into philosophical dogma. Milton’s Adam models a demanding process of self-exploration. “For man to tell how human life began / Is hard” (8.250-51), Adam avers, stressing that telling his “story” is an act of effort, an exercise. Reaching back into his memory to access his earliest experiences, Adam articulates not only his own emergence into “human life,” but also the structures of lived experience normally obscured by day-to-day activities. Milton writes a narrative of origins that serves simultaneously as phenomenological description; he defamiliarizes living in a world by allowing the first man to articulate what it is like to move, feel, and think. Milton extends to his readers an invitation to participate in Adam’s exercise; he encourages them to check Adam’s primal experiences against their own.

This Miltonic invitation is innovative in the context of the Genesis tradition. Such writers as Du Bartas and Tasso aimed to expand the self-knowledge of their readers by developing detailed descriptions of Adam’s body, soul, abilities, and natural propensities. Both poets set up their analysis of Adam as an inventory of parts viewed externally. Du Bartas frames his description of Adam’s form as an anatomy. He describes himself as making “incision[s]” in the body to access its “inward parts,” and implicitly allies his

¹⁰⁹ *Confessions*, 10.16.25. For Milton’s knowledge of Augustine, see note 166. For the circulation of the Augustine’s texts in early modern Europe, see Visser, *Reading Augustine in the Reformation*. For an insightful discussion of Augustine and memory, see Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 96-102.

¹¹⁰ *Confessions*, 10.16.25; 10.8.14.

poetic technique with such surgeons as Hippocrates and Galen.¹¹¹ Yet even when they dig into Adam's entrails, the writers of the Genesis tradition present the first man as a series of surfaces, as an object of knowledge. Milton's great innovation was to adopt Adam's perspective. When Adam awakens in *Paradise Lost*, he opens up new vistas of self-knowledge by sharing his own experience of acquiring self-knowledge. By allowing Adam to present a first-person account of what it was like to emerge into life, Milton presents the first man in terms that mimic the position of embodied existence from which any semblance of human self-knowledge is acquired. To be sure, Milton's poetic predecessors put words in Adam's mouth, but these speeches do not provide insight into Adam's experiences *as* human experiences.¹¹²

Adam's description of his own awakening reveals Milton's ongoing fascination with theatricality, with the "private or inner voice made public."¹¹³ As J. M. Evans argues, Milton's initial attempts around the year 1639 to write what would become *Paradise Lost* as a drama probably stem from his 1638 meeting with Hugo Grotius in Paris.¹¹⁴ In 1601, Grotius wrote *Adamus exul*, a tragedy based on the fall of man. It is likely that the theatrical elements of *Paradise Lost* receive a good part of their inspiration from Grotius's work. Grotius's Adam recounts to Eve how it felt for a "deep and heavy sleep" to bind with "heavy numbness" his "every sense" while God removed his rib.¹¹⁵ In Grotius's hands, Adam conveys the first-person nature of his experience, describing how as he slid into unconsciousness he could feel his "spirit panting from within."¹¹⁶ Grotius bestows Adam with a sense of self absent from the earlier dramatic tradition, which tends to offer little insight into the nature of Adam's experience.¹¹⁷ Yet *Adamus exul* does not

¹¹¹ Du Bartas, *Du Bartas, His Divine Weekes and Workes*, 162-63.

¹¹² For example, the first words spoken by Tasso's Adam are to Eve after her creation almost an entire book after the creation of the first man. See Tasso, *The Creation of the World*, 7.1009.

¹¹³ Stevens, "Milton's Janus-Faced Nationalism," 253.

¹¹⁴ Evans, 212-13. For more on Milton's meeting with Grotius, see Campbell and Corns, *John Milton*, 106-07.

¹¹⁵ Grotius, *Adamus exul*, 2.660-63.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 2.663-64.

¹¹⁷ Take, for example, the Cardmaker's Play in the *York Cycle*, where Adam's most revealing speech is one of praise: "A Lord! Ful mekill is [th]y myght, / And [th]at is seene in ilke a side, / Ffor nowe is here a joifull sighte, / To see this worlde so long and wide. / Many diverse thynges nowe here is, / Of Beestis and

attempt to perform the “hard” task of having Adam describe his emergence into life from his own point of view. The first playwright to put Adam’s experience of awakening into dramatic speech was Giambattista Andreini, who published *L’Adamo* in 1613.¹¹⁸ Yet Andreini’s Adam is alien to human experience in a way that Milton’s is not. Upon awakening, the hero of *L’Adamo* immediately addresses God in already-knowing language: “O great and peerless Monarch, if this tongue / Fails to frame thanks to match my obligations, / Behold in the affection of my heart / An ampler language than my lips express.”¹¹⁹ Adam does not notice his environment or his body, but is automatically directed towards the divine and the unearthly. In fact, Andreini’s Adam seems to dwell in the heavens: “Already, Lord, in ecstasy devout / My mind flies upwards, soars beyond the clouds, / Past every sphere, yea, enters even heaven / And there beholds the stars, a throne for man.”¹²⁰ The self-knowledge provided by this Adam is that of the mystic who “merge[s]” with and becomes a “part” of God.¹²¹ By contrast, Milton’s terrestrial Adam is recognizably human. Later dramatists depicted the story of Eden—Serafino della Salandria’s *Adamo caduto* (1647) and Joost Van Den Vondel’s *Adam in Ballingschap* (1664) stand out¹²²—but none give Adam the opportunity to frame his emergence into life verbally. To my knowledge, Milton is the first writer to approach the moment of Adamic awakening from a first-person perspective and to use that moment to enhance self-knowledge through an exploration of recognizably human experience.

If Milton’s treatment of Adamic awakening is a departure from the literature on Genesis, is there another tradition to which the Adam of *Paradise Lost* can trace his lineage?

foules, both wilde and tame, / 3itle is non made to [th]i likenesse / But we allone, a! loved by [th]y name.” Anonymous, “The Cardmaker’s Play,” 1.45-52, in *York Plays*. For a summary of medieval and early modern dramatic works that covers the creation and fall of man, see Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*, 192-216.

¹¹⁸ In 1727, Voltaire famously claimed that while in Italy in the late 1630s, Milton had seen *L’Adamo* onstage and had pierced “through the absurdity of the performance to the hidden majesty of the subject” Qtd. in Masson, “Introduction to *Paradise Lost*,” 9.

¹¹⁹ Andreini, *L’Adamo*, 230.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² For these texts, see Kirkconnell, *The Celestial Cycle*, 290-349 and 434-79.

Dryden's translation of Milton into an identifiably philosophical register provides a clue. Although the account of Adamic awakening provided in *Paradise Lost* wears the trappings of drama, the heart of Adam's speech is related to philosophical techniques, to spiritual exercises established by Augustine and appropriated by Descartes.¹²³ *Paradise Lost* brings to the surface a latent Adamic impulse that lies at the heart of Augustinian and Cartesian thought. As I unfold the relationship between these two thinkers and Milton's Adam, I pair the quest for self-knowledge embedded in the *cogito* with attention to the relationship between life and being. Milton's stress on life and feeling positions his Adam in a debate about the valences of self-knowledge.

When Dryden turns Adam into a Cartesian, he highlights a tendency in Cartesian philosophy. As Wallace Stevens writes in *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*, "Adam / In Eden was the father of Descartes."¹²⁴ With deep irony, Stevens recognizes the affinity between the Cartesian *cogito* and the attempt to get back to a primordial past undefiled by tradition.¹²⁵ Descartes strives to ventriloquize Adam, to philosophically occupy a moment of Adamic purity.¹²⁶ In the 1638 *Discours de la méthode*, Descartes famously claims that he had "entirely quitted the study of letters," and resolved to "seek no other science than that which could be found in myself, or at least in the great book of the world."¹²⁷ Turning away from inherited textual learning, Descartes attempts to gain knowledge only from *expérience*.¹²⁸ Intensifying this drive towards the purification of knowledge, Descartes "formed the resolution of also making myself an object of study," a desire that led to his replication of Adamic existence in a space with "no society to

¹²³ The most thorough books on this topic are Menn, *Descartes and Augustine*; and Janowski, *Augustinian-Cartesian Index*. For a different summary of the overlap, see Stock, *Augustine's Inner Dialogue*, 90-120.

¹²⁴ Stevens, *The Palm at the End of the Mind*, 209.

¹²⁵ Michel Henry also points to this inclination in Descartes's work: "What makes the Cartesian project so fascinating and still today mysterious and attractive is its coincidence with the project of philosophy itself. First and radical philosophy is the search for the beginning... The beginning is not new. Rather it is ancient, the most ancient" *The Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 11.

¹²⁶ For a brief discussion of the link between Milton's Adam and Descartes, see Sawday, "Self and Selfhood in the Seventeenth Century," 45-47.

¹²⁷ Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Haldane and Ross, 8. Subsequent citations of the *Dicours* will be, first, to the French text edited by Dorolle; and, second, to the Haldane and Ross translation.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.15; 8.

divert me” and “no cares or passions to trouble me,” “alone” [*seul*] with the “complete leisure to occupy myself with my own thoughts.”¹²⁹ Descartes later explains this grounding of certain knowledge in his own first-person experience through an allusion to Adam. Since “we have all been children before being men” and were, as a result, given information by a variety of teachers, “it is almost impossible that our judgments should be so excellent or solid as they should have been had we the complete use of our reason since our birth, and we had been guided by its means alone.”¹³⁰ If human beings were born as Adam was, fully-fledged with the “full use of their reason,” then they could possess the same purity of judgment and knowledge that Descartes seeks to gain through his ostensible rejection of inherited teachings. The Cartesian move towards the *cogito* is presented as a return to Adamic beginnings.¹³¹

Descartes’s goal is to secure a firm epistemological basis for the developing sciences. Lying behind his method is the premise that both the soul and God are easier to know than bodies.¹³² Any certain knowledge of the world must begin not with the world, but with the soul and its relationship to God. In the 1641 *Meditations*, Descartes demonstrates that all knowledge stemming from the senses and the imagination—that is, all knowledge of bodies or even of number—is uncertain because it can be undermined by skepticism. Only the *cogito* provides the Meditator with an unshakable first principle. To doubt is to think, and so long as one is thinking one must exist. For Descartes, the foundations of knowledge are necessarily formulated in the first person: “*I am, I exist* is

¹²⁹ Ibid., 2.1; 9.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 2.1; 10: “Et ainsi encoure je pensai que pour ce que nous avons tous été enfants avant que d’être hommes, et qu’il nous fallu longtemps être gouvernés par nos appétits et nos précepteurs, qui étaient souvent contraires les uns aux autres, et qui, ni les uns ni les autres, ne nous conseillaient peut-être pas toujours le meilleur, il est presque impossible que nos jugements soient si purs ni si solides qu’ils auraient été si nous avions eu l’usage entier de notre raison dès le point de notre naissance, et que nous n’eussions jamais été conduits que par elle.”

¹³¹ In the *Discours*, Descartes frames the obliteration of inherited traditions in numerous ways—one prevalent metaphor is the builder who needs to “rebuild” his house because the “foundations are unsound” (2.2; 10)—but all of these attempts to recapture a purity of knowledge rest on the primordial beginnings of Eden.

¹³² The full title of the second part of the *Meditations* is: “Of the Nature of the Human Mind; and that it is more easily known than the body.”

necessarily true each time that I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it.”¹³³ The assertion of the *cogito* is not an act that someone else can perform for me.

Obviously, *cogito ergo sum* pertains to being. Life does not figure in Descartes’s method, except insofar as it is deliberately excluded. In fact, the central thrust of the Second Meditation is the elimination of life as a phenomenon with any epistemological priority. Having established the validity of the *cogito*, the Meditator realizes that he does not know “clearly enough what I am, I who am certain that I am.”¹³⁴ Determining that “thought is an attribute that belongs to me [and] it alone cannot be separated from me,”¹³⁵ the Meditator jettisons all aspects of himself that were “inspired by anything beyond my own nature alone when I applied myself to the consideration of my being.” All aspects of the Meditator that fall outside the certainty of the *cogito*—the solitary relationship between thought and being—must be eliminated. The Meditator once “considered” himself as “having a face, hands, arms, and all the system of members composed of bones and flesh as seen in a corpse which I designated by the name of body.” He also believed that this complex system of parts, identical in a dead or living body, was animated by a soul through which he “considered that I was nourished, that I walked, that I felt, and that I thought.”¹³⁶ Although he was sure he had a body coupled with a soul that performed vegetative, animal, and rational functions, now the Meditator “can only give judgment on things that are *known [nota]* to me.”¹³⁷ Since, first, he truly has knowledge only of that which is certain and, second, only the being of thought is certain, life simply falls away. The Meditator is “a thing which thinks [*res cogitans*],”¹³⁸ an entity that knows its being but has no way of apprehending life. The elimination of body, soul, and all that pertains to life in the *Meditations* parallels the same movement in Descartes’s physiology, which figures animals as automata in the *Discours* and the human body as a machine in *L’Homme*. In Dennis Des Chene’s pithy summary of the physiological works,

¹³³ Descartes, *Meditations*, 2.3; 64. I use the Haldane and Ross translation of the *Meditations*, and the Latin text provided in Marion, *Index des Meditationes*.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 2.4; 64.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 2.6; 65.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 2.5; 64.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 2.7; 65; emphasis mine.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 2.6; 65.

“Descartes proposes to eliminate the living as a natural kind.”¹³⁹ The absence of life in Dryden’s depiction of Adam’s awakening is thus predicated on Descartes’s belief that life is a confused and uncertain explanatory principle.

What, then, does Descartes do with the sentience so central to the awakening of Milton’s Adam? Does the Meditator feel his life? As he strives to locate the certainty of the *cogito*, the Meditator considers whether “sensation” might be indubitably “in” him. His verdict is that “one cannot feel without body.”¹⁴⁰ Since body is not certain, feeling [*sentire*] is eliminated as a criterion for apprehending the self, that “thing which thinks.” Yet when Descartes asks himself precisely what constitutes a “thing which thinks,” he includes feeling as part of his definition: “It is a thing which doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels [*sentiens*].”¹⁴¹ Feeling is here brought beneath the auspices of thought.¹⁴² Abstracted from life, feeling is attached instead to a zone of pure appearance:

I am the same who feels [*sentire*], that is to say, who perceives certain things, as by the organs of sense, since in truth I see light, I hear noise, I feel heat [*calorem sentio*]. But it will be said that these phenomena are false and that I am dreaming. Let it be so; still it is at least quite certain that it seems to me that I see light, that I hear noise and that I feel heat [*At certe videre videor, audire, calescere*]. This cannot be false; properly speaking it is what is in me called feeling [*sentire*]; and used in this precise sense that is no other thing than thinking.¹⁴³

Descartes has reordered the classical hierarchy of being, life, feeling, and knowing. He eliminates life entirely, and subsumes feeling within knowing.¹⁴⁴ One cannot feel one’s life in this model because there is nothing to feel and because *sentio* is folded within

¹³⁹ Des Chene, *Spirits and Clocks*, 2.

¹⁴⁰ Descartes, *Meditations*, 2.6; 65.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 2.8; 66.

¹⁴² Stephen Menn claims that Descartes “takes ‘sensation’ to be ambiguous, referring on the one hand to a process occurring in the bodily organs (including the brain), and on the other hand to a mental activity which or may or may not be *caused* by physical process of sensation.” *Descartes and Augustine*, 255.

¹⁴³ 2.9; 67.

¹⁴⁴ For a complex and breathtaking account of this passage and Descartes’s oscillation between a privileging and denial of affectivity, see Henry, *Genealogy of Psychoanalysis*, 11-64.

cogito. Descartes eliminates the possibility of sentience as a mode of self-apprehension, as part of the pathway to self-knowledge.

Much recent scholarship has simply presupposed that Descartes inherited the *cogito* from Augustine, who repeatedly employs its argumentative strategies throughout his corpus. To take one famous example, in *De civitate Dei*, Augustine claims: “if I am mistaken, I exist [*si enim fallor sum*]. He who does not exist clearly cannot be mistaken; and so, if I am mistaken, then, by the same token, I exist. And since, if I am mistaken, it is certain that I exist, how can I be mistaken in supposing that I exist?”¹⁴⁵ In this familiar version of the argument, a state of knowledge akin to Descartes’s doubt (being mistaken) is taken as the guarantor of being. However, when Descartes’s interlocutors read the *Meditations*, they often connected his argument with the more expansive version of the *cogito* in Augustine’s *De libero arbitrio*. For instance, in the objections Antoine Arnauld sent Descartes, he links the Cartesian project explicitly with Augustine’s early dialogue:

The first thing that arises here for us to marvel at is that the distinguished gentleman [Descartes] established as the principle of the whole of his philosophy the same one as established by St. Augustine... For in *On the Free Choice of the Will*, Book II, Chapter 3, Alipius, during his debate with Evodius, was about to prove the existence of God when he asserted: “first, to begin with things that are most evident, I ask you whether you yourself exist or whether perhaps you are afraid you might be mistaken in this line of questioning, since, in any event, if you did not exist you could never be mistaken?” The words of our author are similar.¹⁴⁶

Arnauld is correct to note the startling similarities between Augustine and Descartes. Yet a closer examination of *De libero arbitrio* reveals a major difference in the nature of the evidence employed in these texts. While Descartes focuses only on being, Augustine argues for the certainty of both being and life.

¹⁴⁵ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, trans. Dyson, 11.26.

¹⁴⁶ Arnauld, “Fourth Set of Objections,” 116-17. Menn points out that the speaker in question is not Alypius, but Augustine, and goes on to suggest that presumably Arnauld was misled by using an edition that referred to the speaker simply as “A.” *Descartes and Augustine*, 4-5.

In fact, Augustine claims that certainty of one's being must necessarily pass *through* life. At the beginning of an argument about God's existence, Augustine takes "something quite obvious as [a] starting point," and asks Evodius "whether you yourself exist." Not letting his interlocutor respond, Augustine contends that Evodius must exist since even if he was mistaken about his existence, "you could certainly not be mistaken unless you existed." From this familiar foundation, Augustine begins to build his argument: "since it is obvious you exist, and this could not be obvious unless you were alive, it is also obvious that you are alive."¹⁴⁷ The certainty of one's own being relies on the presence of life. Since certainty is a function of "understanding," and understanding in turn depends upon life, the *cogito* is in fact only foundational insofar as it involves a triangulation of being, life, and understanding.¹⁴⁸ Employing an inversion later used by such thinkers as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Augustine argues that knowledge of being presupposes life.¹⁴⁹ For Augustine, life occupies the *ergo* between the Cartesian *cogito* and *sum*: "whatever is not alive can certainly not understand" and "whatever understands must certainly also exist and be alive."¹⁵⁰ Summarizing the Augustinian *cogito*, Brian Stock suggests that across his corpus Augustine uses the argument to portray a "vital principle," a form of "self-awareness [or] kind of intimate knowledge within each of us, which is the basis of our knowing anything else."¹⁵¹ In *De beata vita*, Augustine articulates with startling clarity the centrality of life to his version of the *cogito*. Addressing a skeptic, Augustine asks, "Do you not know at least that you live [*uiuere*]?" Since the skeptic acknowledges this fact, Augustine is able to reply: "You know therefore that you have life, since nobody can live except by life [*Scis ergo habere te uitam, si quidem uiuere nemo nisi uita potest*]."¹⁵² Drawing on such texts as this, Jean-Luc Marion firmly distinguishes Augustine's position from that of Descartes. For the former, what is at stake is "the evidence of life or, more exactly, of the life in me, different from me, but without which I

¹⁴⁷ Augustine *De libero arbitrio*, trans. Williams, 2.3; 33. Citations to this text include the Latin numbers first followed by the page numbers of the English edition.

¹⁴⁸ Augustine inherits this triadic formulation from Plotinus. See Hadot, "Etre, Vie, Pensée."

¹⁴⁹ *De libero arbitrio* 2.3; 33. For a phenomenological employment of the same argumentative strategy, see Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behaviour*, 129-84.

¹⁵⁰ *De libero arbitrio*, 2.3; 33.

¹⁵¹ Stock, *Augustine's Inner Dialogue*, 94.

¹⁵² Augustine, *De beata vita*, 2.7. I take the English translation from Marion, *In the Self's Place*, 59.

would not be, nor be myself.” If, “for Descartes, the experience of self-contradicting doubt attests to the certainty of the act of thinking in such a way that the *ego* finds in it its essence as *res cogitans*, in contrast, for Saint Augustine, doubt does not assure the mind of any essence, which it could perform at will, but assigns it to life, unshakable and inevitable but uncontrollable.”¹⁵³

I suggest that Adam’s awakening in *Paradise Lost* may find its philosophical roots in the mode of thought Augustine employs in *De libero arbitrio* and elsewhere in his corpus. Adam’s immediate sense of vitality is cognate to Evodius’s claim that nothing “could be more certain” to him than his own life.¹⁵⁴ More to the point, Adam’s emphasis on sentience—on feeling his life—also finds a philosophical precedent in Augustine’s thought.¹⁵⁵ Although “nothing knows it is alive unless it is in fact alive,” it is not the case that “everything that is alive also knows it is alive.”¹⁵⁶ In other words, animals do not necessarily possess the reason requisite for knowledge, yet they obviously live. Moreover, since a given animal “avoids or pursues what it sees,” it must have some means of coordinating with its own wellbeing the sensual impulses it receives from its environment. Augustine names this capacity the “inner sense,” a form of apprehension that “presides” over the external senses.¹⁵⁷ Humans also possess an inner sense, which must be distinguished from reason. When the inner sense coordinates raw sensations or perceives the senses as they work, its operations “[do] not amount to knowledge, since only reason can produce knowledge.”¹⁵⁸ The activities of the inner sense can be

¹⁵³ Marion, *In the Self’s Place*, 59-60.

¹⁵⁴ *De libero arbitrio* 1.7; 12. Later in his career, Augustine will propose a completely vital *cogito*. In *De trinitate*, Augustine writes: “It is an inner knowledge by which we know that we live, where not even the Academician can say: ‘Perhaps you are sleeping, and you do not know, and you see in dreams.’ For who does not know that things seen by those who are asleep are very similar to things seen by those who are awake. But he who is certain about the knowledge of his own life does not say in it: ‘I know that I am awake,’ but ‘I know that I live’; whether he, therefore, sleeps, or whether he is awake, he lives. ... even he who is deceived, lives.” *On the Trinity*, 15.12.

¹⁵⁵ For a discussion of Augustine’s *De libero arbitrio* and “the life in the midst of which the thinking being discovers itself without any clear knowledge,” see Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch*, 131-41.

¹⁵⁶ *De libero arbitrio*, 1.7; 12.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.3; 35. For the genealogy leading from the Aristotelian “common sense” to the Augustinian “inner sense,” see Heller-Roazen, 21-141.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.4; 37.

understood by reason and turned into knowledge, but until that point the inner sense functions solely at the level of feeling.¹⁵⁹

This sensation is intimately related to the feeling of being alive, a point Augustine gestures towards when he refers to it as “that life that we call the ‘inner sense,’ which surpasses the senses of the body.”¹⁶⁰ The inner sense is intertwined with life. Yet the exact nature of the relationship between these two terms is almost impossible to articulate: “it is not so clear whether this life [the inner sense], which feels that it senses material objects, also senses itself—except that everyone who considers the matter will realize that every living thing flees death. Since death is the opposite of life, it must be the case that life feels itself [*vita etiam seipsam sentiat*], because it flees from its opposite.”¹⁶¹ Although Augustine abandons this argument due to what he diagnoses as a lack of clarity, his notion of life feeling itself provides a model for vital reflexivity—the folding inwards of feeling and life that characterizes Milton’s Adamic awakening. I do not mean to suggest that *De libero arbitrio* is a direct source for Adam’s awareness of his own life. There were plenty of texts where Milton could have discovered such ideas. For example, in *De rerum natura*, Lucretius claims: “we feel [*sentimus*] that vital sense [*vitalem sensum*] inheres in the whole body.”¹⁶² Milton situates Adam within a broad tradition of first-person philosophical exercise of which Augustine and Descartes are prominent exponents. Augustine’s acknowledgement of the difficulty involved in theorizing sentience is born out centuries later by Milton’s description of his task as “hard.” Writing beyond the confines of the Genesis tradition, Milton turns to the resources of philosophy in order to give voice to Adam as he awakens. Milton describes the experience of feeling one’s life, of apprehending the process of living through one’s “inner sense.” Adam’s story is a spiritual exercise that queries memory to excavate a fundamental aspect of the human condition.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 2.3; 35.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 2.3; 36.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 2.4; 37; translation modified: “Sed utrum et se ipsam haec vita sentiat, quae se corporalia sentire sentit, non ita clarum est, nisi quod se quisque intus interrogans, invenit omnem rem viventum fugere mortem; quae cum sit vitae contraria, necesse est ut vita etiam seipsam sentiat, quae contrarium suum fugit.”

¹⁶² Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, trans. Rose, 3.634-35.

Milton knew the writings of both Descartes and Augustine.¹⁶³ Putting himself into the Edenic beginning that is the stage of Cartesian meditation, Milton tries to recapture human experience at its most fundamental level. In performing this exercise, he discovers not the certainty of the Cartesian *cogito*, but the capacious vitality of its Augustinian ancestor. Life, not being, lies at the felt foundation of Milton's vision of human experience. As with the writings of Descartes and Augustine, this Adamic *cogito* in *Paradise Lost* is not whole unto itself: for all three writers, the articulation of self-awareness is in the service of moving through the self towards God. In *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine uses the certainty of being, living, and understanding to prove to Evodius that God exists. In the *Meditations*, Descartes moves from the certain knowledge of the *cogito* towards knowledge of God's existence. For both writers, only through a minimal understanding of God is it possible to obtain adequate self-knowledge. In *Paradise Lost*, Adam engages in a similar exercise of ascent. Dryden's Adam awakens into the Cartesian *cogito*. Milton's Adam awakens into the "living middle" that Descartes excludes, the soul by which the Meditator once believed he "was nourished, that [he] moved [*incedere*], that [he] felt."¹⁶⁴ If, in the words of Stephen Menn, Descartes "isolates the rational soul,"¹⁶⁵ then Milton follows Augustine in demonstrating through Adam that the rational soul depends on the vegetative and animal souls that pertain to the life of the body.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ For the most thorough treatment of the relationship between Milton and Descartes, see Fallon, *Milton Among the Philosophers*. Milton could have easily accessed the works of Descartes in the library of his friend Nathan Paget. For details, see Hill, *Milton and English Revolution*, 492-95; and Hanford, "Dr. Paget's Library." For Paget and Milton, see Nicholls, "'Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,'" 6-8. Milton was also very familiar with Augustine: his *Commonplace Book* contains extracts of *De civitate dei*, he repeatedly references Augustine's works in his prose tracts, and he was educated from a young age by such teachers as Thomas Young, whose pedagogy included large amounts of Augustine. For details, see Fiore, *Milton and Augustine*.

¹⁶⁴ Descartes, *Meditations*, 2.5; 64, translation modified. The phrase "living middle" is taken from Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 22.

¹⁶⁵ Menn, *Descartes and Augustine*, 245.

¹⁶⁶ In *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine writes: "we see that we have many characteristics in common not only with animals but even with trees and plants. We know that trees, which are the lowest level of life, take in nourishment, grow, reproduce, and flourish. We recognize that animals can see and hear, and can sense material objects by touch, taste, and smell" (1.8; 14). For details on how early modern Aristotelians conceived of the vegetative and animal souls, see Des Chene, *Life's Form*.

When Adam asks “who [he] was” and “from what cause” he came, he seeks self-knowledge. These questions place Milton in dialogue with Augustine and Descartes, both of whom attempt to think through the same questions. Milton’s Adam, however, has an advantage in that he does not need to *return* to the primal scene of existence, as Descartes wishes to do. Adam *inhabits* the Cartesian fantasy, and he has direct access to the “Presence divine” towards which Augustine and Descartes must struggle. Almost immediately after Adam’s question—“how came I thus?” (8.277)—the first man finds himself falling “untroubled” into sleep. At first he thinks he “then was passing to my former state / Insensible,” until he receives a dream “Whose inward apparition gently moved / My fancy to believe I yet had being, / And lived” (8.289-95). Adam describes the state before his awakening as “Insensible,” a word Milton’s earliest commentator glosses as “unfelt.”¹⁶⁷ Note that it is only at the point when Adam thinks he might lose consciousness that Milton uses the word “being,” and even here that basic state of *unfeeling*—the body before divine inspiration—is coupled with the word “lived.” Much like Augustine in *De libero arbitrio*, Adam arrives at being only within the greater context of living and feeling that subtend the act of knowing.

In what is perhaps a joke at Descartes’s expense, God appears to Adam in or through a “dream” in order to tell him “who [he] is.” Milton gives Adam absolute, divine certainty about his nature through a state of consciousness that Descartes classifies as deceitful. God’s first words to Adam begin to explain the nature of his *who*: “Adam, rise, / First man, of men innumerable ordained / First father, called by thee I come thy guide / To the garden of bliss” (8.296-99). In this sentence, Adam learns his proper name; the title of his species, of whom he is the first; and that in the future he will be the father to “innumerable” offspring. Yet it is only after Adam has demonstrated his rational abilities in a debate with God about the nature of companionship that he truly steps into self-knowledge. As the debate draws to a close, God addresses the first man: “Thus far to try thee, Adam, I was pleased, / And find thee knowing not of beasts alone, / Which thou hast rightly named, but of thyself, / Expressing well the spirit within thee free, / My

¹⁶⁷ Hume, *Annotations on Milton’s Paradise Lost*, 234.

image, not imparted to the brute” (8.437-41). God has seen Adam *perform* his rational capacities. This performance is itself the evidence that Adam knows not only the names of beasts but also his own nature. Adam’s argument shows that he knows “of [him]self,” precisely because he is capable of “expressing” the image of God within him, an image that was not given to other animals. The quest for self-knowledge is here fulfilled, since God informs Adam that he already knows himself through his actions, which are informed by the rational spark of divinity within him. Earlier, when Raphael tells Adam of his creation, the angel harmonizes Genesis 1:26 and 2:7 such that the “image” of God is given to Adam in the moment he receives the “breath of life” and becomes a “living soul” (7.525-28). Adam’s quest for self-knowledge may end in an acknowledgement of the conventional principle that distinguishes human from animal, but Milton’s account of Adamic awakening moves through the full spectrum of the “living soul” before arriving at its rational *telos*. Adam’s story suggests that complete human self-knowledge cannot be limited to reason and knowledge, but must also include recognition of embodied life and the sentience through which vitality is apprehended.

Corporate Identity and the Phenomenology of Life

In early modern England, Adam was the paradigm of human universality. Seventeenth-century religious writers, philosophers, scientists, and poets shared Thomas Browne’s sense that “the man without a navel yet lives in me.”¹⁶⁸ As Joanna Picciotto has persuasively argued, English writers of all stripes were drawn to the “undifferentiated unity of humanity in the figure of Adam.”¹⁶⁹ According to the preacher Robert Harris, “*We are Adam.*” Harris elaborates on this condensed formulation a number of times: “*Adam is every man,*” containing the “whole species mankind,” and “Adam in paradise was but our nature personated; we out of Paradise are but his Person multiplied.”¹⁷⁰ Adam is both singular and multiple. Such writers as Du Bartas and Tasso insisted on linking Adam to the Delphic injunction because he was the primary means for expressing a corporate human identity. Within his figure, all of humanity coalesced. In Adam, the

¹⁶⁸ Browne, *Religio medici*, 86.

¹⁶⁹ Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence*, 50.

¹⁷⁰ Harris, *A Brief Discourse of Mans Estate*, 11; 16. For discussions of Harris’s claims and their “quasi-legal” connotations, see Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence*, 78; 202.

differences distinguishing every human in his or her individuality were bracketed so that the similarities shared by all could be revealed in their primordial simplicity.

To write of Adamic experience is to describe a singular figure that is, in Harris's vocabulary, "multiplied" within every reader. For Milton and his contemporaries, Picciotto argues, "Eden was no longer to be sought in a foreign landscape but in a different experience of the familiar."¹⁷¹ In *Paradise Lost*, the moment of Adamic awakening allows readers to see one of the most familiar aspects of the everyday—their own feeling of being alive—in a different way. Thus, Milton's Adam provides an opening onto the realization of the Delphic injunction, and in so doing points towards the roots of philosophy itself. Channeling Henri Bergson, Pierre Hadot suggests:

"philosophy is not the construction of a system, but the resolution to look naïvely at the world in and around oneself."¹⁷² By identifying the philosophical impulse with innocent and naïve observation, Hadot connects ancient spiritual exercises with contemporary phenomenology.¹⁷³ Historically situated between the two temporal poles of Hadot's argument, Milton's Adam participates in an ongoing attempt to see the world with fresh eyes, but he also provides a mythopoetic paradigm that lies at the origins of the "naïve" thought that currently calls itself phenomenology. One way of tracing the genealogy of phenomenology is to demonstrate how its procedures and methods are an attempt to regain Adam's voice.¹⁷⁴ Situating his argument under the aegis of the "Delphic motto," Edmund Husserl articulates the phenomenological project as one undertaken by "radically beginning philosophers," thinkers who attempt to get back to origins.¹⁷⁵ It is therefore fitting that he concludes his *Cartesian Meditations* with a quotation from Augustine's *De vera religione*: "Do not wish to go out; go back into yourself. The truth

¹⁷¹ Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence*, 200. This argument also resonates with Picciotto's claims that Milton transforms paradise into a perceptual medium through which the world can be seen anew (404; 435-36).

¹⁷² Hadot, *The Present Alone is our Happiness*, 10.

¹⁷³ Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 251-63.

¹⁷⁴ As Peter Harrison demonstrates, the early modern philosophies of "empiricism" and "idealism" (which, I would add, phenomenology seeks to simultaneously unite and overcome) both found their roots in an attempt to regain Adamic knowledge. See Harrison, *Fall of Man*, 9.

¹⁷⁵ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 157; 6.

dwells in the inner man.”¹⁷⁶ Behind this regress to origins from Husserl, through Descartes, to Augustine, the figure of Adam beckons knowingly.

Yet Adam is not human in the same way as Milton and his readers. When Milton articulated Adam’s awakening, he needed to imagine a moment without precedent: a moment in which Adam becomes immediately and directly aware of himself and his environment, and emerges into a life that is without age, decay, or death—and is therefore unlike any subsequent human life. At his moment of awakening, the structure of lived experience that Adam seeks to relate is at once radically different from and yet strangely similar to the experiences of Milton and his readers. Adam’s life is analogous to other human lives. His account of awakening articulates a recognizable human experience in which a living body explores a new environment. Yet the central term of his account—life—is almost unrecognizably different from its postlapsarian meaning. In *Confessions*, Augustine writes that, as an infant, he entered into a “mortal life” [*vitam mortalem*] or a “living death” [*mortem vitalem*].¹⁷⁷ For Augustine and for the Christian tradition inherited by Milton, the life of the fallen body is so tightly bound to the process of dying that to live is simply to die. In the words of the ubiquitous *Book of Common Prayer*, which still provided the language of ritual in Milton’s time, “In the myddest of lyfe we be in death.”¹⁷⁸ Life is not found in this world, a point Augustine makes clear when he addresses his soul in *Confessions*: “You seek the happy life in the region of death; it is not there. How can there be a happy life where there is not even life?”¹⁷⁹ In the temporal flux of the fallen world lies only death. Milton’s Adam emerges into a world possessing not *vitam mortalem*, but *life itself*. His attempt to describe how “human life began” is as far removed from death as it is from the pangs of birth. Adam’s act of sin may have “brought death into the world” (1.3), but at the moment of his awakening he lives a life that is not in dialectical tension to death.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 157.

¹⁷⁷ *Confessions* 1.6.7.

¹⁷⁸ Church of England, *Booke of the Common Prayer*, 126r.

¹⁷⁹ *Confessions* 4.12.18.

¹⁸⁰ Of course, as Peter Fiore points out in a summary of the Augustinian position, “Adam was immortal not because he could not die (*non posse mori*) but simply because it was not necessary that he should die

To think human life along with Adam is to attempt to think *life in itself*.¹⁸¹ Western accounts of life tend to situate the phenomenon of living between death and being. Life is understandable only insofar it is related to nonlife. Living creatures are set over against the being or matter from which they derive their bodily solidity—there is a reason that the word *human* is etymologically cognate with *humus*¹⁸²—but they are always at risk of losing their individuality and autonomy, and being dispersed back into the realm of nonliving being through the processes of death and decomposition. In the words of Hans Jonas: “So constitutive for life is the possibility of not-being that its very being is essentially a hovering over this abyss, a skirting of its brink: thus being itself has become a constant possibility rather than a given state, ever anew to be laid hold of in opposition to its ever-present contrary, not-being, which will inevitably engulf it in the end.”¹⁸³ On this understanding, life can only be understood as hanging above the threat of its non-being as it pursues its activities in the face of an always-lurking death. A recent turn in phenomenology attempts to move away from this dialectical and relational understanding of life. For example, Renaud Barbaras notes that in Western thought the notion of death tends to be “integrated into the very definition of life.” His writings are attempts to challenge this way of thinking. “Why,” he asks, “must the vitality of life be understood in terms of what threatens it rather than as a dynamism of its own? Why must the living-being’s being alive be apprehended from the perspective of its annihilation? The fact of death does not force us to grant it the status of living’s essential core.”¹⁸⁴ Barbaras’s project—the seeds of which he inherits from Michel Henry and the thrust of which he

(*posse non mori*), and the condition was contingent upon strict observance of the prohibition.” *Milton and Augustine*, 24. Nevertheless, when he is created, Adam’s life does not stand in a necessary dialectical relationship with death.

¹⁸¹ For the difficulty of trying to approach life *as* life, see Thacker, *After Life*.

¹⁸² On this connection, see Harrison, *Dominion of the Dead*.

¹⁸³ Jonas, *Phenomenon of Life*, 4. Evan Thompson agrees with Jonas, and bases his understanding of living on the ever-present background necessity of “precarious conditions.” For a concise description of this position, see Thompson, “Living Ways of Sense Making.”

¹⁸⁴ Barbaras, “Life, Movement, and Desire,” 11. On the theme of thinking life *as* life, see also Barbaras, *Introduction à une phénoménologie de la vie*; Henry, *I Am the Truth*; and Thacker, *After Life*.

shares with such contemporary thinkers as Eugene Thacker—is to think life in itself. Those who attempt to write this phenomenology of life in this manner are, I suggest, Milton's heirs, trying to think Adam in his vitality.

Milton's depiction of Adamic awakening brings to light a sentience that is analogous to that felt by those who read *Paradise Lost*, but is nearly impossible to think. Adam feels a pure life that is unrelated to death. Yet all who read Milton's poem share in the *relationship* between sentience and the "human life" that Adam describes in his "story." That is, Adam's sentience is to his quest for self-knowledge as postlapsarian sentience is to the general human quest for self-knowledge. Despite the fact that Adam's life is radically other than the lives of his descendants, his account of beginnings still offers a window onto the human condition. In *Of Education*, Milton contends that the "end of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents."¹⁸⁵ If part of this process of restoration is to move in the direction proposed by the Delphic oracle, then Adam's description of his emergence into life provides a model for repairing one's self-knowledge. Adam demonstrates how a naïve attention to the felt realities of the living body and the movements of thought lead to a fuller understanding of the self, the ambient world, and rhythms of life.

¹⁸⁵ Milton, *Of Education*, 227.

Chapter 2

Montaigne and the Immanence of Sentience

Approximately four years after Montaigne recovered from his 1560s horse riding accident, he composed “De l’exercitation”—usually translated as “Of Practice” or “Of Exercise”—a work that some critics consider to be among his most important.¹ In the 1582 edition of the *Essais*, Montaigne deletes a phrase, published in the first edition of 1580, in which he claims to record his brush with death “four years” after the accident occurred.² Combined with Montaigne’s suggestion that the event took place during “our third civil war, or the second (I do not remember which),” this excised phrase enabled Pierre Villey to date the chapter’s composition to 1573–74.³ Although critics have commented on the importance of these “four years,” their erasure is surely as significant as their survival.⁴ The temporal precision of the deleted phrase works against Montaigne’s nonchalant inability to remember the difference between wars. “De l’exercitation” is dedicated to memory, the ability to recall, anatomize, and interpret experiences. By erasing a temporal marker, Montaigne retreats from the specificity of calendric time into the haziness of the remembered past, solidifying his contention that the “event” he describes is, as the conclusion of the 1580 version of the chapter suggests, “trivial.”⁵ Yet the erasure also expands the implications of Montaigne’s brush with death

¹ For the conventions of abbreviation I use in citing Montaigne, see note 25 in the Introduction. In their modern translations, both Donald Frame and Michael Screech translate “De l’exercitation” as “Of Practice.” In his fuller early seventeenth-century translation, John Florio renders the title as “Of exercise or practise.” Montaigne, *The Essayes*, trans. Florio, 214. A number of critics believe that “De l’exercitation” played a decisive role in Montaigne’s growth as a writer. For example, Terrence Cave claims that “the original text of ‘On practising’ represents a key step in the evolution of the *Essais* into a sustained exercise in self-reflection. ... One may reasonably conclude that the accident itself played an important if obscure role in the genesis of the whole project of registering the wayward and elusive movements of the mind.” *How to Read Montaigne*, 15.

² In the 1580 edition, he writes: “et me sens encore quatre ans après de la secousse de ceste froissure.” I quote from BMS, 1520. The only two words deleted from this phrase were “quatre ans.”

³ F 2.6.268; BMS 2.6.391: “Pendant nos troisiemes troubles ou deuxiesmes (il ne me souvient pas bien de cela).” For the details of this dating process, see VS 370. See also Montaigne, *Selected Works*, ed. and trans. Frame, 92, n.1.

⁴ See, for example, Cave, “Master-Mind Lecture: Montaigne,” 188. Cave claims that the “four years” solidifies the importance of memory and anamnesis in “De l’exercitation.”

⁵ F 2.6.272; BMS 2.6.396: “Ce conte d’un événement si léger, est assez vain.”

by removing the temporal contingency that anchors events to dates. Abstracted from datable history, Montaigne's accident occupies a broader exemplarity through which readers can approach their own mortality.

Although Montaigne claims that his thoughts are not intended to be exemplary—"What I write here is not my teaching, but my study; it is not a lesson for others, but for me"—he hopes to encourage others to investigate themselves, to realize that, "as Pliny says, each man is a good education to himself, provided he has the capacity to spy on himself from close up."⁶ "De l'exercitation" is deeply engaged with questions of self-knowledge and, by extension, a general understanding of the human condition. In a late addition to the essay, Montaigne articulates a defense of writing about oneself.⁷ There is, he claims, "no description equal in difficulty" to the "description of oneself," for it is "a thorny undertaking, and more so than it seems, to follow a movement so wandering as that of our spirit, to penetrate the opaque depths of its innermost folds, to pick out and immobilize the innumerable flutterings that agitate it."⁸ Spying on himself from "close up," Montaigne works to "immobilize" experience in words so that he can begin to know himself. He derives his understanding of the Delphic injunction from Xenophon's portrait of Socrates, in which self-knowledge is identified as the "knowledge of the nature and limits of one's powers."⁹ Given this connection between limits and self-knowledge, it is fitting that Montaigne discusses his method in "De l'exercitation," since its topic presents the limits of his capacity to spy on and know himself. "De l'exercitation" attempts what is perhaps the most difficult act of "description": the limits

⁶ F 2.6.272; BMS 2.6.396: "Or, comme dit Pline, chacun est à soy-mesmes une très bonne discipline, pourveu qu'il ait la suffisance de s'espier de près. Ce n'est pas icy ma doctrine, c'est mon estude: et n'est pas la leçon d'autry, c'est la mienne."

⁷ For an analysis of parts of this addition, see Tournon, *Montaigne*, 18-19 and 39-40.

⁸ F 2.6.273; BMS 2.6.396-97: "Il n'est description pareille en difficulté, à la description de soy-mesmes. ... C'est une espineuse entreprinse, et plus qu'il ne semble, de suyvre une alleure si vagabonde, que celle de nostre esprit; de penetrer les profondeurs opaques de ses replis internes: de choisir et arrester tant de menus airs de ses agitations"

⁹ Nehamas, *The Art of Living*, 106; referring to Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 4.2.24-29. Montaigne also used a version of this saying—"Mentre si puo"—as a motto on a number of his books. See F 3.3.622, n.1. Montaigne owned a copy of Sébastien Castellion's 1551 Latin translation of Xenophon. See de Botton and Pottière-Sperry, 294. For Montaigne's discussion of the Delphic injunction, see F 3.9.766: "'Except for you, O man,' said that God, 'each thing studies itself first, and, according to its needs, has limits to its labors and desires.'" Self-knowledge is the knowledge of one's limits.

of experience, the hinterlands of awareness. In its most basic form, this limit is the inaccessibility of death.

Approaching the topic of death, Montaigne claims that since “[r]easoning and education” are not “powerful enough to lead us to action,” in order to behave appropriately, we must “exercise and form our soul by experience to the way we want it to go.”¹⁰ It is for this reason that soldiers perform drills and athletes practice routines. Yet “as for dying, which is the greatest task we have to perform, practice cannot help us.” One can “fortify” oneself “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.”¹¹ Everyone encounters death without previous experience; it is the occasion for which one most needs to prepare, but its opacity renders practice impossible. Proper “action” requires willed engagement, which Montaigne invokes with active verbs: *exerçons*, *formons*, *voulons*, *essayer*.¹² He uses *exercitation* as a synonym for *experience*, a word that could also mean experiment. Both nouns imply focused repetition, necessary for practice or experimentation alike, but rendered inoperable by death’s singularity. Bringing the vocabulary of effort into proximity with the absence of effort, Montaigne suggests that his topic is not death, but rather suspended animation, a lived encounter with one’s limits in a zone of experience where the line separating active from passive all but disappears.¹³

“De l’exercitation” is a chapter framed by death, but it is in fact dedicated to the experience of minimal vitality revealed in moments of breakdown, when normal modes

¹⁰ F 2.6.267; BMS 2.6.388: “Il est malaisé que le discours et l’instruction, encore que nostre creance s’y applique volontiers, soient assez puissantes pour nous acheminer jusques à l’action, si outre cela nous n’exerçons et formons nostre ame par experience au train auquel nous la voulons renger.”

¹¹ F 2.6.267; BMS 2.6.388-89: “Mais à mourir, qui est la plus grande besoigne que nous ayons à faire, l’exercitation ne nous y peut ayder. On se peut, par usage et par experience, fortifier contre les douleurs, la honte, l’indigence et tels autres accidents; mais, quant à la mort, nous ne la pouvons essayer qu’une fois; nous y sommes tous apprentifs quand nous y venons.”

¹² For Montaigne’s use of words that convey the “act of trying” in “De l’exercitation,” see Kritzman, *The Fabulous Imagination*, 88.

¹³ For a recent treatment of suspended animation, see Luper, *The Philosophy of Death*, 44-46.

of living are thrown into crisis.¹⁴ Montaigne plunges into his “opaque depths” and “innermost folds” in order to express the point at which felt experience first emerges from biological vitality. He presents an account of his accident that seeks to clarify the haze in which the willed actions requisite for human life first emerge from involuntary processes. For Montaigne, both the freedom to act and the necessities that condition that freedom are, in different ways, felt. In “De l’exercitation,” he explores how the voluntary shades into the involuntary by drawing on a range of conditions that test the limits of awareness: epileptic fits, swoons, extended comas, amputated but still writhing limbs, sleep, dreams, and death.¹⁵ Relating his own experience to other states, he develops a spiritual exercise that seeks to interrogate the point at which the very possibility of exercise disappears.¹⁶ It is at this point, where effort vanishes but an almost non-existent awareness remains, that Montaigne discovers the feeling of being alive.

Montaigne claims that his accident is a trivial, contingent, and unimportant event. Yet as a historical document “De l’exercitation” reveals a great deal. As Saul Frampton notes, Montaigne’s account of his accident is a “momentous event in terms of the redirection of human knowledge that it suggests: away from a Christian humanist yearning for the afterlife, and back to the human, to the body, to the *natural*.”¹⁷ Montaigne is by no means the first thinker to make nature into a privileged explanatory principle. In the Renaissance, nature was often figured as autonomous, free to nurture human abilities and foibles. For Montaigne and many others, “man is,” in Hugo Friedrich’s words, “a creature of a nature that has its own power, that forms the single instance of the living of a life, and that carries within it an order that no longer relies upon grace.”¹⁸ Responding

¹⁴ In making this claim, I argue against such critics as Lawrence Kritzman, who claims that Montaigne does not recall an actual experience in “De l’exercitation,” but rather a “fictive process.” See Kritzman, *The Fabulous Imagination*, 92.

¹⁵ In this sense, Montaigne anticipates an intriguing and understudied thread of contemporary phenomenology, which is concerned with the how the involuntary is given to experience. See Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*; and Leder, *The Absent Body*. John Lyons notes that in “De l’exercitation” Montaigne provides descriptions that employ a “kind of ‘bracketing’ that a later phenomenologist might envy.” *Before Imagination*, 47.

¹⁶ On spiritual exercises, see Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 81-125.

¹⁷ Frampton, *When I am Playing with My Cat*, 85-86. Italics in original.

¹⁸ Friedrich, *Montaigne*, 26.

to the ethos of his time, Montaigne finds in such ancient writers as the newly rediscovered Lucretius both an antecedent of and confirmation for his concept of nature. Yet however much Montaigne's nature may be derivative of and dependent on ancient and sixteenth-century thinkers, it is historically important and original insofar as Montaigne uses this concept as the central criterion for interpreting the feeling of being alive. In "De l'exercitation," vital feeling is a natural, immanent phenomenon. Early modernity marks a watershed in the interpretive history of sentience, for it opens up the real possibility that this feeling is a mundane, bodily occurrence.

Montaigne's attempt to arrest his experience in language pairs a detailed expression of sentience with an implicit naturalistic interpretation.¹⁹ Revivifying Lucretius's ideas by using them as a lens through which to understand his experience, Montaigne approaches the feeling of being alive in an immanent manner, which is, however, inflected by traces of a transcendence that silently structures his account. Digging into his life, Montaigne discovers nature. His understanding of nature both absorbs and alters a set of powers and relationships previously articulated as divine. Yet such naturalism does not mean that God disappears; rather, in Montaigne's hands, the concept of nature renders a formerly transcendent structure of experience immanent while, at the same, transferring the site of transcendence into the recalcitrant interstices of experience, where awareness slips away. I begin this chapter with a brief outline of the Augustinian tradition of vital feeling that Montaigne inherited. After demonstrating how Montaigne's depiction of sentience appropriates, transforms, and expands the resources of the Augustinian tradition, I show how "De l'exercitation" employs a Lucretian conceptual vocabulary to express feeling. I conclude by showing how Jean-Jacques Rousseau, one of Montaigne's heirs, exploits the descriptive possibilities established in "De l'exercitation" in order to turn the feeling once associated with divine touch into a means of self-deification. The feeling of being alive is a transhistorical phenomenon, but it is understood and interpreted in historically contingent ways.

¹⁹ I use *naturalism* purposefully, since Montaigne referred to himself as a naturalist. See Hoffman, "The Investigation of Nature," 163-82.

Augustine and Divine Feeling

Augustine's *Confessions* is perhaps the most important predecessor for Montaigne's exploration of lived experience. Montaigne quotes frequently from *De civitate Dei* and other works, but never directly from *Confessions*, a fact that has led some to speculate that he was not influenced by the latter.²⁰ However, more recent scholarship suggests that, in the words of Brian Stock, "Augustine is one of Montaigne's philosophical counselors."²¹ Montaigne certainly had access to Augustine's text: a new version of *Confessions*, edited by Jeronimo Torres, was published in Paris in 1570, and a French translation appeared in 1577. The editors of the most recent scholarly edition of the *Essais* suggest that Montaigne's defense of self-description in "De l'exercitation" is in fact a translation and compilation of disparate moments in *Confessions*.²² When, for example, Montaigne discusses how difficult it is "to penetrate the opaque depths of [his spirit's] innermost folds [*de penetrer les profondeurs opaques de ses replis internes*]," the editors suggest that Montaigne appropriates Augustine's description of memory: "This power of memory is great, very great, my God. It is a vast and infinite profundity [*penetrable*]. Who has plumbed [*pervenit*] its bottom [*fundum*]?"²³

Like Montaigne, when Augustine examines himself he discovers that he can never "grasp the totality of what [he is]."²⁴ He contains depths impossible to know, in part because in those depths he discovers God or absolute life. In order to discover this divine vitality within, Augustine turns away from the external world, within which he has been enmeshed from infancy. In *Confessions*, Augustine describes how as an infant his "desires were internal." Since adults had "no means of entering [his] soul" and he could not fulfill his own desires, he communicated in signs, imposing himself on the "external"

²⁰ For this influential view, see Villey, *Les Sources*, 321.

²¹ Stock, *Ethics Through Literature*, 35. See also Mathieu-Castellani, "Les *Confessions* de saint Augustin dans les *Essais* de Montaigne," 211-26; and Martin, "The *Confessions* of Montaigne."

²² BMS 1519-20, 1522.

²³ F 2.6.273; BMS 2.6.396-97. Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.8.15: "Magna ista vis est memoriae, magna nimis, deus, penetrare amplum et infinitum: quis ad fundum eius pervenit?"

²⁴ *Confessions*, 10.8.15.

world.²⁵ This movement outwards accelerates as he grows older. As a young man, “[his] soul thrust itself to outward things, miserably avid to be scratched by contact with the world of the senses.”²⁶ Yet as the image of scratching [*scalpi*] suggests, it is impossible to gain lasting satisfaction from worldly things, all of which “rise and set” in time, emerging into the world only to “rush towards non-being.”²⁷ The world appears at a distance, as a horizon of manifestation caught in the flux of time. There is “no point of rest” in the world. The things within it “flee away and cannot be followed with the bodily senses. No one can fully grasp [these things] even while they are present.”²⁸ In this passage, Augustine describes the transitoriness of worldly flux—the fact that things are made, exist in time, and are destroyed. But he also attends to the basic structure of manifestation within which the world appears to human perception. Martin Heidegger later defined the quality of things that Augustine describes as their propensity to “flee” as the constitutive feature of the world: its “transcendence.”²⁹ The world is a structure of transcendence because there is always more of it to explore, another temporal or spatial horizon that opens itself. As Augustine moves through the world, it retreats before him, tantalizing with a promise of completeness that “flees” as quickly as it approaches.

The world is a mode of manifestation that is external to the body, mediated by the senses, caught up in passing time, and necessarily incomplete. Life is radically opposed to the world. Addressing his soul, Augustine chastises it: “There is no rest where you seek for it. Seek for what you seek, but it is not where you are looking for it. You seek the happy life in the region of death; it is not there. How can there be a happy life where there is not even life?”³⁰ In the flux of the world lies only death. Life, Augustine claims, cannot be found there. But surely, one might argue, the world is populated by living beings. The Augustinian retort is that all creatures are born and die; they are fully immersed in the

²⁵ Ibid., 1.6.8.

²⁶ Ibid., 3.1.1.

²⁷ Ibid., 4.10.15.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ For the transcendence of world, see Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 401-18. On Heidegger’s connection to Augustine, see Heidegger, *Phenomenology of the Religious Life*, nearly half of which is dedicated to Augustine.

³⁰ *Confessions*, 4.12.18.

flux of time, and can more accurately be said to live a “dying life [*vitam mortalem*]” or a “living death [*mortem vitalem*].”³¹ When Augustine observes worldly creatures or even his own body, he sees only a steady movement towards death. Life is absent from the mode of appearance that belongs to the world. Where, then, is life to be found? For Augustine, life is with God. The two terms overlap almost to the point of identity. For example, while describing mistaken Manichean beliefs about the divine, Augustine abruptly addresses God: “But you are no body. Nor are you soul, which is the life of bodies; for the life of bodies is superior to bodies themselves, and a more certain object of knowledge. But you are the life of souls [*vita es animarum*], the life of lives [*vita vitarum*]. You live in dependence only on yourself [*vivens te ipsa*], and you never change, life of my soul [*vita animae meae*].”³² Augustine positions the soul between a body, which it animates, and the life of God, which in turn animates the soul. God is the life of the soul, the life of all that live, and even life itself. If the soul occupies a space between the living body and divine life, then it is capable of moving either outwards into the world or inwards towards God. Augustine addresses his soul: “you animate the mass of your body and provide it with life... But your God is for you the life of your life.”³³ Pushing the genitive and the nominative forms of life together—*vitae vita*—Augustine emphasizes how closely they are interwoven. All life is grounded in God, and the self-examination central to *Confessions* and so much of Augustine’s writing is necessarily a turn towards the divine, “the power which begets life in my mind and in the innermost recesses of my thinking.”³⁴

A dominant thread binding *Confessions* together is Augustine’s quest to come into contact with the “life of my life [*vita vitae meae*].”³⁵ He demonstrates three times how such an act is possible: first, through an early spiritual exercise that allows him only a

³¹ Ibid., 1.6.7.

³² *Confessions*, 3.4.10: “...et eis certiora corpora, quae tamen non es. Sed nec anima es, quae est corporum (ideo melior vita corporum certiorque quam corpora), sed tu vita es animarum, vita vitarum, vivens te ipsa, et non mutaris, vita animae meae.”

³³ Ibid., 10.6.10.

³⁴ Ibid., 1.13.21: “deus, lumen cordis et panis oris intus animae meae et virtus maritans mentem meam et sinum cogitationes meae.”

³⁵ Ibid., 7.1.2.

“flash of a trembling glance” of God’s “invisible nature”;³⁶ second, in the vision at Ostia that brings him to a “region of inexhaustible abundance” where time has no bearing;³⁷ and third, in the extended meditation on the nature of this mystical process that provides the structuring principle for Book 10. The first two instances recount events from Augustine’s personal history, while the latter is an attempt to develop a detailed account of how these experiences play out within the soul. In all three cases, the process is the same. Augustine begins his search for God in the “external world” by “plung[ing]” into created things, all of which tell him they did not make themselves.³⁸ Moving away from things in the world, he retraces his external senses to the “inward force” of the soul by which it “fills” the body “with life.”³⁹ Burrowing even further, Augustine searches the “palaces” of memory, but finds only the “force of human life,” not the “true life” he seeks.⁴⁰ He cannot locate life in his “consciousness,” but he knows it is within.⁴¹ Augustine knows that absolute unchanging life, the generative principle of his soul, belongs to a non-worldly mode of appearance, one that is inner, immediate, and partakes somehow of eternity. Since true life is found deep within one’s own “vast profundity” and can be accessed only through an “inward discernment,” life is only ever available to oneself.⁴² The world is shared, manifest to all. Life is profoundly private, a manifestation intuited only by those who turn from the transcendence of the world and enter an immanence even more intimate than that of consciousness, a principle “more inward than my most inward part” [*interior intimo meo*].⁴³

In Ostia, Augustine comes into felt contact with this divine principle. Shortly before his mother’s death, the two discuss “what quality of life the eternal life of the saints will have, a life which neither eye has seen nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of

³⁶ Ibid., 7.17.23.

³⁷ Ibid., 9.10.24.

³⁸ Ibid., 10.27.38; 10.6.9.

³⁹ Ibid., 10.7.11.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 10.8.12; 10.17.26.

⁴¹ Ibid., 10.25.36.

⁴² Ibid., 4.14.22; 6.16.26.

⁴³ Ibid., 3.6.11.

man.”⁴⁴ Still condemned to the life of the body, Augustine and Monica cannot yet fully enter into this divine life that must be understood without reference to the “bodily senses” and the temporality within which they still live. Yet they nonetheless open their hearts to drink the “waters flowing from your spring on high, the spring of life which is with you” in an effort to understand eternal vitality “in some degree.”⁴⁵ In this attempt to approach the divine life that subtends their own lives, mother and son follow a Neoplatonic pattern of ascent, moving from corporeal bodies, into their souls, and then “beyond” into a “region of inexhaustible abundance” where “life is the wisdom by which all creatures come into being.”⁴⁶ This vital wisdom is not itself “brought into being,” for it has no “past or future” but is “eternal.” As Augustine and Monica “talked and panted after” this eternal life “more inward than [their] most inward part[s],” they “touched it in some small degree [*atingimus*] by a moment [*modice*] of total concentration of the heart.”⁴⁷ Augustine attempts to feel God through a strenuous ascetic program, a maximization of effort dedicated to “total concentration.” For the briefest of instants, the bishop and his mother brush against the eternal life from which their own lives emerge.

In order to feel life itself, Augustine and Monica undergo a process of retreat from the immersive nature of everyday life:

If to anyone the tumult of the flesh has fallen silent, if the images of earth, water, and air are quiescent, if the heavens themselves are shut out and the very soul itself is making no sound and is surpassing itself by no longer thinking about itself, if all dreams and visions in the imagination are excluded, if all language and every sign and everything transitory is silent ... we would hear [God] in person without mediation. That is how it was when at that moment we extended

⁴⁴ Ibid., 9.10.23: “qualis futura esset vita aeterna sanctorum, quam nec oculus vidit nec auris audivit nec in cor hominis ascendit.”

⁴⁵ Ibid., 9.10.23.

⁴⁶ On Augustine’s debt to Plotinus in this passage, see Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self*, 31-44.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 9.10.24: “et dum loquimur et inhiamus illi, atingimus eam modice toto ictu cordis.”

our reach and in a flash of mental energy attained [*atingimus*] the eternal wisdom which abides beyond all things.⁴⁸

If all aspects of the body and world are “shut out” and the soul uncoils its natural reflexivity so as to surpass itself, it is possible to recognize one’s proximity to the divine. For only in an incredibly swift [*rapida*] moment is thought [*cogitatione*] able to touch the “eternal wisdom” that is coterminous with God’s life. Both times that Augustine describes his shared experience of ecstasy at Ostia, he expresses his moment of divine contact by using the verb *atingo* (to touch). Deep within the recesses of his soul, far from the world and even the representations of the world mobilized by memory and imagination, Augustine can figure his experience of divine contact only through imagery of touch. Using an inner tactility, Augustine feels divine life within him.

Augustine establishes an authoritative account of the structure of what I am calling *divine feeling* that would be followed by numerous theologians and mystics throughout late antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and well into modernity. This structure possesses five components. First, contact with the divine takes place in what Augustine repeatedly calls a “flash,” an instant that opens onto the timeless.⁴⁹ Second, this contact is described in terms of feeling, a tactility that supersedes and transcends understanding. Elaborating on Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius influentially encodes this primacy of feeling: “by transcendence of yourself and all other things, and by thus cleansing your feelings of all worldly, fleshly and natural pleasures, and your intellect of everything that can be known according to its own form, then ... you will be drawn up in your feelings above understanding to the radiance of divine darkness that transcends all being.”⁵⁰ Once one leaves behind the pretensions of the intellect, the only vehicle for divine contact is feeling. Third, being thus “drawn up in your feelings” eliminates the self. In a popular

⁴⁸ Ibid., 9.10.26: “si cui sileat tumultus carnis, sileant phantasiae terrae et aquarum et aeris, sileant et poli et ipsa sibi anima sileat, et transeat se non se cognitando, sileant somnia et imaginariae revelationes, omnis lingua et omne signum et quidquid transeundo fit si cui sileat omnino ... quem in his anamus, ipsum sine his audieamus, sicut nunc extendimus nos et rapida cogitatione atingimus aeternam sapientiam super omnia manentem...”

⁴⁹ Ibid., 7.17.23; 9.10.26.

⁵⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, “Mystical Theology of St. Denis,” 2. As Eugene Thacker demonstrates, Pseudo-Dionysius was deeply engaged with approaching “a life beyond being.” *After Life*, 36.

collection of Augustinian writings that circulated widely in pre-modern Europe, this evacuation is described with striking simplicity: “Through love the soule withdraweth herselfe, and departeth from the bodilie senses, to the end that feeling God, she may have no feeling of her selfe.”⁵¹ The soul that feels God can no longer feel itself, for contact with the divine temporarily obliterates the self. Fourth, this evacuation of self is experienced as an inner event, a connection with the absolute life that conditions one’s own life. Expanding Augustine’s insights, Master Eckhart claims: “There is one power in the soul and that not merely power but being; and not merely being; it radiates life, and is so pure, so high and so innately noble that creatures cannot live in it; none but God can abide therein.”⁵² When one feels “contact” with God—something that Eckhart, discussing Augustine, calls “actual gnosis”—one touches “pure” life.⁵³ All of these elements (instantaneousness, felt contact, the loss of self, and the presence of absolute vitality) lend this experience its fifth quality, indescribability. As Augustine claims in *Enarrationes in Psalmos*: “Before you felt God, you thought you could express God; you begin to feel Him, and then feel that what you feel cannot be expressed.”⁵⁴ Once one has felt the divine, one recognizes that such a feeling cannot be translated from the register of affective experience into discourse.

The structure of divine feeling established by Augustine and inherited by Christian Europe is clearly expressed by the anonymous English author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, who stressed the affective component of devotional practice. In the *Book of Privy Counselling*, he leads readers through a process of contemplation and renunciation of intellect that culminates in a felt experience of the divine: “In þis tyme it is þat þou boþe seest þi God & þi love, & nakidly felist hym also bi goostly onying to his love in þe

⁵¹ Rogers, trans., *S. Augustines Manuel*, 54. This text was translated into English in 1581 by Thomas Rogers, and was part of a series of English editions and translations that derived from an active French publishing scene: 31 Latin and French editions of the compilation left the presses of Paris and Lyon between 1481 and 1593. I derive these figures from a search of Andrew Pettigree’s *Universal Short Title Catalogue*, <<http://www.ustc.ac.uk/>>. For a good summary of how this textual tradition, see Staykova, “The Augustinian Soliloquies of an Early Modern Reader.”

⁵² Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart*, 202.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁵⁴ Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 100.6 (translation modified): “Ante enim quam sentire, dicere te putabas Deum: incipis sentire, et ibi sentis dici non posse quod sentis.”

soueryn poynte of þi spirit, as he is in hym-self, bot blyndely, as it may be here, vtterly spoylid of þi-self & nakidly cloped in hymself as he is, uncloped & not lappid in any of þees sensible felynges (be þei never so sweet ne so holy) þat mowen falle in þis liif.”⁵⁵ Meditative ecstasy is here figured in terms of touch. One should strive to “nakidly felist” God, such that one is stripped of all “sensible felyngs” and “nakidly cloped” in divinity. To move towards such divine contiguity, one must “wipouten cesyng lene to þe nakid felying of þi-self,” and it is through this feeling of one’s existence, stripped of all intellectual activity, that one can eventually “fele God & lake þe felyng of [oneself].” Reason and intellect must be avoided: “*Scientia inflat, karitas edificat*. In knowyng is trauaile, in feling is rest.”⁵⁶ The author is explicit about this relationship between divine feeling and rest, for “wel is þis werk [of contemplation] licnyd to a slepe.” Just as “in þe slepe þe vse of þe bodely wittys is cesid, þat þe body may take his ful rest ... ri3t so in þis goostly sleep þe wantoun questyons of þe wilde goostly wittys, ymaginatyue resons, ben fast bounden & vtterly voidid.”⁵⁷ Sleep is akin to the absence of sensation and intellect necessary for divine feeling. The author claims in the *Cloud of Unknowing* that this contact is “þe schortest werke of alle þat man may ymagyn. It is neiper lenger ne schorter þen is an athomus; þe which athomus, by þe diffinicion of trewe philisophres in þe sciens of astronomye, is þe leest partie of tyme.”⁵⁸ The opening that allows one to feel God’s eternal embrace occurs in an instant, an atom of time—in the briefest flash imaginable, a flash in which the contemplative soul begins to “sleep,” to feel God both in spite and because of its own absence.

Montaigne was deeply aware of both this tradition and its Augustinian roots, and his description of the experience he underwent after his accident employs the same five-part structure. Yet although there are many analogues between the structure of divine feeling and the structure of what I am calling Montaigne’s natural feeling, the French essayist repeatedly rejects the affective mode advocated by the practitioners of this religious

⁵⁵ Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, 169.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 171-72.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 152.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 17.

tradition. For example, Montaigne comments with derision on “those venerable souls, exalted by ardent piety and religion to constant and conscientious meditation on divine things.” He claims that because they anticipate the “enjoyment of eternal food,” they “scorn to give their attention to our beggarly, watery, and ambiguous comforts.”⁵⁹ Nor is he only wary of Christian mystics who neglect the body. He is equally leery of the pagan “transports of Archimedes” or of the philosophical “ecstasies” of Socrates: “these transcendental humors frighten me, like lofty and inaccessible places.”⁶⁰ True to his preference away from “a wholly spiritual repose” and towards the “support” of “bodily comforts,” Montaigne transmutes the structures and paradoxes of divine feeling into an embodied and natural register.⁶¹ He connects the feeling of being alive to a set of interpretive possibilities that are not inherently secular, but that would be easily pushed towards a conception of sentience shorn of transcendence.

Montaigne and Natural Feeling

After Montaigne falls from his horse, he enters a state of suspended animation. He explicitly models his efforts to describe how it felt to inhabit the border between felt awareness and oblivion on the exercises of Julius Canus, a Roman philosopher accused of conspiracy against Caligula and beheaded. Montaigne introduces Canus by claiming that some ancients attempted to experience death: “they tried to taste and savour it [the time remaining in their lives] even at the point of death, and strained [*bandé*] their spirits

⁵⁹ F 3.13.856; BMS 3.13.1165: “Je ne touche pas icy, et ne mesle point à cette marmaille d’hommes que nous sommes, et à ceste vanité de desirs et cogitations, qui nous divertissent, ces ames venerables, eslevées par ardeur de devotion et religion, à une constante et conscientieuse meditation des choses divines, lesquelles preoccupant par l’effort d’une vive et vehemente esperance l’usage de la nourriture eternelle, but final, et dernier arrest des Chrestiens desirs: seul plaisir constant, incorruptible: desdaignent de s’attendre à nos necessiteuses commoditez, fluides et ambiguës: et resignent facilement au corps, le soin et l’usage, de la pasture sensuelle et temporelle.”

⁶⁰ F 3.13.856; BMS 3.13.1165-66: “Quand ce seroient les ravissements d’Archimedes mesme, que seroit-ce? ... Ces humeurs transcendentes m’effrayent, comme les lieux hautains et inaccessibles. Et rien ne m’est fascheux à digerer en la vie de Socrates, que ses ecstases et ses demoneries. Rien si humain en Platon, que ce pourquoy ils disent qu’on l’appelle divin.”

⁶¹ F 1.39.182; BMS 1.38.251: “Les gens plus sages peuvent se forger un repos tout spirituel, ayant l’ame forte et vigoureuse: Moy qui l’ay commune, il faut que j’ayde à me soustenir par les commoditez corporelles.”

to see what this passage was.”⁶² These men imported tasting and savoring, capacities of a living body, into the maw of death. They strained to glimpse—and therefore hang suspended in—the “passage” between life and death. When asked how he felt at his execution, Canus replied: “I was thinking ... about holding myself ready and with all my powers intent [*bandé*] to see whether in that instant of death, so short and so brief, I shall be able to perceive any dislodgement of the soul, and whether it will have any feeling of its departure; so that, if I learn anything about it, I may return later, if I can, to give the information to my friends.”⁶³ Canus’s speech is an unattributed expansion of an anecdote from Seneca’s *De tranquillitate animi*, a source that offers a less explicit account: “Canus replied, ‘I have decided to take note whether in that most fleeting moment the spirit [*animus*] is aware of its departure from the body’; and he promised that if he discovered anything he would visit his friends in turn and reveal to them the state of the soul [*animarum*].”⁶⁴ Here, Canus aims to maintain awareness or feeling [*sensurus*] in the instant of death. Seneca’s version of the story is framed in less active terms than Montaigne’s: the former aims to “take note” of what happens, but the latter holds “all [his] powers intent.” Montaigne stresses the effort involved in confronting death, twice using *bandé*, a verb that Randle Cotgrave’s 1611 *Dictionary of the French and English Tongues* translates as “bent, as a bow.”⁶⁵ Montaigne elevates Seneca’s narrative into a kinetically willed exercise.

The Canus of “De l’exercitation” also presents a more layered typology of awareness. He begins with sensation, claiming that he will tense his powers so that in the instant of

⁶² F 2.6.267; BMS 2.6.389: “ils ont essayé en la mort mesme de la goustier et savourer: et ont bandé leur esprit pour voir que c'estoit de ce passage.” In the context of this passage, they are actually savoring *time*, but it is necessarily lived time, the time available to one during one’s life, the time of personal experience.

⁶³ F 2.6.267; BMS 2.6.389: “Je pensois, luy respondit-il, à me tenir prest et bandé de toute ma force, pour voir si, en cet instant de la mort, si court et si brief, je pourray appercevoir quelque deslogement de l’ame, et si elle aura quelque ressentiment de son yssue, pour, si j’en aprens quelque chose, en revenir donner apres, si je puis, advertissement à mes amis.”

⁶⁴ Seneca, *Four Dialogues*, 91. The Latin can be found in *De tranquillitate animi*, 14: “‘Obseruare,’ inquit Canus ‘proposi illo uelocissimo momento an sensurus sit animus exire se’, promisitque, si quid explorasset, circumiturum amicos et indicaturum quis esset animarum status.’” The connection to this Senecan text was first noted by Villey, *Les Sources*, 215. Other early modern writers used the anecdote, notably the English humanist Thomas Lupset in *A Compendious and Very Fruteful Treatyse*, 266-68.

⁶⁵ Cotgrave, *Dictionary of the French and English Tongues*, *bandé*.

death he can “see” [*voir*] both if he can “perceive” [*apercevoir*] the soul dislodging and if there is any “feeling” [*ressentiment*] of departure. If he learns [*apprend*] anything, he will attempt to return and convey what he learned [*advertissement*]. Montaigne’s Canus begins with an intention to see whether he can perceive his soul’s “dislodgement,” and then switches into an affective reflexivity, aiming to determine if the soul will feel itself slipping away. Both take place in an *instant de la mort* that simultaneously separates and straddles life and death. If, through inner sight or inner touch, Canus’s soul registers its dislodgement, then it can translate these sensations into knowledge, learn about its own nature, and communicate what it has learnt. To convey this sharing, Montaigne uses *advertissement*, which Jean Nicot’s 1573 *Dictionnaire* translates as *monitum* (teaching) or *significatio* (signal or indication). In Montaigne’s expansion, Canus’s felt reflexivity is turned first into knowledge and then into signification.

Montaigne believes that one can, while still living, gain an approximation of the experience Canus sought. “[T]here is,” he claims, “a certain way of familiarizing ourselves with death and trying it out to some extent. We can have an experience of it that is, if not entire and perfect, at least not useless.”⁶⁶ For example, humans approach death through sleep, which “deprives us of all action and all feeling” and all “knowledge” of ourselves, and in so doing mimics death.⁶⁷ There are states that capture the cessation of life with more rigor: “those who by some violent accident have fallen into a faint and lost all feelings, those, in my opinion, have been very close to seeing death’s true and natural face.”⁶⁸ These people confront nonexistence in a way that surpasses sleep because they *unexpectedly* lose feeling. There is a way of practicing for death, albeit one subject to contingency and thus less a matter of exercising and forming

⁶⁶ F 2.6.268; BMS 2.6.389: “Il me semble toutefois qu’il y a quelque façon de nous apprivoiser à elle et de l’essayer aucunement. Nous en pouvons avoir experience, sinon entiere et parfaite, au moins telle, qu’elle ne soit pas inutile.”

⁶⁷ F 2.6.268; BMS 2.6.390: “Combien facilement nous passons du veiller au dormir, avec combien peu d’interest nous perdons la connoissance de la lumiere et de nous! A l’aventure pourroit sembler inutile et contre nature la faculté du sommeil, qui nous prive de toute action et de tout sentiment.”

⁶⁸ F 2.6.268 (translation modified); BMS 2.6.390 “ceux qui sont tombez par quelque violent accident en defaillance de coeur, et qui y ont perdu tous sentimens, ceux là à mon advis ont esté bien près de voir son vray et naturel visage.”

one's soul than of having one's soul exercised and formed by "accident."⁶⁹ Montaigne rejects the effort that Canus claims necessary to experience death and the meditative labour that Augustine thought requisite for divine contact.

He then moves into a discussion of his own accident. While riding with a group of servants, one of them collided with his smaller master: "So that there lay the horse bowled over and stunned, and I ten or twelve paces beyond, 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 [*souche*]. It is the only swoon [*esvanouissement*] that I have felt to this day"⁷⁰ Montaigne is deprived of "all feeling" such that he sees "death's true and natural face." Yet however much he wants to dramatize his proximity to death, his ability to describe this event requires minimal awareness. Coming as close to death as possible, Montaigne enters the murky zone anticipated by Canus, where the soul is on the brink of departure but still capable of feeling. The ambiguity of this state is captured in Montaigne's claim that he had no more feeling than a *souche*, a word that Cotgrave records as meaning "the stock, trunke, or bodie or a tree" or "a log."⁷¹ Donald Frame's translation opts for "log"; John Florio's chooses "stocke."⁷² *Souche* introduces multiple meanings: Montaigne could possess no more feeling than a log, a nonliving body, or he may possess no more feeling than a stock, the stem of a living plant. The distinctions are even more fine-grained, since Montaigne's contemporaries were uncertain about vegetal sentience. Can stocks feel? Francis Bacon uses a common distinction to separate plants from "living creatures." The

⁶⁹ For the figure of Montaigne as an "accidental philosopher," see Hartle, *Michel de Montaigne*.

⁷⁰ F 2.6.269 (translation modified); BMS 2.6.391: "si que voilà le cheval abbatu et couché tout estourdy, moy dix ou douze pas au delà, estendu à la renverse, le visage tout meurtry et tout escorché, mon espée que j'avoy à la main, à plus de dix pas au delà, ma ceinture en pieces, n'ayant ny mouvement, ny sentiment, non plus qu'une souche. C'est le seul esvanouissement que j'aye senty jusques à cette heure." In the editions of the *Essais* from 1580 to 1588, Montaigne includes the word "mort" in between "delà" and "estendu"—Frame's translation, following VS 2.6.373, reads: "I ten or twelve paces beyond, *dead*, stretched on my back"—but deleted the phrase in subsequent editions. By removing this word, Montaigne distances himself from an identification of his post-accident condition with death. He may approach death's face, but he is not, even metaphorically speaking, dead.

⁷¹ Cotgrave, *Dictionary of the French and English Tongues*, *souche*.

⁷² Montaigne, trans. Florio, 216.

latter “have sense, which plants have not.”⁷³ Opposed to this position were such figures as Marin Cureau de la Chambre, who anticipated present-day understandings by arguing that plants could feel and even cognize.⁷⁴ The early modern debate about whether plants are alive and whether they feel traces its roots back to ancient philosophy, in which the life of plants was contested because of a tendency to equate life and perception. Contributing to this debate, Aristotle influentially claims that plants live but do not feel.⁷⁵

When Montaigne claims to have had no more feeling than a *souche*, he intensifies the ambiguity of his condition, the uncertainty of which is captured in his contention that this “swoon” is the only one he has ever “felt” [*senty*]. Montaigne’s companions share these difficulties: “Those who were with me, after having tried all the means they could to bring me round, thinking me dead, took me in their arms and were carrying me with great difficulty to my house... On the way, and after I had been taken for dead for more than two full hours, I began to move and breathe.”⁷⁶ Montaigne’s entourage spends hours with what seems like a corpse. Then, expelling “clots of pure blood,” Montaigne “began to recover a little life, but it was bit by bit and over so long a stretch of time that my first

⁷³ Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum*, 81.

⁷⁴ De la Chambre writes: “On peut dire que tout ce qui est vivant connoist, et que tout ce qui connoist est vivant.” Qtd. in Wild, “Marin Cureau de la Chambre on the Natural Cognition of the Vegetative Soul,” 445. Cureau de la Chambre also makes the vegetative soul the foundation for his understanding of human life. In many ways, the French natural philosopher can be seen as a precursor to the current biological and neuroscientific hypothesis about the “deep continuity” between life and mind. In Evan Thompson’s words, “Where there is life, there is mind.” *Mind in Life*, ix.

⁷⁵ Aristotle summarizes the lines of contestation in the following way: “Life is found in animals and plants; but while in animals it is clearly manifest, in plants it is hidden and not evident. For before we can assert the presence of life in plants, a long inquiry must first be held as to whether plants possess a soul and a distinguishing capacity for desire and pleasure and pain. Now Anaxagoras and Empedocles say that they are influenced by desire; they also assert that they have sensation and sadness and pleasure. Anaxagoras declared that plants are animals and feel joy and sadness, deducing this from the fall of their leaves; while Empedocles held the opinion that sex has a place in their composition. Plato indeed declares that they feel desire only on account of their compelling need of nutriment. In this be granted, it will follow that they also feel joy and sadness and have sensation.” *De plantis* 815a10-24. For Aristotle’s view that plants possess life—indeed, are the primary example of life in its most basic form—but nevertheless “cannot perceive,” see *De anima* 424a32-424b2.

⁷⁶ F 2.6.269; BMS 2.6.391: “Ceux qui estoient avec moy, après avoir essayé par tous les moyens qu’ils peurent, de me faire revenir, me tenans pour mort, me prindrent entre leurs bras, et m’emportoient avec beaucoup de difficulté en ma maison... Sur le chemin, et après avoir esté plus de deux grosses heures tenu pour trespassé, je commençay à me mouvoir et respirer.”

feelings were much closer to death than to life.”⁷⁷ The wording harkens back to the chapter’s opening problem, where he claimed that although one could not reach death, one could at least “approach” [*approcher*] it.⁷⁸ Now when he begins to “recover a little life,” his “feelings” are approaching [*approchants*] death more than life. Implicit in this formulation is a correlation between life and feeling: hovering over the abyss of nonexistence, even life’s most minimal instantiation is isomorphic with *sentiments*.

Montaigne illustrates his experience by appealing to two passages from Torquato Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata*. The first quotation—“Because the shaken soul, uncertain yet / Of its return, is still not firmly set”⁷⁹—describes Tancredi after he has slain Clorinda, but the lines Montaigne quotes barely scrape the surface of the ways that Tasso’s tragic scene resonates with Montaigne’s experience. As Clorinda’s “gentle soul” departs, Tancredi’s grief so affects his body that “his senses and his countenance” fill with death, and his state mimes that of his victim: “The living man lies languishing like to the dead, in color, in silence, in attitude, and in blood.”⁸⁰ Rescued by a troop of soldiers who cannot tell that he is “scarce living,” Tancredi is transported as if he were a corpse.⁸¹ Not until the soldier “groans” is it “known that his life’s race is not yet run.”⁸² After a good stretch of time, “light returns to [his] languid eyes,” but his soul remains “uncertain,” since it is “still not firmly set.”⁸³ Adhering to Tasso’s narrative, Montaigne claims that when he “began to see anything, it was with a vision so blurred, weak, and dead, that I still could distinguish nothing but light.”⁸⁴ He then quotes a second passage from *Gerusalemme liberata*: “As one ‘twixt wakefulness and doze, / Whose eyes now open, now again they close.”⁸⁵ Montaigne here aligns his experience with a knight who survived a massacre by falling

⁷⁷ F 2.6.269; BMS 2.6.392: “Par là je commençay à reprendre un peu de vie, mais ce fut par les menus, et par un si long traict de temps, que mes premiers sentimens estoient beaucoup plus approchans de la mort que de la vie.”

⁷⁸ F 2.6.268; BMS 2.6.389.

⁷⁹ F 2.6.269; BMS 2.6.392: “Perche, dubbiosa anchor del suo ritorno, / Non s’assecura attonita la mente.”

⁸⁰ Tasso, *Jerusalem Delivered*, 12.70.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 12.71.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 12.73.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 12.74.

⁸⁴ F 2.6.269; BMS 2.6.392: “Quand je commençay à y voir, ce fut d’une veue si trouble, si foible, et si morte, que je ne discernois encores rien que la lumiere.”

⁸⁵ F 2.6.269; BMS 2.6.392: “come quel ch’or apre or chiude / Gli occhi mezzo tra ’l sonno è l’esser desto.”

“while alive.” No one, Tasso’s knight claims, would have “thought me alive,” and his own senses were “wholly benumbed.”⁸⁶ Eventually, the knight continues, when “the light returned to my eyes, which had been clouded by a dark mist ... to my weakened sight was presented the flickering of a little flame.”⁸⁷ The knight’s eyes open and close, caught between sleeping and waking.

Montaigne recognizes his experience in Tasso’s description of two events. With these epic precedents, he gestures towards his theme’s universality while digging into a contingent biographical event. Quoting only fragments of accounts that, in their entirety, mirror his experience, Montaigne formally enacts the structure of surface and depth central to “De l’exercitation.”⁸⁸ In the same way that the quotations from Tasso only vaguely suggest their rich narrative contexts, Montaigne’s dead countenance reveals nothing of the felt aliveness that permeates his invalid awareness. Even more to the point, Tasso is himself an example of the suspended animation Montaigne describes. The second Tasso quotation was added in 1588, after Montaigne had returned from a trip to Italy in 1580-81. On that trip, Montaigne journeyed to Ferrara to visit Tasso, who had been committed to a madhouse in 1579. In the “Apologie,” Montaigne describes this visit: “I felt even more vexation than compassion to see him in Ferrara in so piteous a state, surviving himself, not recognizing himself or his works.”⁸⁹ Whatever made Tasso Tasso was no longer there, for he had survived himself and, much like the comatose patients depicted in “De l’exercitation,” was unable to even recognize himself. Montaigne claims that it was the “careful and laborious pursuit of the sciences” that led Tasso to “stupidity” [*bestise*] and that it was “that rare aptitude for the exercises of the mind [*ame*], which has left him without exercise and without mind [*ame*].”⁹⁰ Montaigne

⁸⁶ Tasso, *Jerusalem Delivered*, 8.25.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Montaigne frequently employs this technique of quotation. Mary McKinley notes this pattern: “The context from which he borrows is often more relevant to his immediate text than the line or lines he actually incorporates. The borrowed lines are not simply excised from the source text to stand alone in the *Essais*. They bring with them the echo of the lines they left behind.” *Words in a Corner*, 20.

⁸⁹ F 2.12.363; BMS 2.12.518: “J’eus plus de despit encore que de compassion, de le voir à Ferrare en si piteux estat survivant à soy-mesmes, mescognoissant et soy et ses ouvrages.”

⁹⁰ F 2.12.363; BMS 2.12.518: “...à la curieuse et laborieuse queste des sciences, qui l’a conduit à la bestise? à cette rare aptitude aux exercices de l’ame, qui l’a rendu sans exercice et sans ame?”

suggests that Tasso hangs in suspended animation because of his propensity for contemplative exercises like those propounded by ancient philosophers like Canus and those belonging to the Augustinian tradition, a propensity that rendered him less than human, bestial and unable to exist as a whole man. In the words of “De l’Experience,” such people as Tasso “want to get out of themselves and escape from the man. That is madness: instead of changing into angels, they change into beasts [*bestes*].”⁹¹ The difference between Montaigne and Tasso lies in the accidental, effortless quality of the former’s ecstatic experience.

Although he appeared dead, Montaigne maintained a level of awareness, for “It seemed to me that my life was hanging only by the tip of my lips; I closed my eyes in order, it seemed to me, to help push it out, and took pleasure [*plaisir*] in growing languid and letting myself go [*me laisser aller*]. It was an idea that was only floating on the surface of my soul, as delicate and feeble as all the rest, but in truth not only free from distress [*deplaisir*] but mingled with that sweet feeling that people have who let themselves slide into sleep [*se laissent glisser au sommeil*].”⁹² Languishing near death, his life hangs only by the “tip of [his] lips,” an image that conjures the transience of breath as it passes through and beyond the mouth. He takes “pleasure” in the easiness of “letting himself go” in much the same way that people “let themselves slide into sleep.” As Hugo Friedrich notes, Montaigne describes a “passive event” in which the one affected “intensifies his own passivity,” as if he observes an occurrence that is “not an act of will, but rather an obedience that precedes will, which the weak remnant of will supports.”⁹³ Like breath, a vital function that partakes both of the voluntary and the involuntary, the sweetness Montaigne feels is like that mix of activity and passivity that structures the threshold of sleep. Floating atop his soul’s “surface,” the notion of death is not troubling. Montaigne describes a self that makes contact only with the surfaces encoded in his

⁹¹ F 3.13.856; BMS 3.13.1166.

⁹² F 2.6.269; BMS 2.6.392: “Il me sembloit que ma vie ne me tenoit plus qu’au bout des lèvres: je fermois les yeux pour ayder (ce me sembloit) à la pousser hors, et prenois plaisir à m’alanguir et à me laisser aller. C’estoit une imagination qui ne faisoit que nager superficiellement en mon ame, aussi tendre et aussi foible que tout le reste: mais à la verité non seulement exempte de desplaisir, ains meslée à ceste douceur, que sentent ceux qui se laissent glisser au sommeil.”

⁹³ Friedrich, *Montaigne*, 278.

repeated use of *me semblait*. His life hangs from a bodily extremity and his awareness floats atop his soul. Although he can feel the sweetness of life, he is in the same position as his companions, who can only access the surface of a seemingly dead body.

“De l’exercitation” attempts to explore what lies below the surface, to grasp the depths of feeling that animate the first person perspective. When Montaigne introduces his accident, he claims that after being thrown from his horse he lay on the ground with his “face all bruised and skinned [*écorché*].” The word *écorché* invokes the skinned musclemen of the new anatomical sciences, the authors of which used the word in reference to the flayed bodies—the *écorchés*—that illustrate such texts as Andreas Vesalius’s *De humani corporis fabrica*.⁹⁴ In later additions to “De l’exercitation,” Montaigne confirms this anatomical context by claiming that his purpose in writing is to “expose myself entire: my portrait is a cadaver [*skeletos*] on which the veins, the muscles, and the tendons appear at a glance, each part in its place.”⁹⁵ Emphasizing the unusualness of his technique, Montaigne avoids the French *squellette* and Latin *skeleton*, and employs the rare Greek *skeletos*, a choice so singular that Florio renders the term *keletos*.⁹⁶ Montaigne imagines that his text exposes what lies beneath, so that his innermost secrets “appear at a glance.” Yet insofar as this task resonates with early modern anatomy, it is impossible: scalpels can only reveal new surfaces for inspection.⁹⁷ Opening himself within the anatomy theatre of his *Essais*, the foundation of Montaigne’s life continues to elude his capacity for expression and even his experience.

⁹⁴ For the link between Montaigne’s *écorché* and the act of writing, see Van Den Abbeele, *Travel as Metaphor from Montaigne to Rousseau*, 21.

⁹⁵ F 2.6.274; BMS 2.6.398: “Je m’estalle entier: C’est un *skeletos*, où d’une veue les veines, les muscles, les tendons paroissent, chasque piece en son siege.”

⁹⁶ Montaigne, trans. Florio, 217. *Skeleton* was first used in English in 1578, but the term was by no means widespread, and was derived from Latin. See *OED*, *skeleton* n.1. For Montaigne’s *skeletos*, see Legros, “Pour illustrer Montaigne”; Demonet, “Le *skeletos* de Montaigne”; and Conley, *Graphic Unconscious*, 126-27.

⁹⁷ Valerie Traub puts it this way: despite the “revelation of viscera and the re-articulation of the skeleton, one can never anatomize to the point of ultimate truth; one can never dissect to the ground of being.” “Gendering Mortality in Early Modern Anatomies,” 49.

Although Montaigne's method is analogous to Vesalius's, the French writer describes not an external body, but his "cogitations," which are "a shapeless subject."⁹⁸ His *skeletos* is his experience, what it feels like to live his life. What "I write down," he claims, "is myself, it is my essence."⁹⁹ But his near-death experience has revealed the limits of description; he intuits internal depth, but can only access surfaces. Recalling his swoon, Montaigne struggles to articulate aspects of himself to which he was exposed but that withdraw from knowledge. In order to articulate his personal experience, he turns to the "prostrate and comatose."¹⁰⁰ Hearing such people "groan and from time to time utter poignant sighs" and seeing them "make certain movements of the body" would seem to provide "signs that they still have some consciousness [*cognaissance*] left."¹⁰¹ Yet Montaigne is sure they know nothing of their condition: "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 [*se reconnoistre*]; and so I believed that they had no reflections to torment them, nothing able to make them judge and feel the misery of their condition."¹⁰² Even when their movements suggest awareness, he claims they possess no knowledge and have no access to reflection, judgment, or feeling. The "signs" they generate are "not evidence that they are alive, at least fully alive."¹⁰³

To be "fully alive" is to possess a *vie entiere*. Those who suffer unaware are in states akin to "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

⁹⁸ F 2.6.274; BMS 2.6.398: "Je peins principalement mes cogitations, subject informe."

⁹⁹ F 2.6.274; BMS 2.6.398: "Ce ne sont mes gestes que j'escris; c'est moy, c'est mon essence."

¹⁰⁰ F 2.6.270; BMS 2.6.392: "renversez et assoupis."

¹⁰¹ F 2.6.270; BMS 2.6.393: "que nous oyons rommeller, et rendre par fois des souspirs trenchans, quoy que nous en tirons aucuns signes, par où il semble qu'il leur reste encore de la cognoissance."

¹⁰² F 2.6.270; BMS 2.6.393: "Et ne pouvois croire qu'à un si grand estonnement de membres, et si grande défaillance des sens, l'ame peust maintenir aucune force au dedans pour se reconnoistre: et que, par ainsin, ils n'avoient aucun discours qui les tourmentast, et qui leur peust faire juger et sentir la misere de leur condition."

¹⁰³ F 2.6.271; BMS 2.6.394: "Et les voix et responses courtes et descousues qu'on leur arrache à force de crier autour de leurs oreilles et de les tempester, ou des mouvemens qui semblent avoir quelque consentement à ce qu'on leur demande, ce n'est pas tesmoignage qu'ils vivent pourtant, au moins une vie entiere."

hearing which seems to touch only on the edges of the soul [*bords de l'ame*].”¹⁰⁴

Responses generated by these people do not emerge from a *vie entiere*, since they come from the soul’s borders. The movements and words of such patients are involuntary:

There are many animals, and even men, whose muscles we can see contract and move after they are dead. Every man knows by experience that there are parts that often move, stand up, and lie down, without his leave. Now these passions which touch only the rind [*escorce*] of us cannot be called ours. To make them ours, the whole man must be involved; the pains which the foot or the hand feel while we are asleep are not ours.¹⁰⁵

The noun *escorce* recalls Montaigne’s earlier use of *écorché*. If only the soul’s rind is involved in a movement, then that stirring comes not from the “whole man,” the *homme y soit engage tout entier*, a notion Montaigne regularly invokes.¹⁰⁶ In “L’histoire de Spurina,” he claims that appetites engendered by love “affect both body and soul, and the whole man [*tout l’homme*] is possessed by them.”¹⁰⁷ Expressing a similar sentiment in “De l’institution des enfans,” he writes: “It is not a soul being trained, not a body, but a man; these parts must not be separated.”¹⁰⁸ It is the same belief that leads Montaigne to claim in “De l’exercitation” that his goal is to craft a *skeletos* and “expose myself entire.”¹⁰⁹ Yet the terms of this totality are difficult to negotiate. Since dead bodies twitch, and, as Augustine points out, the genitals “stand up” and “lie down” in an

¹⁰⁴ F 2.6.271; BMS 2.6.394: “Il nous advient ainsi sur le beguayement du sommeil, avant qu’il nous ait du tout saisis, de sentir comme en songe, ce qui se fait autour de nous, et suyvre les voix, d’une ouye trouble et incertaine, qui semble ne donner qu’aux bords de l’ame.”

¹⁰⁵ F 2.6.271; BMS 2.6.394: “Il y a plusieurs animaux, et des hommes mesmes, apres qu’ils sont trespassez, ausquels on voit resserrer et remuer des muscles. Chacun sçait par experience, qu’il y a des parties qui se branslent, dressent et couchent souvent sans son congé. Or ces passions qui ne nous touchent que par l’escorse, ne se peuvent dire nostres: Pour les faire nostres, il faut que l’homme y soit engagé tout entier; et les douleurs que le pied ou la main sentent pendant que nous dormons, ne sont pas à nous.”

¹⁰⁶ For a general and very different discussion of the “whole man” in Montaigne, see Frame, *Montaigne’s Discovery of Man*, 142-47. See also Bencivenga, *Discipline of Subjectivity*, 26-29.

¹⁰⁷ F 2.33.550; BMS 2.33.764: “Entre lesquels ceux qui jugent qu’il n’en y a point pour leur opinion, qu’ils tiennent au corps et a l’ame, et que tout l’homme en est possédé.”

¹⁰⁸ F 1.26.122; BMS 1.25.171: “C’est n’est pas une ame, ce n’est pas un corps qu’on dresse, c’est un homme, il n’en faut pas faire à deux.”

¹⁰⁹ F 2.6.274; BMS 2.6.398. The stress here on the totality of representation is repeated throughout the *Essais*. See, for example, the “Au Lecteur,” with which the book begins. BMS 27: “Que si j’eusse esté parmy ces nation qu’on dit vivre encore souz la douce liberté des premieres loix de nature, je t’asseure que je m’y fusse très-volontiers peint tout entier, et tout nud.”

uncontrollable manner, actions need not come from a *vie entiere*.¹¹⁰ During his swoon, Montaigne's movements are generated by his soul's *escorce*: "while wholly unconscious [*esvanouy*], I was laboring to rip open my doublet ... and yet I know that I felt nothing in my imagination that hurt me; for there are many movements that do not come from our will."¹¹¹ In addition to unknowingly opening his clothing, Montaigne's hands "flew" to his stomach "against the intention of the will," and he tells his men to fetch a horse for his stumbling wife, but claims that when he spoke those orders, "I was not there at all."

His words were "idle thoughts, in the clouds, set in motion by the sensations of the eyes and ears; they did not come from within me ... what the soul contributed was in a dream, touched very lightly, and merely licked and sprinkled, as it were by the soft impression of my senses."¹¹² Montaigne's body acts and speaks without permission, against his will; life proceeds anonymously, governed by forces experienced only indirectly.

To know oneself, one must come to terms with this vitality that exceeds knowledge. Montaigne's self-inspection reveals that biological life is beyond one's control, that human awareness is a sliver of light swimming atop an inaccessible darkness of vitality. No matter how hard Montaigne tries to penetrate into the life that subtends his awareness, he can only brush against surfaces. An anatomist of experience is still an anatomist. Nevertheless, Montaigne *does* register the superficial contact he makes with

¹¹⁰ For Augustine's most famous discussion of the human fall as a fall into the involuntary body, see *De civitate Dei* 14.19 and 14.26.

¹¹¹ F 2.6.271; BMS 2.6.394: "Car premierement estant tout esvanouy, je me travaillois d'entr'ouvrir mon pourpoint à belles ongles (car j'estoy desarmé) et si sçay que je ne sentoys en l'imagination rien qui me blessast: Car il y a plusieurs mouvemens en nous, qui ne partent pas de nostre ordonnance."

¹¹² F 2.6.271-72; BMS 2.6.394-95: "J'avoy mon estomach pressé de ce sang caillé, mes mains y couroient d'elles mesmes, comme elles font souvent, où il nous demange, contre l'advis de nostre volonté. ... Il semble que cette consideration deust partir d'une ame esveillée; si est-ce que je n'y estois aucunement: c'estoyent des pensemens vains en nue, qui estoient esmeuz par les sens des yeux et des oreilles: ils ne venoyent pas de chez moy. Je ne sçavoy pourtant ny d'où je venoy, ny où j'aloys, ny ne pouvois poiser et considerer ce que on me demandoit: ce sont des legers effects, que les sens produysoyent d'eux mesmes, comme d'un usage; ce que l'ame y presteoit, c'estoit en songe, touchée bien legerement, et comme lechée seulement et arrosée par la molle impression des sens." Montaigne returns to this theme in "Du repentir," where he discusses how, in moments of great duress, the Latin language returns to his mouth unbidden and unwilling. F 3.2.615; BMS 3.2.851: "Si est-ce qu'à des extremes et soudaines esmotions, où je suis tombé, deux ou trois fois en ma vie: et l'une, voyant mon pere tout sain, se renverser sur moy pasmé: j'ay tousjours eslané du fond des entrailles, les premieres paroles Latines: Nature se sourdant et s'exprimant à force, a l'encontre d'un si long usage."

his anonymous vitality, and he does so through feeling. His companions see a bloody, vomiting body wracked with agony, but:

my condition was, in truth, very pleasant and peaceful. I felt no affliction either for others or for myself; it was a languor and an extreme weakness, without any pain. ... When they put me in bed I felt infinite sweetness... It would, in truth, have been a very happy death; for the weakness of my understanding kept me from having any judgment of it, and that of my body from having any feeling of it. I was letting myself slip away so gently, so gradually and easily, that I hardly ever did anything with less of a feeling of effort.¹¹³

Here, Montaigne captures the paradox of “De l’exercitation”: a subject incapable of feeling and able to feel. He experiences “extreme weakness” “without any pain,” a felt “languor,” and in bed he “felt infinite sweetness and repose.” He also claims that his weakness would prevent him from “having any feeling” of death. He slips away so “easily” that he cannot imagine anything less acutely felt. He feels the furthest edge of awareness, but is unsure if he should describe this state in terms of feeling since there is hardly enough “effort” involved to claim that he actively “did” anything at all.

Montaigne claims that his weakness prevented him from judging or feeling the onset of death, and applies to himself a scheme he uses to describe unresponsive patients. He believes they could not “judge and feel the misery of their condition.”¹¹⁴ By drawing explicit linguistic parallels, he demonstrates that he has “tried this [condition] out by experience.”¹¹⁵ Yet how can one describe the experience of someone who is not “fully alive,” incapable of feeling?¹¹⁶ Can there be unfelt experience? As I argued in the

¹¹³F 2.6.272; BMS 2.6.395: “Cependant mon assiette estoit à la vérité tres-douce et paisible; je n’avoys affliction ny pour autrui ny pour moy: c’estoit une langueur et une extreme foiblesse, sans aucune douleur. Je vy ma maison sans la recognoistre. Quand on m’eust couché, je senty une infinie douceur à ce repos ... C’eust esté sans mentir une mort bien heureuse: car la foiblesse de mon discours me gardoit d’en rien juger, et celle du corps d’en rien sentir. Je me laissy couler si doucement, et d’une façon si molle et si aisée, que je ne sens guere autre action moins poissante que celle-là estoit.” In the Bordeaux Copy, “molle” is changed to “douce.”

¹¹⁴F 2.6.270; BMS 2.6.393.

¹¹⁵F 2.6.271; BMS 2.6.394 “Or à présent que je l’ay essayé par effect, je ne fay nul doubte que je n’en aye bien jugé jusques à cette heure.”

¹¹⁶F 2.6.271; BMS 2.6.394.

Introduction, for Montaigne, true feeling pertains only to the whole man. The pains felt by the body during sleep are phenomena that ripple atop the *escorce*, and are not truly felt. They are much like the hand belonging to Laridus that appears in a passage Montaigne quotes from Virgil's *Aeneid*, which John Florio translates thus: "The halfe-dead fingers stirre, and feelee, / (Though it they cannot stirre) for steele."¹¹⁷ Virgil describes these severed fingers as *semianimis*, half alive and half dead as they writhe for a sword they will never hold. Laridus's hand is not "fully alive," but still possesses a *semi* life. Virgil does not indicate, as Florio does, that the hand is capable of feeling. But if it were, it must feel in a manner akin to Montaigne's sleeping feet, through a sensation cut off from the whole man. If only the "whole man" can feel, what, Montaigne wonders, is responsible for his hands moving "against the intention" and in the absence of "the will"?¹¹⁸ Does his soul's *escorce* also feel? For Montaigne, these surface phenomena are felt, but not by the individual self, that agent of will and reason, feeling and thought. Rather, they are felt by what conditions the self, an anonymous power that operates beneath awareness and manifests itself daily in beating hearts and instinctual movements.

For Montaigne, this power revealed by the evacuation of self, this life that preconditions his life, is not, as it was for Augustine, God. He names this power *nature*. Describing his return to life, he claims: "after I had been taken for dead for more than two full hours, I began to move and breathe; for so great an abundance of blood had fallen into my stomach that nature had to revive its forces to discharge it."¹¹⁹ His recovery is initiated by a "nature" over which he has no control.¹²⁰ Even when one is conscious, this power asserts itself: "those who are falling throw out their arms in front of them, by a natural impulse which makes our limbs lend each other their services and have stirrings apart

¹¹⁷ Montaigne, *Essayes*, trans. Florio, 217. The Latin reads: "semianimesque micant digiti ferrumque retractant." *Aeneid VII-XII*, 10.396.

¹¹⁸ F 2.6.271; BMS 2.6.394.

¹¹⁹ F 2.6.269; BMS 2.6.391: "après avoir esté plus de deux grosses heures tenu pour trespassé, je commençay à me mouvoir et respirer; car il estoit tombé si grande abondance de sang dans mon estomach, que pour l'en descharger, nature eut besoin de resusciter ses forces."

¹²⁰ As Hoffman demonstrates, Montaigne saw these involuntary movements as central to his self-positioning as a "naturalist": the concluding thirty pages of the *Essays* are dedicated to "visceral sensations and impulses," and he repeatedly treats such "less easily falsified" internal sensations as nausea, vertigo, abdominal pain, and the loss of awareness. "The Investigation of Nature," 170-71.

from our reason.”¹²¹ Nature coordinates the body, arranging its parts into a responsive whole. Balance is a property the conscious self cannot generate, a gift from what Montaigne calls nature, produced by “natural impulse[s].” Montaigne was fascinated with this opaque but omnipresent force. In “De la force de l’imagination,” he links the “unruly liberty” of the penis to other body parts that “refuse [their] function[s] to our will and exercise [them] against our will.” Many of these parts “have passions of their own which rouse them and put them to sleep without our leave,” and the “same cause that animates [the penis] also animates, without our knowledge, the heart, the lungs, and the pulse.” Nor is anyone able to “command our hair to stand on end or our skin to shiver with desire or fear. The hand often moves itself where we do not send it.”¹²² Human experience is unified and driven by a natural power that outstrips awareness and transcends control.

It is into the arms of this force that we fall when overcome by sleep. “Perhaps the faculty of sleep, which deprives us of all action and all feeling, might seem useless and contrary to nature,” Montaigne writes, “were it not that thereby Nature teaches us that she has made us for dying and living alike, and from the start of life presents to us the eternal state that she reserves for us after we die, to accustom us to it and take away our fear of it.”¹²³ This passage, added to the margins of “De l’exercitation” in the Bordeaux Copy, bundles together the essay’s central themes. Every night, we slip into an anonymous state where we cannot act and are bereft of feeling, a state through which nature presents us with a temporary version of death and teaches us that death is woven into the fabric of

¹²¹ F 2.6.271; BMS 2.6.395: “Ceux qui tombent, eslancent ainsi les bras au devant de leur cheute, par une naturelle impulsion, qui fait que nos membres se prestent des offices, et ont des agitations à part de nostre discours.”

¹²² F 1.21.72; BMS 1.20.104: “On a raison de remarquer l’indocile liberté de ce membre... Car je vous donne à penser, s’il y a une seule des parties de nostre corps, qui ne refuse à nostre volonté souvent son operation, et qui souvent ne s’exerce contre nostre volonté. Elles ont chacune des passions propres, qui les esveillent et endorment, sans nostre congé. ... Cette mesme cause qui anime ce membre, anime aussi sans nostre sceu, le coeur, le poumon, et le poulx. ... Nous ne commonadons pas à noz cheveux de se herisser, et à nostre peau de fremir de desir ou de crainte.”

¹²³ F 2.6.268; BMS 2.6.390: “A l’aventure pourroit sembler inutile et contre nature la faculté du sommeil, qui nous prive de toute action et de tout sentiment, n’estoit que par iceluy nature nous instruit, qu’elle nous a pareillement faicts pour mourir, que pour vivre, et dès la vie nous presente l’éternel estat qu’elle nous garde après icelle, pour nous y accoustumer et nous en oster la crainte.”

life. We cannot control our awareness in this state, but nature nevertheless teaches us in and through sleep, for when sleeping we lose ourselves and *become* nature. Although sleep entails a loss of consciousness, the nature into which we slip is itself a minimal form of awareness.

Those people who have “fallen into a faint and lost all sensation” have “been very close to seeing death’s true and natural face [*naturel visage*].”¹²⁴ The face of death is here aligned with nature, which subtends life and death alike. To practice for death is thus to lose oneself in natural processes, to occupy a state of suspended animation, where our “feelings [are] much closer to death than to life.”¹²⁵ Montaigne isolates the point where experience first emerges from biological life. Within this awareness, we do not actively experience; we enter a mode of passivity where nature feels for us. Here, awareness is revealed for what it is: a gift over which we have no control. When caught up in daily affairs and projects, it can seem as though we direct our awareness and will our activities. Montaigne reveals how will and choice are ultimately gifts we must passively accept. According to Friedrich, in “De l’exercitation,” Montaigne “seeks an ‘it’ within the ‘I’—an ‘it’ that is not of an individual nature, but rather forms the deep layer of individuality which precedes will, where individuality is embedded in guiding, healing forces.”¹²⁶ Friedrich’s claim does not go far enough. *It* implies a subject, an experiencer for whom something happens. I suggest that the “deep layer” Montaigne’s accident discloses is anonymous, unable to adopt a perspective. Nature is not an *it*, but a happening, an intransitive activity beyond and before both subject and object. The point at which the experiential *vécu* first emerges from the biological *vivant* is a zone where nature becomes transparent to itself, where it feels itself feeling. Nature feels when I cannot. Of such moments, one should not say, “I feel” or even “it feels,” but rather “there is feeling.”¹²⁷

¹²⁴ F 2.6.268; BMS 2.6.390: “Mais ceux qui sont tombez par quelque violent accident en defaillance de coeur, et qui y ont perdu tous sentimens, ceux là à mon advis ont esté bien près de voir son vray et naturel visage.”

¹²⁵ F 2.6.269; BMS 2.6.392.

¹²⁶ Friedrich, *Montaigne*, 278.

¹²⁷ For Paul Valéry’s formulation (“one should not say ‘I wake,’ but rather ‘there is waking’”), see Heller-Roazen, *Inner Touch*, 76.

When Montaigne swoons, he slips into the felt vitality of nature, a passive intransitivity that operates according to a temporality different from that of everyday awareness. He expresses the relationship between human time and natural time by appealing to the instant, a moment of transition that belongs both to him and the nature within him. Throughout “De l’exercitation,” he returns obsessively to punctual time, the precise instant of change. These meditations are linked to the paradoxes that rive the capacity to feel. Montaigne’s Canus prepares to discover if in the “instant [*instant*] of death, so short and brief” the soul will have “any feeling of its departure.” He associates Canus with those ancients who were such effective managers [*mesnagers*] of time that they attempted to experience the “passage” into death.¹²⁸ To manage one’s time is to focus awareness such that one can register affective tonalities that vanish the instant they occur. Montaigne does not believe that Canus’s project is possible—he claims that no one has “come back [from death] to tell us news of it”¹²⁹—and his reasons for this disbelief are rooted in a conviction about the relationship between feeling and time: “For as for the instant [*instant*] and point of passing away [*passage*], it is not to be feared that it carries with it any travail of pain, since we can have no feeling [*sentiment*] without leisure. Our sufferings need time, which in death is so short and precipitate that it must necessarily be imperceptible [*insensible*].”¹³⁰ The experience Canus seeks occurs in an “instant” too brief to be felt. Feeling manifests in and through time; it is impossible within a punctual point. Montaigne’s project is possible because he experiences not death, but a swoon. Death is the absence of time. Montaigne feels his life in a temporality belonging to nature, a time that only approaches the timelessness of death.

If the instant of death is too brief to be felt, the instant in which the “sudden occasion” of Montaigne’s accident occurs is a moment that yokes two poles of awareness: nature and the whole man. In Montaigne’s experience, there is a moment when the feelings of self

¹²⁸ For an extremely perceptive treatment of this “passage,” see Kritzman, *Fabulous Imagination*, 90.

¹²⁹ F 2.6.267; BMS 2.6.389: “mais ils ne sont pas revenus nous en dire les nouvelles.”

¹³⁰ F 2.6.268; BMS 2.6.390: “Car, quant à l’instant et au point du passage, il n’est pas à craindre, qu’il porte avec soy aucun travail ou desplaisir: d’autant que nous ne pouvons avoir nul sentiment sans loisir. Nos souffrances ont besoing de temps, qui est si court et si précipité en la mort, qu’il faut necessairement qu’elle soit insensible.”

and nature overlap such that the intransitive effortlessness of nature can be registered and retained in memory. Montaigne gestures to this instant through imagery of lightning. He quotes Lucretius's description of an epileptic fit: "A man, struck, as by lightning [*fulminis*], by some malady, / Falls down all foaming at the mouth."¹³¹ The onset of a seizure takes place in an instant. Montaigne contends that in such fits epileptics do not possess any knowledge [*connaissance*] and their souls are unable to recognize themselves [*se reconnaître*].¹³² They are in a state akin to that described in a quotation Montaigne takes from Ovid's *Tristia*, where the poet describes his reaction to impending exile: "I was as dazed as one who, smitten by the fire of Jove, still lives and knows not that he lives."¹³³ Montaigne excerpts only this sentence's last clause, leaving the reference to lightning and this quotation's perfect symmetry with the passage from Lucretius buried in intertextual depths. Describing the moment, days later, when he was first able to recall his accident, he appeals again to an implicitly Augustinian vocabulary: "when my memory came to open up and picture to me the state I had been in the instant I had perceived that horse bearing down on me ... it seemed to me that a flash of lightning [*éclair*] was striking my soul with a violent shock, and that I was coming back from the other world [*autre monde*]."¹³⁴ In "De l'exercitation," he intertwines two instants—that when his accident occurred and that when he regained memory of his accident—through a lived chiasmus where the experience of the whole man is separated from an "other world" by the illuminating and blinding swiftness of a lightning bolt. Bracketed by two instants of clarity, this "other world" is the realm of nature and forgetting, a zone of elastic time only glimpsed in the measured clarity of punctual instants. He recognizes that the minimal feeling generated by this contact is as close to death as he can come.

¹³¹ F 2.6.270; BMS 2.6.393: "vi morbi saepe coactus / ante oculos aliquis nostros, ut fulminis ictu, concidit et supmas agit."

¹³² F 2.6.270; BMS 2.6.393.

¹³³ F 2.6.270; BMS 2.6.393. The Latin reads: "none aliter stupui, quam qui Iovis ignibus ictus / vivit et est vitae nescius ipse suae." Ovid, *Tristia*, 1.3.11-12. Montaigne quotes only line 112.

¹³⁴ F 2.6.272; BMS 2.6.396: "Mais long temps après, et le lendemain, quand ma memoire vint à s'entr'ouvrir, et me représenter l'estat, où je m'estoy trouvé en l'instant que j'avoy aperçeu ce cheval fondant sur moy (car je l'avoy veu à mes talons, et me tins pour mort: mais ce pensement avoit esté si soudain que la peur n'eut pas loisir de s'y engendrer) il me sembla que c'estoit un esclair qui me frapoit l'ame de secousse, et que je revenoy de l'autre monde."

Montaigne's return to feeling as a whole man occurs in an instant as brief as the moment he first lost awareness. "When I came back to life and regained my powers," he writes, "I felt myself all of a sudden caught up again in the pains, my limbs being all battered and bruised by my fall; and I felt so bad two or three nights after that I thought I was going to die all over again, but by a more painful death; and I still feel the effect of the shock of that collision."¹³⁵ In control of his "powers"—willing, thinking, and so on—nature no longer feels for him. Firmly in renewed possession of his "life," his *vie entiere*, Montaigne feels himself actively once again. Yet although he now has the power to feel, what he feels is no longer the presence of his own life. Gone is that effortless sense of floating atop the *escorce* of his soul. He is now fully "caught up" in severe pain. The feeling of being alive manifests itself through nature's feeling, through the vital but involuntary processes of a body that feels its own life. This continual hum of felt aliveness—the sense of existence—recedes to the background of everyday experience, subsumed beneath pain, pleasure, and projects. Yet for an instant as brief as the moment of divine contact described by Augustine, Montaigne brushes against the surface of his life as it moves in the depths of his being. To feel through nature is to surrender to the anonymous biological processes that power the body and enter a state of suspended animation that resembles divine feeling, the structure of which Montaigne depends upon for his account of this near-death experience.

Lucretian Feeling

The figure of Canus, the philosopher who works unto and into death, haunts the *Essais*. In "De trois bonnes femmes," Montaigne describes the death of Seneca. Lying in the bathtub, his wrists and thighs cut, his stomach full of poison, Seneca continues to philosophize: "feeling that his end was near, as long as he had breath he continued his most excellent discourses on the subject of the state that he was in, which his secretaries

¹³⁵ F 2.6.272; BMS 2.6.395-96: "Quand je vins à revivre et à reprendre mes forces ... qui fut deux ou trois heures après, je me senty tout d'un train rengager aux douleurs, ayant les membres tous moulus et froissez de ma cheute, et en fus si mal deux ou trois nuits après, que j'en cuiday remourir encore un coup: mais d'une mort plus vifve, et me sens encore de la secousse de cette froissure."

collected as long as they could hear his voice.”¹³⁶ Like Canus, Seneca speaks about how it feels to die as he dies, his words continuing until (and perhaps after) his audience can no longer register his speech. Montaigne, who claims that there is no “place in the histories that I note so attentively” as accounts of “the death of men,” was no doubt aware that in the *Annals* Tacitus describes the dying Seneca using words that echo those that the Stoic had earlier employed in his depiction of Canus.¹³⁷ Tacitus writes: “even at the last moment [*novissimo quoque momento*] his eloquence remained at command, he called his secretaries, and dictated a long discourse.”¹³⁸ As James Ker notes, Tacitus’s *novissimo quoque momento* draws on Seneca’s earlier *illo volocissimo momento*.¹³⁹ Seneca, a reader and writer of Canus’s story, takes Canus as a model for his own death, which he transforms into language that is, in turn, taken down by scribes and then read by many others, including Tacitus, who solidifies the link between these deaths by verbally weaving Canus’s ghost into his account of Seneca’s death. Montaigne, in turn, incorporates both accounts in his version (*cet instant de la mort, si court et si brief*), employing the finality of Tacitus’s *novissimo* with the introduction of *mort* and the brevity of Seneca’s *volocissimo* in *court* and *brief*. Invoking Canus as the model for his impossible endeavor in “De l’exercitation,” Montaigne enters an intertextual network that he manipulates in order to articulate and interpret his experience.

Montaigne’s interpretation of vital feeling is similarly entangled in complex intertextual relationships. If his naturalistic interpretation of sentience in “De l’exercitation” is on the one hand a revision of Augustine and his followers, it is also the product of his reading of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*. This poem is the text most frequently referenced in “De l’exercitation,” furnishes the essay’s first quotation, and is the book to which Montaigne

¹³⁶ F 2.35.567; BMS 2.35.787: “et lors sentant sa fin prochaine, autant qu’il eut d’halene, il continua des discours très-excellens sur le subject de l’estat où il se trouvoit, que ses secretaires recueillirent tant qu’ils peurent ouyr sa voix.”

¹³⁷ F 1.20.62; BMS 1.19.91: “Et n’est rien dequoy je m’informe si volontiers, que de la mort des hommes: quelle parole, quel visage, quelle contenance ils y ont eu: ny endroit des histoires, que je remarque si attentivement.”

¹³⁸ Tacitus, *Annals*, trans. Jackson, 15.63: “Et novissimo quoque momento suppeditant eloquentia advocatis scriptoribus pleraque tradidit.”

¹³⁹ Ker, *Deaths of Seneca*, 5.

turns when he addresses feelings disconnected from the whole man. The centrality of Lucretius for Montaigne is indisputable, given that *De rerum natura* is quoted 148 times in the *Essais*, “only one fewer than Horace and more than any other classical author, including Virgil.”¹⁴⁰ Montaigne added these Lucretian quotations to the *Essais* in bunches: fifty in the first edition of 1580; two more in the 1582 edition; ninety-five more in 1588; and one final addition in 1595.¹⁴¹ Although he continued to read Lucretius throughout his writing career, Montaigne first encountered *De rerum natura* much earlier. He owned a copy of Denys Lambin’s 1563 edition of the poem, the first printed iteration of Lucretius to supplement the text discovered by Poggio Bracciolini in 1417 with the ninth-century manuscript now called the *Codex Quadratus*, which was brought to Paris in 1559.¹⁴² The *perlegi* at the end of Montaigne’s Lucretius states that he finished reading the poem by 16 October 1564.¹⁴³ Michael Screech argues that the extensive Latin notes in the flyleaves and margins were completed before the *perlegi*, and that the French marginal notes were added later, probably in the years between 1572 and 1580, as Montaigne was preparing the first edition of the *Essais*.¹⁴⁴ Montaigne had thus finished reading Lucretius before he suffered his accident in the late 1560s and wrote about it around 1573-74. Lucretius provided Montaigne with a readymade conceptual vocabulary for expressing the state of accidental suspended animation in which he found himself, a vocabulary that altered the significance of the experiential structure adumbrated by Augustine.

On page 229 of Montaigne’s copy of *De Natura Rerum*, Lucretius describes the moment of death, when the spirit or *anima* leaves the body and disperses into the air. The *anima*

¹⁴⁰ Passannante, *Lucretian Renaissance*, 105.

¹⁴¹ For these numbers, see Fraisse, *Une conquête du rationalisme*, 171-72; and Mack, *Reading and Rhetoric in Montaigne and Shakespeare*, 30.

¹⁴² On the recovery of Lucretius, see Brown, *Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*. For the recovery of the *Codex Quadratus*, see Smith, “Introduction to the Text,” 98-100 and 116-17. On Lambin as a scholar and editor, see Passannante, *Lucretian Renaissance*, 84-94. On Montaigne’s copy of Lucretius, see Screech, *Montaigne’s Annotated Copy of Lucretius*; and Legros, *Montaigne manuscrit*, 215-422.

Montaigne also had lines from Lucretius covering the ceiling of his library. For details, see Legros, *Essais sur poutres*. See also Moore, “Lucretius and Montaigne”; and Legros, “Montaigne, annotateur de Lucrèce.”

¹⁴³ Screech, 4-5: “16 octob. / perlegi 1564/31/.” Subsequent references to Screech will be abbreviated as S.

¹⁴⁴ S 8-9.

is “torn all apart within the body itself” before it glides off through the body’s pores. Something similar happens when, still “within the bounds of life,” the *anima* is “weakened” by a given cause and “appears to wish to depart and to be released from the whole body, and the countenance appears to grow languid as at the last hour, and all the limbs to relax and droop from the bloodless body. This is what happens when the phrase is used ‘the mind [*animus*] fails’ or ‘the spirit [*anima*] faints’: when all is trepidation... At that time the intelligence [*mens*] fails and all the powers of the spirit [*anima*] are shaken together, and these fail the body itself, so that a slightly more serious cause could dissolve them.”¹⁴⁵ Here, Lucretius moves from death towards the loss of consciousness, a phenomenon that mimics death. At the moment of transition (beside Lucretius’s final lines on death and just before he moves into fainting) Montaigne wrote “De leuanouissement,” a French term referring to the loss of awareness, to swooning.¹⁴⁶ In the *Essais*, the word *ésvanouissement* appears only once: in “De l’exercitation,” when Montaigne describes the “only swoon [*ésvanouissement*] I have felt to this day.”¹⁴⁷ Just as in Lambin’s Lucretius, Montaigne scrawled “De leuanouissement” beside a passage transitioning from death to the loss of awareness, so in “De l’exercitation” he describes his own swoon as a brush with death that allowed him to see its “true and natural face” in an extended moment of suspended animation.

For Lucretius, the capacity of living creatures for feeling, moving, and thinking is best understood holistically. He identifies three aspects of feeling—*animus*, *anima*, and body (*corpus*)—but insists that true feeling only emerges when all three are intertwined. The former two terms are usually translated as *mind* and *spirit*. For Lucretius, “*animus* and *anima* are held in conjunction together and compound one nature in common, but the head so to speak and lord over the whole body is the understanding which we call *animus* and intelligence [*mentemque*]. And this has its abiding place in the middle region of the breast. For in this place throbs terror and fear, hereabouts is melting joy: here is the

¹⁴⁵ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 3.590-602. References to this edition will subsequently be abbreviated as L. Montaigne’s copy of Lucretius is now digitized. See Lucretius, 1563.

¹⁴⁶ Lucretius, 1563, 229; S 311. Legros briefly mentions the connection to “De l’exercitation” in *Montaigne manuscrit*, 316.

¹⁴⁷ F 2.6.269; BMS 2.6.391.

intelligence [*mens*] and the *animus*.¹⁴⁸ The *animus* abides in the living breast, the epicenter of feeling that Lucretius equates with an intelligence or mind that is primarily affective. Lucretius claims that *animus* and *mens* are synonyms, and that this power, responsible for the “government of life,” is a “part of man, no less than hands and feet and eyes are parts of the whole living being.”¹⁴⁹ *Animus* is linked to *anima*, which provides the “vital sense” [*vitalem sensum*] and is “interlaced through veins, flesh, and sinews.”¹⁵⁰ The *anima* “distributes the sense-giving motions through the limbs,” and ensures that the “flesh is all thrilled through with feeling.”¹⁵¹ However, *anima* does not feel *for* body. To show “what it is for the body to feel” one must attend to “experience,” which demonstrates that responsibility for feeling lies not with the “*anima* mingled throughout the body,” but rather with the body. It is the “feeling” of the eyes themselves that “draws us” towards visible objects.¹⁵² True feeling emerges from a unity of *animus*, *anima*, and body. Lucretius insists that none of these aspects “has the power to feel singly without the others’ help,” for only by “common motions” is “sensation kindled in the flesh.”¹⁵³ Feeling is only possible for the “whole man” [*hominem totum*].¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁸ L 136-42: “Nunc animum atque animam dico coniuncta teneri / inter se atque unam naturam conficere ex se, / sed caput esse quasi et dominari in corpore toto / consilium quod nos animum metemque vocamus. / idque situm media regione in pectoris haeret. / hic exultat enim pavor ac metus, haec loca circum / laetitia mulcent: hic ergo mens animusquest.” Note that “mind” has a radically different meaning here, the center not of *rational* thought but of *emotional* feeling.

¹⁴⁹ L 3.94-97: “Primum animum dico, mentem quam saepe vocamus, / in quo consilium vitae regimenque locatum est, / esse hominis partem nilo minus ac manus et pes atque oculi partes animantis totius extant.”

¹⁵⁰ L 3.214-20: “mors omnia praestat / vitalem praeter sensum calidumque vaporem. / ergo animam totam perparvis esse necessest / seminibus, nexam per venas viscera nervos, / quatenus, omnis ubi e tot iam corpore cessit, / extima memborum circumcaesura tamen se / incolumem praestat nec deficit ponderis hilum.”

¹⁵¹ L 3.245: “sensiferos motus quae didit prima per artus”; L 3.249-50: “tum viscera persentiscunt / omnia.”

¹⁵² L 3.350-69.

¹⁵³ L 3.333-36: “nec sibi quaeque sine alius vi posse videtur / corporis atque animi seorsum sentire potestas, / sed communibus inter eas conflatur untrique / motibus accensus nobis per viscera sensus.”

¹⁵⁴ L 3.161-167: “Haec eadem ratio naturam animi atque animai / corpoream docet esse; ubi enim propeller membra, / corripere ex somno corpus matureque vultum / atque hominem totum regere ac versare videtur / quorum nil fieri sine tactu posse videmus / nec tactum porro sine corpore, none fatendumst / corporea natura animum constare animamque?”

Montaigne struggles with these distinctions in the flyleaves of his *De rerum natura*.¹⁵⁵ At times, he attempts to determine the “differences between *anima* and *animus*” and proceeds to list contrasts, while at others he admits bafflement: “*anima* and *animus* are the same.”¹⁵⁶ Throughout these comments, he maintains an interest in Lucretius’s ideas about feeling: “It is false,” he writes, “that the body cannot feel, only the *anima*.” Following the same thread, he notes that for Lucretius, “It is no objection that when the *anima* is lost the body lacks sensation” and that the Epicurean “clearly teaches that the body can feel.”¹⁵⁷ Yet *anima* is involved in the body’s ability to feel, and *animus* is similarly sensitive, for it “often happens that the *animus* suffers pain when the *anima* is not ill, and vice versa.”¹⁵⁸ *Animus* and *anima* are corporeal because their movements “cannot exist without touch.”¹⁵⁹ As he struggles with this typology of feeling, Montaigne references and quotes moments in *De rerum natura* that resonate with his accident: “But if the illness which strikes the mind [*mentem*] is very violent, it affects also the *anima*; hence it happens that we can see ‘speech falter, the voice fail, the eyes grow dim, the ears ring, the limbs sag [*succidere*] and, finally, men swooning [*concidere*] from deadly fear.’”¹⁶⁰ It is the notion of swooning that Montaigne finds most interesting here, since he originally copied out Lucretius’s *succidere* (sagging of the limbs) as *concidere* (swooning), accidentally repeating the latter word and forcing a correction. Montaigne derives his understanding of sensations simultaneously felt and unfelt from *De rerum natura*. In the *Essais*, he insists that the “pains which the foot or the hand feel [*sentent*] while we are asleep are not ours [*ne sont pas à nous*].” Passions or feelings that brush the soul’s *escorce* do not belong to the “whole man” [*homme y soit engage tout entier*] or the

¹⁵⁵ According to Ada Palmer, Montaigne is unique in the attention he devoted to Book III of the poem. “Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance,” 415.

¹⁵⁶ S 121: “*Animae & animi differentia*”; and Screech 127: “*anima & animus idem*.” Montaigne’s affirmation that these terms are different and the same mirrors a similar confusion in *De rerum natura*.

¹⁵⁷ S 125: “*Falsum est corpus non sentire sed solam animam*”; 126: “*Nec obstat quod amissa anima corpus sensu caret*”; and 126: “*Docet apertè corpus sentire / argumenta sensus uisus*.”

¹⁵⁸ S 122: “*Accidit saepe ut & animus doleat se non aegra anima & è diuerso*.”

¹⁵⁹ S 122: “*Nam isti motus animo & anima sine tactu esse*.”

¹⁶⁰ S 122: “*sed si uiolentier est morbus qui feriat mentem pertingit quoque animam ut uideamus infringi linguam uocemque aboriri caligare oculos sonere aures succidere artus denique concidere exanimi terrore homines*.”

vie entiere; we do not truly possess them.¹⁶¹ Montaigne takes this grasp of totality from Lucretius, who suggests that feeling is possible only for the “whole man” [*hominem totum*] and the “whole living being” [*animantis totius extant*].¹⁶²

Yet although he adopts a Lucretian framework for discussing feeling as it relates to suspended animation, Montaigne questions the Roman poet’s claims. In “De l’exercitation,” he introduces the figure of Canus with a quotation from Lucretius: “No man awakes / Whom once the icy end of living overtakes.”¹⁶³ This Lucretian assertion places Canus’s desire to tell his friends about the nature of death under the sign of irony, but the efforts of Canus also undermine Lucretius’s absolute mortalism. In the flyleaves, Montaigne summarizes Lucretius’s view on the relation between feeling and death in his notes: “Nobody when dying feels [*sentit*] the *anima* escaping from his body, nor how it escapes.”¹⁶⁴ This sentiment contrasts with the ambitions of Canus, who sought to determine if his soul would have “any feeling of its departure.”¹⁶⁵ Seneca’s Latin puts the differences between Canus and Lucretius into further relief.¹⁶⁶ Canus sought to see if his *animus* was aware of its departure so that he could reveal the nature of the *anima*.¹⁶⁷ Seneca employs the same terms as Lucretius in a manner at odds with the Lucretian scheme Montaigne took such care to learn. The Stoic model for “De l’exercitation” aims to do what Lucretius suggests is impossible. Tackling Lucretius’s ultimate subject—the fear of death—from a perspective approaching that of Canus, Montaigne adopts the notion of the “whole man” from *De rerum natura* and employs it to strikingly different

¹⁶¹ F 2.6.271; BMS 2.6.394

¹⁶² L 3.97, 3.164.

¹⁶³ F 2.6.267; BMS 2.6.389: “nemo expurgitus extat / Frigida quem semel est uitae pausa sequuta.” Montaigne replaces Lucretius’s “nec quisquam” with “nemo.”

¹⁶⁴ S 130: “Nemo moriens animam sentit a corpore euadere neque quâ euaderet.” Montaigne is here summarizing *De rerum natura* 3.607-08: “It is evident that no one in dying feels his soul go forth from the whole body intact” [Nec sibi enim quisquam moriens sentire videtur / ire foras animam incolumem de corpore toto].

¹⁶⁵ F 2.6.267; BMS 2.6.389.

¹⁶⁶ On the relationship between Montaigne’s reading of Seneca and Lucretius, John D. Lyons claims: “Much of Montaigne’s Epicurean thought comes from Seneca, who proclaimed his loyalty to the Stoa but frequently quotes Epicurus in his letters.” *Before Imagination*, 225.

¹⁶⁷ Seneca, *Four Dialogues*, 91; *De tranquillitate animae*, 14: “‘Obseruare,’ inquit Canus ‘proposi illo uelocissimo momento an sensurus sit animus exire se’, promisitque, si quid explorasset, circumiturum amicos et indicaturum quis esset animarum status.’ The genitive *animarum* stems from *anima*, and therefore distinguishes itself from *animus*, the genitive of which is *animorum*.

effect. For Lucretius, there is an asymmetry between the soul's two aspects; one can survive without much *anima*, but not without *animus*. Even if one were a "mutilated trunk dismembered all about" and "deprived of a great part of the *anima*," one could retain life so long as *animus* remains.¹⁶⁸ Montaigne explores this model of death in "Contra la faineantise," where he recounts the final hours of Muley Moloch, who in the midst of battle lost all capacities of body and *anima*, but kept his "understanding" "firm to the last gasp."¹⁶⁹ In "De l'exercitation," Montaigne reverses this Lucretian stance and inquires into what happens to feeling when the *animus* is rendered inoperable, leaving behind body and *anima*.

In a quotation added by Montaigne in 1588, Lucretius writes: "They say that chariots bearing scythes will cut so fast that severed limbs are writhing on the ground below before the victim's mind and strength can even feel the pain, so swift has been the hurt."¹⁷⁰ Post-amputation movement suggests that although soldiers do not "feel" the limb's absence at once, the limb may continue to feel so long as it writhes. These Lucretian limbs are much like the hand belonging to Laridus in the passage Montaigne quotes from Virgil. Positioning Lucretius's limbs one sentence after Virgil's *semianimis* hand, Montaigne presents the dismembered lines of his poetic predecessors in order to move from the intact body to fragmented pieces. Montaigne's appropriation of the scythed chariots changes Lucretius's argument, which is focused on how swift dismemberment prevents soldiers who remain "absorbed in the ardour of battle" from feeling pain.¹⁷¹ Lucretius claims that "we feel that vital sense inheres in the whole body,

¹⁶⁸ L 3.396-416.

¹⁶⁹ F 2.21.514; BMS 2.21.717: "Tenant son corps couché: mais son entendement, et son courage, debout et ferme, jusques au dernier souspir."

¹⁷⁰ F 2.6.271; BMS 2.6.395: "Falciferos memorant currus abscindere membra, / Ut tremere in terra videatur ab artubus id quod / Decidit abscissum, cum men stamen atque hominis vis / Mobilitate mali non quit sentire dolorem." I have modified Frame's translation, which renders *mens* as "soul" and imports a symmetry not present in the Latin by claiming that the limbs hit the ground "[b]efore the victim's soul and strength *can ever know* / Or even feel the pain" (italics mine). The Latin refers only to feeling and does not use words associated with knowing. Montaigne's quotation skips Lucretius's second line: "saepe ita de subito permixta caede calentis" (L 3.643). The Lambin edition includes that line. See Lucretius, 1563, 233.

¹⁷¹ L 3.646-51.

and see that it is the whole that is animated.”¹⁷² The feeling of being alive [*vitaletm sensum*] is for Lucretius a holistic phenomenon. If a “swift blow” removed a body part, the *anima* enlivening it would be “sundered and cleft apart and cut apart with the body.”¹⁷³ Since *anima* and body cannot operate without *animus*, the severed part would cease to feel. In the flyleaves of Lambin’s *De rerum natura*, Montaigne takes careful note of Lucretius’s view. “As in snakes so too in us,” he writes, “when parts of the body are suddenly sliced off, they continue to move somewhat, therefore there is one *anima* in each part.”¹⁷⁴ In the paragraph featuring scythed chariots, Lucretius evokes beheadings: “Even the head shorn off the hot and living trunk retains on the ground the look of life and its open eyes, until it has rendered up all that is left of the *anima*.”¹⁷⁵ Does this head, which retains the “look of life” [*voltum vitaletm*], continue to feel as it “render[s] up” its *anima*? Elsewhere in the *Essais*, Montaigne expresses doubts on this matter. Describing an “extreme punishment”—“men cut in two parts across the diaphragm ... whence it happened that they died as it were two deaths at once [with] both parts moving a long time after, full of life and writhing in torment”—Montaigne asserts: “I do not believe there was much feeling in that movement.”¹⁷⁶ Although severed limbs or disconnected bodies may not feel as a whole man would, perhaps nature feels through them, an interpretation that gains traction when one considers that Montaigne connects these Virgilian and Lucretian quotations through a sentence dedicated to how the body works spontaneously, driven by a “natural impulse.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² L 3.634-35: “Et quoniam toto sentimus corpore inesse / vitaletm sensum et totum esse animale videmus.”

¹⁷³ L 3.636-39.

¹⁷⁴ S 130: “Vt in serpentibus sic in nobis fit ut in corporis partibus subito excisis sit adhuc aliquis motus ergus in singulis est una anima.”

¹⁷⁵ L 654-56: “et caput abscisum calido viventeque trunco / servat humi voltum vitaletm oculusque patetis, / donec reliquias animai reddidit omnes.”

¹⁷⁶ F 2.28.530; BMS 2.27.737: Chalcondylas recounts how “l’Empereur Mechmed pratiquoit souvent, de faire trancher les hommes en deux parts, par le faux du corps, à l’endroit du diaphragme, et d’un seul coup de simeterre: d’où il arrivoit, qu’ils mourussent comme de deux morts à la fois: et voyoit-on, dit-il, l’une et l’autre part pleine de vie, se demener long temps après presée de tourment. Je n’estime pas, qu’il y eust grand’ souffrance en ce mouvement.”

¹⁷⁷ F 2.6.271; BMS 2.6.395.

In “De l’exercitation,” Montaigne presents an approach to death, a tarrying in the passage of suspended animation, where the whole man is broken and the intellect is removed, leaving behind an animated body that passively approaches death through a feeling nature evacuated of any sense of self. Most thinkers seek to practice for death by actively willing their *animus* apart from *anima* and body. Yet such activities also make Montaigne uncomfortable, for they seek to break up the whole man. In the conclusion of the *Essais*, Montaigne roundly dismisses those who would “impel the body one way and the soul another.”¹⁷⁸ Such people desire to “get out of themselves and escape from the man,” an aim that is madness, for instead of “raising themselves, they lower themselves.”¹⁷⁹ One should not strive to divide the whole human being, to practice for death by denying life. In “De l’exercitation,” Montaigne inverts Canus’s Stoic priorities. If Canus sought to keep his “powers intent [*bandé*]” and tense, to ready his “*animus*” to perceive its own departure, Montaigne describes his own near-death experience as an absence of *animus*, of *bandé*, of activity.¹⁸⁰ Montaigne uses the scheme established by Lucretius to open up a new vista on human experience. His reading of *De rerum natura* allows him to develop a way of exercising passively, a way of dividing the whole man unintentionally, accidentally, in order to feel life by hanging in suspended animation. Lucretius also helps Montaigne to offer an immanent interpretation of this phenomenon. If Augustine seeks to discover God, the “life of [his] life,” Lucretius claims that the source of feeling is a “nature [*natura*] that lies deep down, hidden in the most secret recess, and there is nothing in our body more deeply seated than this; and it is itself furthermore the *anima* of the whole *anima*.”¹⁸¹ This invisible “nature” is the principle that subtends sentience and makes it possible. “Just as commingled in our frame and in all our body the force of *animus* and the power of *anima* lie hidden,” Lucretius continues, “so, I tell you, this force without a name ... lies hid, and is furthermore itself as were

¹⁷⁸ F 3.13.856; BMS 3.13.1165: “et aliò corpus impellere, aliò animum: distrahique inter diuerissimos motus?” (Montaigne quotes Seneca’s *Epistles* here).

¹⁷⁹ F 3.13.856; BMS 3.13.1166: “Ils veulent se mettre hors d’eux, et eschapper à l’homme. C’est follie: au lieu de se transformer en Anges, ils se transforment en bestes: au lieu de se hausser, ils s’abbattent.”

¹⁸⁰ F 2.6.267; BMS 2.6.389.

¹⁸¹ L 3.271-75: “nam penitus prorsum latet haec natura subestque, / nec magis hac infra quicquam est in corpore nostro, / atque anima est animae proporro totius ipsa.”

anima of the whole *anima* and lords it over all the body.”¹⁸² Using the same repetitions that Augustine would later invoke, Lucretius provides a naturalistic way of grasping what for sixteenth-century readers would have been an important theological motif.

A Romantic Coda

Montaigne took the structure of divine feeling that Augustine rendered influential and paired it with his understanding of Lucretian feeling in order to generate an intriguing and, so far as I can tell, new interpretation of sentience: to feel one’s life is to become minimally aware of nature feeling itself. Montaigne’s account of his near-death experience later inspired Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In the 1782 *Les rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, Rousseau describes how, while out walking, he suffers a collision with a sprinting Great Dane, which knocks him unconscious.¹⁸³ Describing his awakening, Rousseau employs terms that resonate with Montaigne’s accident:

This first sensation was a moment of delight. It alone gave me some feeling of myself. In that instant I was born into life, and it seemed to me as if I was filling all the things I saw with my frail existence. Entirely taken up by that moment, I could not remember anything else; I had no clear sense of myself as an individual, nor the slightest idea of what had just happened to me; I did not know who I was nor where I was; I felt neither pain nor fear nor anxiety. ... Throughout my whole being I felt a wonderful calm with which, whenever I think of it, I can find nothing to compare in the whole realm of known pleasures.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² L 3.276-81: “quod genus in nostris membris et corpore toto / mixta latens animi vis est animaeque potestas, / corporibus quia de parvis paucisque creatast, / sic tibi nominis haec expers vis facta minutis / corporibus latet atque animae quasi totius ipsa / porporrost anima et dominatur corpore toto.”

¹⁸³ The accounts of both Rousseau and Montaigne may share a common ancestor in Gerolamo Cardano’s 1576 autobiographical *De vita propria*, which, in a chapter entitled “Perils, Accidents, and Persistent Treacheries,” describes a deadly encounter with a sprinting, leaping dog. See Cardano, *The Book of My Life*, 106-07.

¹⁸⁴ Rousseau, *Reveries*, 14; Rousseau, *Les rêveries*, 23: “Cette première sensation fut un moment délicieux. Je ne me sentais encore que par-là. Je naissais dans cet instant à la vie, et il me semblait que je remplissais de ma légère existence tous les objets que j’apercevais. Tout entier au moment présent je ne me souvenais de rien; je n’avais nulle notion distincte de mon individu, pas la moindre idée de ce qui venait de m’arriver; je ne savais ni qui j’étais ni où j’étais; je ne sentais ni mal, ni crainte, ni inquiétude. ... Je sentais dan tout mon être un calme ravissant, auquel chaque fois que je me le rappelle, je ne trouve rien de comparable dans toute l’activité des plaisirs connus.” In future citations, the English translation will be abbreviated as RSW and the French as RPS.

As several scholars have concluded, the parallels between Rousseau's account and Montaigne's are far from accidental.¹⁸⁵ I expand previous observations by noting that even though Rousseau claims that his "task is the same as Montaigne, but [his] aim is the exact opposite," his work nevertheless incorporates nearly all of his predecessor's insights into the structure of felt vitality.¹⁸⁶ He takes this glimpse of sentience, which he gleans from his accident and his reading of Montaigne, and, later in the *Rêveries*, attempts to actively cultivate this state of consciousness.

Rousseau describes sitting at a peaceful Swiss lakeside and being "pleasantly aware [*sentir*] of my existence, without my having to take the trouble to think." For Rousseau, this simple awareness provides the key to true happiness. Since all earthly things are in "constant flux" and as a result our pleasures are always "beyond or behind us," happiness seems to be "always transitory."¹⁸⁷ Yet Rousseau's lakeside experiences illuminate another possibility:

But if there is a state where the soul can find a position solid enough to allow it to remain there entirely and gather together its whole being, without needing to recall the past or encroach upon the future, where time is nothing to it, where the present lasts forever, albeit imperceptibly and giving no sign of its passing, with no other feeling of deprivation or enjoyment, pleasure or pain, desire or fear than simply that of our existence, a feeling that completely fills our soul; as long as this state lasts, the person who is in it can call himself happy, not with an imperfect, poor, and relative happiness, such as one finds in the pleasures of life, but with a sufficient, perfect, and full happiness, which leaves in the soul no void needing to be filled.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ For a comparison, see Smith, "From Meditation to Reverie," 89-107. See also, Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 37-41; and Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch*, 201.

¹⁸⁶ RSW, 9.

¹⁸⁷ RSW, 55; RPS, 81-83: "Le flux et relux de cette eau, son bruit continu mais renflé par intervalles, frappant sans relâche mon oreille et mes yeux, suppléaient aux mouvements internes que la rêverie éteignait en moi, et suffisaient pour me faire sentir avec plaisir mon existence, sans prendre la peine de penser. ... Tout est dans un flux continuel sur la terre. ... Toujours en avant ou en arrière de nous ... Auggi n'a-t-on guère ici-bas que du plaisir qui passe."

¹⁸⁸ RSW 55; RPS, 83-84: "Mais s'il est un état où l'âme trouve un assiette assez solide pour s'y reposer tout entière et rassembler là tout son être, sans avoir besoin de rappeler le passé ni d'enjamber sur l'avenir;

When Rousseau enjoys this state, he escapes from time, inhabits a permanent present, and, as vital awareness fills him “completely,” feels his existence in its simplicity. Immune from intrusions, he enjoys plenitude. What does one experience during such moments? “Nothing external to the self,” Rousseau claims, “nothing but oneself and one’s own existence: as long as this state lasts, one is self-sufficient like God. The feeling of existence stripped of all other affections is itself a precious feeling of contentment and peace.”¹⁸⁹ The “feeling of existence” brings with it a sense of completeness that renders one “self-sufficient like God,” without need of anything beyond oneself. Rousseau interprets this feeling as completely immanent, as a way of replicating the transcendence of God within oneself; his appeal to self-sufficiency approaches a denial of the divine.

Rousseau depicts the feeling of being alive by using Montaigne’s experiential categories—a lack of all other affections, an alteration in one’s relationship with oneself, an intermingling of the timeless and the instantaneous—and then, in turn, adds a new interpretive wrinkle, namely that to experience this feeling is to become “self-sufficient like God.” Although Montaigne would have found such claims abhorrent, the essayist inadvertently prepares the way for Rousseau’s interpretation by disassociating this feeling from the divine. Presented schematically, the “feeling of existence” is interpreted by Augustine and his followers as feeling the presence of the divine within the self, by Montaigne as feeling the workings of nature or the functions of the body, and by Rousseau as feeling a sense of completeness akin to divinity. Over time, a feeling that is continuously described in nearly identical terms interpretively migrates from a divine hermeneutics to the hermeneutics of an absolute individuality that seeks to replace the

où le temps ne soit rien pour elle, où le présent dure toujours sans néanmoins marquer sa durée et sans aucune trace de succession, sans aucun autre sentiment de privation ni de jouissance, de plaisir ni de peine, de désir ni de crainte que celui seul de notre existence, et que ce sentiment seul puisse la remplir trouve peut s’appeler heureux, non d’un bonheur imparfait, pauvre et relatif, tel que celui qu’on trouve dans les plaisirs de la vie, mais d’un bonheur suffisant, parfait et plein, qui ne laisse dans l’âme aucun vide qu’elle sente le besoin de remplir.”

¹⁸⁹ RSW, 55-56; RPS, 84: “De rien d’extérieur à soi, de rien sinon de soi-même et de sa propre existence; tant que cet état dure, on se suffit à soi-même comme Dieu.”

divine. Interpretive possibilities opened by Montaigne made an indelible but accidental contribution to the eventual secularization of sentence.

Chapter 3

Felt Infinitives and Unformed Life in *Measure for Measure*

In *The Phenomenon of Life*, Hans Jonas uses a Shakespearean quotation to illustrate life's "precarious" nature. Jonas speculates that the original appearance of life in the cosmos "introduced the tension of 'to be or not to be' into the neutral assuredness of existence." Living creatures possess a "needful freedom," an autonomy that separates them from the same environment that provides the materials they must transform—through eating, digestion, photosynthesis, and so on—if they are to survive. For Jonas, this dependent separation means that life is a form of being for which not-being is a continual option, for which being is "a constant possibility rather than a given state."¹ Jonas employs *Hamlet* to introduce the language of ontology into his analysis, but the conjunction *or* performs far more work here than do Shakespeare's famous infinitives. If Jonas defines life as a continual relation between being and not-being, then Hamlet's *or* expresses the "constant possibility" that lies at life's core. Jonas sees in Shakespeare's conjunction the fundamental property of all living substance, an involuntary, even ontological needful freedom that animates bacteria and the most sophisticated organisms alike. Brian Cummings performs similar interpretive work when, in a recent discussion of suicide—an act that early moderns often understood as the litmus test for personal agency and freedom—he focuses on this *or* as an instantiation of voluntary choice: "It may be that the most important word in Hamlet's most famous line is the one that is least commented on: 'or.' This most unnoticed of conjunctions contains within it a metaphysical grammar of incalculable consequence. What most troubles Hamlet about the question of being is the fact that it is a question at all."² Since one can end one's life, that life amounts to a continual *or*. Although both writers stress the possibility encoded in Hamlet's *or* and isolate Shakespeare's ability to express fundamental issues of lived

¹ Jonas, *Phenomenon of Life*, 4. Although the idea of "needful freedom" is outlined on page 4, the phrase itself can be found on page 80.

² Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts*, 266.

experience through tiny grammatical particles, neither Jonas nor Cummings reveals how Shakespeare's famous phrase generates this existential significance.

Perhaps the greatest mystery surrounding Hamlet's "[t]o be, or not to be" is how, for so many readers, it conjures a palpable urgency.³ After all, the formulation is, as many critics have noted, a commonplace.⁴ In *De interpretatione*, Aristotle invokes the difference between "'to be' or 'not to be'" [*εἶναι ἢ μὴ εἶναι*] in a variety of arguments to the effect that a given entity cannot both exist and not exist at the same time: "all things must be or not be."⁵ Translating Aristotle's *einai* into the Latin *esse*, Cicero uses the same infinitive construction when he mocks an interlocutor in *Tusculanarum disputationum* by claiming that his argument misses the most "elementary lesson" in logic by proceeding "as if anything stated in a proposition of such a kind must not necessarily either be or not be [*id aut esse aut non esse*]."⁶ Hamlet's antithesis was also popular in English. To take two examples, Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love* (published under Chaucer's name in the 1532 *Workes*) uses "to be or not to be" in relation to the foreknowledge of God, while in a treatise from 1596 William Perkins defines intelligence as a faculty that "simply conceives a thing to be or not to be."⁷ Shakespeare employs a brilliant grammatical trick to turn this familiar, logical, and impersonal formula into an expression of angst: he elevates it from the position of syntactical subordination to which it was previously confined. When, for instance, Usk claims that God's foreknowledge "neither constrayneth ne defendeth any thing to be or not to be," the formula's meaning is controlled by the elements of the sentence that precede it.⁸ Shakespeare turns the infinitive *to be* into a grammatical subject. This shift of grammar

³ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Hibbard, 3.1.57. All subsequent quotations are from this edition, and are cited parenthetically.

⁴ Many scholars indicate that Hamlet's "[t]o be, or not to be" partakes of a broader tradition. See, for instance, Bruster, *To Be Or Not To Be*, 16-17; and Cooper, "Hamlet and the Invention of Tragedy," 216. No one, so far as I know has shown how Shakespeare uses grammar to change the meaning of the formula as it is presented in the various traditions that employ it.

⁵ Aristotle, *On Interpretation*, trans. Cooke, 19.24-29.

⁶ Cicero, *Tusculanarum disputationum*, trans. King, 1.6.12-7.14.

⁷ Usk, *Testament of Love*, 362; Perkins, *A Discourse of Conscience*, 6. Qtd. in Frye, *The Renaissance Hamlet*, 188.

⁸ Usk, *Testament of Love*, 362.

translates the *or* separating being from nonbeing into a conjunctive synecdoche for human life, which is perhaps alone in its capacity to actively decide between the affirmation or negation of its own being.⁹ What Cummings calls the “metaphysical grammar” of Hamlet’s *or* is thus dependent on the grammatical ingenuity with which Shakespeare deploys the infinitive mood. The possibility and uncertainty that Jonas and Cummings locate in the conjunction also resides in the less obvious but nevertheless equally powerful semantic force of the particle *to*.

Four years after Shakespeare composed *Hamlet* around 1600, he reworked the syntax of the “[t]o be, or not to be” soliloquy in *Measure for Measure*, a play that enters the historical record in 1604. Shakespeare replaces Hamlet’s “to die, to sleep” (3.1.61) with Claudio’s reaction to his impending death: “Ay, but to die, and go we know not where, / To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot, / This sensible warm motion to become / A kneaded clod.”¹⁰ Claudio’s great speech literalizes what was, for Hamlet, a hypothetical question. Awaiting execution, Claudio faces imminent not-being. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare imbues the infinitive marker with a felt existential burden; in *Measure for Measure*, he deepens this achievement by using the infinitive-as-subject to convey Claudio’s intensely personal affective reaction to his own quickly approaching death. Shakespeare nuances language so that *to* expresses the basic, felt architecture of life. This seemingly counterintuitive claim draws on William James, who, in *The Principles of Psychology*, argues that the syntactical minutia of language are saturated with affect:

If there be such things as feelings at all, then so surely as relations between objects exist in *rerum natura*, so surely, and more surely, do feelings exist to which these relations are known. There is not a conjunction or a preposition, and hardly an adverbial phrase, syntactic form, or inflection of voice, in human

⁹ Although I find many of Bruster’s arguments about this soliloquy compelling, I do not agree with his suggestion that “the speech does not ask us to think much about suicide at all” *To Be Or Not To Be*, 9. Brian Cummings also claims—against Harold Jenkins and Margreta De Grazia, among others—that suicide is central to the speech. See *Mortal Thoughts*, 236-38.

¹⁰ Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, ed. Bawcutt, 3.1.121-24. All subsequent quotations are from this edition, and are cited parenthetically. Given the precision of the parallels between these two speeches, there is surprisingly little written on the correspondences. Oddly, the most thorough paper on this topic is a two-page note: Eagleson, “Eschatological Speculations and the Use of the Infinitive,” 206-08.

speech, that does not express some shading or other of relation which at some moment we actually feel to exist between the larger objects of our thought. ... We ought to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of *blue* or a feeling of *cold*.”¹¹

For Shakespeare’s Claudio, what James might call “the feeling of *to*” is best understood as the feeling of living a life in the face of an approaching but not yet realized death.

The study of grammatical usage enables new ways of approaching the histories of affect, sensation, personhood, and the self. From E. A. Abbott in 1870 to Jonathan Hope in 2003, grammar has long been important to Shakespeare studies, but Lynne Magnusson’s recent claim that the “relation between grammar and early modern drama is overdue for renewed analysis” urges critics to move beyond the identification of grammatical rules in Shakespeare’s work.¹² Taking my lead from Jonas’s offhand quotation of Hamlet, I argue that the infinitive marker, usually all but invisible, enabled Shakespeare to express how it feels to be alive. I anchor my argument in Hamlet and Claudio’s *to* because this particle provides an historically grounded way of addressing the transhistorical felt background of human life, the sentience that undergirds experience but only rarely appears, often in moments that threaten or rupture that life. To verbalize sentience is to provide a set of linguistic tools through which we can better apprehend the ground of our own existence. By transforming the infinitive marker into a means of expressing the feeling of being alive, Shakespeare provides a linguistic resource the recovery of which may open up new ways of speaking and thinking about life.

In this chapter, I use syntax to pry open a reading of how life operates in *Measure for Measure*. After performing a detailed reading of Claudio’s speech in light of what Shakespeare may have learned about infinitives in grammar school, my argument moves dialectically to examine the conceptual and practical background against which this carefully constructed series of infinitives reacts. If Claudio’s speech expresses how it

¹¹ James, *Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1, 245-46.

¹² Magnusson, “A Play of Modals,” 69. See Abbott, *Shakespearean Grammar*; and Hope, *Shakespeare’s Grammar*.

feels to be alive, it mobilizes this phenomenon against the Duke and Isabella, both of whom treat life as an abstraction to be manipulated and as raw material to be formed according to the dictates of disparate disciplinary regimes. This opposition—between Claudio’s articulation of life as it is felt and the Duke and Isabella’s treatment of life as an object that can be controlled—enables me to open up a new way of understanding how vitality functions in *Measure for Measure*. Life and its various processes are central to the play. From the machinations of sexual desire, through the development of life in utero, to the onset of death and the fate of the corpse, *Measure for Measure* insistently circles the ways that human vitality is captured and shaped by legal, political, religious, pedagogical, and philosophical disciplinary apparatuses and yet somehow simultaneously exceeds or even defies these various mechanisms.¹³ Put another way, the play provides a wide-ranging exploration of two very different meanings elided under the word *life*: first, the formed life shaped by practice, habit, education, or social, political, and economic pressures until it develops a more or less stable identity that persists over time; and second, the brute, felt fact of being alive that subtends all of these various formations. A king, a soldier, a scholar: these very different forms of human life share an underlying vitality that has been molded in various ways.

The repeated appearances of monks and nuns in *Measure for Measure* represent the clearest example of Shakespeare’s deep interest in the formation of life. When the Duke goes under cover, he commands Friar Thomas: “Supply me with the habit and instruct me / How I may formally in person bear / Like a true friar” (1.3.6-8). The Duke seeks not simply to disguise himself with a “habit,” but to learn how to comport himself according to what was traditionally called the monastic *forma vitae* or form of life.¹⁴ He inserts himself into a pre-existing manner of living, just as Isabella strives to become a nun,

¹³ Critics often frame these issues in terms of sexuality and the law. See, for example, Dollimore, “Transgression and Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*.” For a historical account of sexuality and the law as it relates to the play, see White, *Natural Law*, 170-84. As my focus on life suggests, I think that sexuality and the law are too narrow to grasp the rich array of biological and disciplinary phenomena displayed on Shakespeare’s stage. Just as sexuality is only the most prominent manifestation of the vitality that churns beneath, connects, and divides the play’s disparate bodies, so Vienna’s laws are only the most easily discerned forms of social and personal order set in place to contain this energy.

¹⁴ The link between monasticism and *forma vitae* is discussed in Agamben, *Highest Poverty*, 91-108.

Angelo dons the formal trappings of sovereignty, and Pompey is inducted into the “mystery” of the executioner’s trade (4.2.26). As the Duke’s request to be “instruct[ed]” suggests, these forms must be learned over time, shaped through a pedagogical process that molds unformed vitality, the organic and largely involuntary processes that precondition the disciplined comportment of monks and nuns. The play is filled with scenes of instruction, a series of pedagogical encounters in which someone is taught or requests to learn how they can embody a *forma vitae*.¹⁵ For example, the Duke instructs Claudio on how he can rationally shape his life through the soliloquy—a term now associated with the theatre but that, in the early seventeenth century, was primarily understood as a spiritual exercise involving rational dialogue with oneself.¹⁶ The Duke’s advice on how Claudio should “[r]eason thus with life” is a prolonged scene of instruction designed both to teach the prisoner how to soliloquize and to initiate him into the philosophical life, which the Duke sees as a way of forming one’s vitality so as to become “absolute for death” (3.1.4-6). This chapter focuses on Claudio’s rejection of the Duke’s pedagogy, and how that rejection, framed by a series of infinitives, is based on an affective immediacy, an involuntary sentience or unformed life that serves as a counterpoint to the disparate *forma vitae* that populate the play.

The Feeling of To

According to William Lily’s *Grammar*, a book that Shakespeare would have encountered regularly in the schoolroom, the “Infinitive signifieth to dooe, to suffre, or to bee, and hath the neyther numbere nor person, nor nominative case before hym, and is known commonly by this sign to: as, Amare, *to love*.”¹⁷ When Shakespeare heard or read this definition, it was as part of a pedagogical program that introduced students to the Latin

¹⁵ I take this apt phrase from Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance*. *Measure for Measure* uses *instruction* and its variants more than any other play. The word *instruction* appears five times in *Measure for Measure*, head and shoulders above its closest competitors, two appearances in such plays as *The Tempest*. When all of the related words—*instruct*, *instructed*, *instructions*, and *instructs*—are also taken into account, *Measure for Measure* uses these terms ten times, more than even the closest contender, *The Taming of the Shrew* (a play obviously busy with issues related to instruction), which uses these words seven times. See Spevack, *Complete and Systematic Concordance*.

¹⁶ For spiritual exercises, see Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.

¹⁷ Lily and Colet, *Short Introduction of Grammar*, Bii. In *Shakespeare’s Schoolroom*, Lynne Enterline develops a compelling account of the connections between feeling and Elizabethan grammar school pedagogy.

language. However, as Magnusson has argued, these Latin lessons also taught Shakespeare what she calls “inadvertent lessons in English.”¹⁸ I suggest that Shakespeare learned three “inadvertent lessons” about the English infinitive. First, the infinitive is without person, a point raised in Lily’s definition, but also brought home by how the *Grammar* lays out the various conjugations of Latin verbs, a presentation that marks the infinitive as a break in the order of language. Lily’s infinitive appears as the twenty-second conjugation, following such forms as the indicative (*Amo, amas, amat*; “I love, thou lovest, he loveth”), the preterperfect (*Amavi*; “I have loved”), the optative present tense (*Amem*; “God graunt I love”), and so on.¹⁹ Each of these conjugations positions the reading, reciting *I* in a specific position vis-à-vis the verb being learned. The infinitive breaks from this pattern: *Amare*, “to love,” an arrangement that eliminates subjective coordinates from the grammar lesson.²⁰ This lack of personhood is coterminous with an absence of specified temporality, as if the loss of person involves the disappearance of time. To take the most obvious example, the infinitive *to be* floats free from the time-bound subject positions of such finite forms as *am, is, are, was, and were*. According to the fourth-century grammarian Diomedes, a figure popular with Elizabethan writers, the *modus infinitivus* is defined by the fact that it is without person, that it is *impersonativum*, a characteristic that aligns it with the atemporal, the *perpetuo*.²¹

When Elizabethan schoolboys learned Latin verb paradigms, they were expected to memorize the four principle parts of each verb—the first-person singular active indicative, the first-person singular perfect active indicative, the first-person singular perfect passive participle, and the active infinitive—an exercise that repeated the oddness of the infinitive in relation to three verbal equivalents of activities one already had or could someday do or undergo. As Shakespeare may have recognized when he memorized Latin verb after Latin verb, the English infinitive uses two words where Latin uses one: “*Amare*, to love.” Of course, this is simply how the highly inflected Latin language

¹⁸ Magnusson, “Grammatical Theatricality in *Richard III*,” 33.

¹⁹ Lily and Colet, Biii-Bv.

²⁰ Ibid., Bv. From this point onward in Lily’s lesson, all remaining conjugations—the future tense, the gerund, the supine, the present participle, and the future participle—are non-finite.

²¹ Diomedes, *Artis Grammaticae*, 340-41.

works: “*amo*, I love; *amas*, thou lovest.” But where in these instances English uses a separate word to indicate something important—the subject of the verb—in the case of the infinitive, the addition of *to* does not seem to add anything of immediate or obvious significance to the verb *love*. For speakers of Old English, *to* was primarily a preposition expressing movement, and was only rarely appended to the bare infinitive. This pairing became increasingly habitual until John Palsgrave could write in the 1530 *Lesclarcissement de la langue francoyse* that the French “infinitive mode” is equivalent to the form “we [the English] use to put *to* before a verbe,” a view that was shared by early English grammarians such as William Bullokar.²² Shakespeare could not have known about the slow lexical change that normalized the to-infinitive at the expense of its bare equivalent, but he might have wondered what purpose this extra word served. I suggest that Shakespeare nuances these three aspects of the English infinitive—its lack of personhood, lack of temporal specificity, and ostensibly unnecessary *to*—in order to open the grammatical form in new ways. He employs the seemingly useless infinitive marker to convey personal and temporally-rooted feelings.

If Shakespeare began to use the infinitive for these purposes in *Hamlet*, he took this style of expression further in *Measure for Measure*. In part, the personalizing of the infinitive featured in the latter play stems from the way that Claudio’s speech is imbricated in the action of the play. Although Hamlet’s soliloquy is part of the play, it also stands apart as a conceptual exercise. The speech is, after all, an explicit exploration of a *quaestio*, a way of declaring the terms of an argument at the outset of a debate. Shakespeare would have learned this decorum under the rubric of a common schoolroom exercise called the *thesis*. This oratorical technique was presented in grammar schools in a form derived from the *Progymnasmata* of the fourth-century Greek grammarian Aphthonius, a text the Latin translation of which was firmly ensconced in humanist curricula across Elizabethan

²² Palsgrave, *Lesclarcissement de la langue francoyse*, 84. See also Bullokar, *Pamphlet for Grammar*, 24. On the history of the infinitive in English, see Visser, *Historical Syntax of the English Language*, 943-48; Los, *Rise of the To-Infinitive*; and Fischer, “The Rise of the Passive Infinitive,” 141-88.

England.²³ According to Aphthonius, a “thesis is a reasoned examination of any thing under consideration,” and should be “the first among preparatory exercises to include a counter-thesis.” Through the thesis, students were trained to think *in utramque partem*, on both sides of a particular question, by adopting arguments for and against propositions like “Whether one should marry.”²⁴ Neil Rhodes argues that Hamlet’s “To be, or not to be” soliloquy takes “the form of a thesis,” but he misses what strikes me as a crucial dimension of this grammar-school exercise.²⁵ For Aphthonius, what distinguishes a thesis from a hypothesis is the fact that the former “is without complicating circumstances” such as “person, act, cause, and so on.”²⁶ The *scholium* provided by Reinhard Lorich in his influential 1572 Latin edition of the *Progymnasmata* states that the thesis speaks to an issue unchecked by limits, an endless question [*quaestionem infinitam*] not imbricated with specific circumstances.²⁷ Hamlet’s “To be, or not to be” presents a sophisticated recapitulation of a grammar school exercise that examines both sides of a question in a general way that excludes the category of person.

Transferring the ostensive solitude of Hamlet’s soliloquy into the register of interpersonal dialogue, Claudio’s speech is firmly entangled in specific circumstances. It is both a direct response to Isabella’s refusal to sacrifice her virginity in exchange for his life and, at the same time, a rejection of the Duke’s earlier attempt to help the young prisoner become “absolute for death” (3.1.5). In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare coupled the impersonality of both infinitive mood and schoolroom exercise; in *Measure for Measure*, he retains only the former. After initially agreeing that Isabella’s chastity is more

²³ For the use of Aphthonius in Shakespeare’s England, see Baldwin, *William Shakspeare’s Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, 288-90; Clark, “The Rise and Fall of Progymnasmata”; and Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind*, 45-50.

²⁴ Nadeau, “The Progymnasmata of Aphthonius in Translation,” 281. For the centrality of *in utramque partem* thinking, see Altman who sees its cultural importance contributing to what he aptly calls “the moral cultivation of ambivalence.” *The Tudor Play of Mind*, 31-63.

²⁵ Rhodes, *Shakespeare and the Origins of English*, 91.

²⁶ Nadeau, “The Progymnasmata of Aphthonius in Translation,” 281.

²⁷ Aphthonius, *Aphthonii Progymnasmata*, Dd3v: “Graeci Rhetores Thesin appellat questionem vagam, nullis circumstantiarum cancellis inclusam, Latini quaestionem infinitam.” For a brilliant exploration of the creative ways Shakespeare used his exposure to Aphthonius’s exercises, see Enterline, *Shakespeare’s Schoolroom*, 107-13, 136-39.

important than his life, Claudio suddenly changes his mind: “death is a fearful thing,” he claims, before turning noun into verb:

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where,
 To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot,
 This sensible warm motion to become
 A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
 To bathe in fiery floods or to reside
 In the thrilling region of thick-ribbèd ice,
 To be imprisoned in the viewless winds
 And blown with restless violence round about
 The pendant world, or to be worse than worst
 Of those that lawless and incertain thought
 Imagine howling—‘tis too horrible.
 The weariest and most loathèd worldly life
 That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
 Can lay on nature is a paradise
 To what we fear of death. (3.1.121-35)

Producing an extended series of infinitives—“to die,” “[t]o lie,” “to rot,” and so on—Claudio suggests that death is a “fearful thing” precisely because it may be a process. To die is to “go we know not where” in two senses. First, the body will begin and then continue “[t]o lie in cold obstruction, and to rot.” After death, one’s body does not disappear, but lies still, unable to perform its vital functions, which are obstructed. Worse, this lack of regulative motion is accompanied by new bodily movements: the loosening, slackening, and crumbling coterminous with “rot.” Yet although death might disperse embodied life, dying may also introduce a new form of disembodied experience. This second meaning of the equation between “to die” and “to go” features a “delighted spirit” accustomed to the warm pleasures of embodied life now forced “[t]o bathe in fiery floods or to reside / In thrilling region of thick-ribbèd ice.” Claudio imagines post-death experience feelingly, either as an extreme heat the immediate proximity of which is

expressed by the verb “to bathe” or as an extreme cold that “thrill[s]” and causes shivers or shudders.²⁸ As Claudio piles up possible forms of post-death experience, he can imagine losing his vision and his freedom of movement, “imprisoned” in “viewless winds,” but he cannot formulate an absolute loss of feeling, since even those in the depths of hell are “howling” in pain. Claudio is certain that the “weariest and most loathèd wordly life” is a “paradise” compared to “what we fear of death.” While embodied, one might be subjected to “ache[s]” and “imprisonment,” but one’s “nature” remains a “sensible warm motion,” a state preferable to a sensibility that feels fire, ice, or complete immobility.

Imagining this postmortem feeling, Shakespeare draws (perhaps indirectly) on Augustine, who, in *De civitate Dei*, distinguishes between body and soul as they relate to death: “The soul is called immortal, then, because, at least to some extent, it never ceases to live and feel [*non desinit vivere atque sentire*]; whereas the body is called mortal because it can be deprived of all life, and cannot, of itself, live at all.”²⁹ If Augustine and the Christianity informed by his theology are correct, then Claudio has much to fear. What Augustine calls “first death” is accompanied by “a sensation of anguish [that] is produced by the force that tears apart two things [body and soul] which had been conjoined and interwoven during life; and this sensation persists until there is a complete cessation of all that feeling which was present by the union of soul and flesh.”³⁰ Even more terrifying is the prospect of “second death,” which occurs after the last judgment: “it consists not in the separation of soul and body, but in the union of both in eternal punishment. There, by contrast to their present state, men will not be before death or after death, but always in death, and, for that reason, never living, never dead, but endlessly dying,” constantly feeling the “anguish” of that event.³¹ Although the pain of the second is avoidable, the first is mandatory, a fact that is, Augustine claims, built into Latin grammar: “it has not improperly or inappropriately come about ... that the Latin word

²⁸ *OED* *thrilling* ppl a. 1b.

²⁹ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, trans. Dyson, 13.2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.6.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 13.11.

moritur [‘he is dying’] cannot be declined by grammarians according to the rule by which other such words are declined.” *Moritur* does not work like words in its class (*oritur*, for example), since when one places it in the perfect tense, one must add an extra *u*, so that it becomes *mortuus est* in a manner that mirrors indeclinable adjectives. “*Mortuus*, however, though in form an adjective, is used as a perfect participle, as if that were to be declined which cannot be declined,” Augustine continues, “so it has appropriately come about that the verb itself can no more be declined in speech than can the event which it signifies be avoided.”³² In its grammatical function, this word mirrors the phenomenon it signifies.

Claudio’s speech performs similar work; Shakespeare uses the infinitive marker to express the phenomenon of sentience. The speech is based on an efflorescence of infinitives-as-subjects, which appear eight times in the first nine lines. The action implied in these verbs replaces the explicit subject position that could have been expressed with the personal language of *I* and *my*. Of course, the opening and closing lines of the speech employ the collective *we*. Claudio begins by claiming that to die is to “go we know not where” (3.1.121) and ends by suggesting that even the worst earthly life “is a paradise / To what we fear of death” (3.1.134-35). Although these personal pronouns certainly include Claudio, they strain to encompass the whole of humanity and, at the same time, help to anchor the two things of which Claudio is certain in the present tense: he “know[s] not” what awaits him after death and he “fear[s]” what death may bring. Beyond these two facts, the rest of the speech is shrouded in existential uncertainty—the grammatical equivalent of the continual possibility Jonas invokes in his image of life as a mode of being that never ceases to hover over “the abyss” of its own negation.³³ The grammatical form best fitted to this radical uncertainty is the infinitive mood, which swells between the first and last lines of this speech to eclipse the immediately apparent ties to personhood and temporality registered in either “we know not” or “we fear.” As if to underline the stress placed on this mood, Shakespeare employs two homophones that

³² Ibid., 13.11.

³³ Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 4.

defamiliarize the meaning of the sound Claudio cannot stop repeating: first, he claims that the potential terrors of the afterlife are “too horrible,” a formulation that adds a letter and turns the infinitive marker into an adverb that modifies and passes judgment on all of the previous verbs; and second, he argues that even the worst conditions of “worldly life” are mild in relation “[t]o what we fear of death,” a phrase that transforms what was a verbal marker into a relational preposition (3.1.131-35). Shakespeare not only repeatedly uses the infinitive; he twice draws attention to this decision.

At a moment dedicated to affective subjectivity, Shakespeare emphasizes a grammatical construction that does not relate directly to a temporally-situated subject. He moves a step beyond what he had accomplished in *Hamlet* by expressing a very personal, immediately lived confrontation with death in almost completely impersonal and atemporal language. There is a sense in which this choice is justified by the way that the infinitive mood expresses the infinite reaches of “what we fear of death,” but I think something deeper is at work. Although it was once thought that the *to* of the to-infinitive was a “semantically empty sandhi form,” recent research suggests that this particle is suffused with meaning.³⁴ The linguist Patrick Duffley argues that when *to* is joined with an infinitive verb, the spatial sense of motion implied in the preposition takes on a “strictly temporal sense,” for *to* situates the “bare infinitive’s event” in relation to a prior position in time: “the infinitive evokes an event and *to*, the movement from an instant situated before this event up to the instant at which the event begins.”³⁵ In this view, Claudio’s “[t]o lie in cold obstruction” expresses a temporal relationship between the realization of a state of affairs (lying still, bereft of warm vitality) and the time before that state has been realized (the anticipation of this future event, which may happen sooner rather than later). The *to* addresses the fact that death is experienced between the moment its inevitability is recognized and the moment one dies. Claudio’s speculations on the pains that may be felt in the afterlife only amplify the “aura of ‘iffness”” surrounding the infinitive event, which is separated from the implicit now of his spoken

³⁴ Visser, *An Historical Syntax of the English Language*, 952.

³⁵ Duffley, *The English Infinitive*, 16-17.

to by the contingency of future events.³⁶ The infinitive marker's capacity to express this sense of existential possibility makes it the ideal vehicle for articulating Claudio's angst.³⁷

If *to* tethers the time of the bare verb back to a prior moment, then the to-infinitive must be implicitly linked to a grammatical person capable of spanning that temporal distance. Duffley argues that when the to-infinitive is used as a subject, it is always silently supported by a "generalized person," the "virtual sum" of all persons (first, second, and third). Thus, although one can properly say "We want it to snow," one cannot legitimately say "To snow is pleasant," since the infinitive here applies only to the third person—the neuter *it* reserved for discussions of weather—and not to the first and second persons.³⁸ When Claudio contends that "to rot" is "too horrible," his claim presupposes a generalized person. The string of to-infinitives that structures his speech invokes the relationship between experience and death as it pertains to a first-person speaker (Claudio), a second-person interlocutor (Isabella), and all other third-person listeners, from the eavesdropping Duke to members of the audience. Shakespeare uses the to-infinitive as a means of appealing to the shared principles that underpin the human condition and suggesting how these principles relate to temporality. The generalized person required for this speech is alive and feels his or her "sensible warm motion" (3.1.123) in a passing now that stands in relation to the event with which embodied life must, sooner or later, cease.³⁹ The felt uncertainty encoded in the speech's repeated *to* is a grammatical rendering of sentience, the felt quality of being alive that Claudio calls

³⁶ Ibid., 128.

³⁷ Although Shakespeare could have used the gerund-as-subject—"Lying in cold obstruction, and rotting, this sensible warm motion becoming a kneaded clod"—this grammatical form does not capture the sense of possibility that the infinitive creates in the space between the temporal priority of *to* and the uncertain futurity of *die*.

³⁸ Duffley, *The English Infinitive*, 121-22.

³⁹ Of course, Shakespeare was not the first English writer to use the infinitive-as-subject in this way. For instance, George Puttenham illustrates anaphora, the "figure of *Report*," with a collection of infinitival subjects that resonates with Claudio's jailhouse plea: "To thinke on death it is a miserie, / To thinke on life it is a vanitie: / To thinke on the world verily it is, / To thinke that heare man hath no perfit blisse." *The Art of English Poesie*, 165. The staid sterility of this verse is enough to suggest that if Shakespeare drew on earlier syntactical models for Claudio's speech, he reinvested them with an energy capable of turning the *modus impersonativum* into a mechanism for conveying personal feeling.

“[t]his sensible warm motion” (3.1.123). The motion is “sensible”—a word that period lexicographers defined as “easily felt”—both because its movements are reflexively perceived and because it is sensitive to its milieu: the entities it encounters, the mediums that surround it, the moods in which it finds itself.⁴⁰ It is also “warm,” for it takes place against a regulated and comfortable tactility. The deictic *this* with which Claudio introduces his arresting phrase suggests that the felt movement under consideration is his own, but also beyond his control. Claudio does not say “*my* sensible warm motion” precisely because he will lose embodied life; *this* signals the transience of sentience, which is a felt motion distended across and caught up in time. “This sensible warm motion” constantly skirts the abyss beneath it, moving towards and atop its own negation.

With this sense of motion established, the logic of Shakespeare’s grammatical choice falls into place: the infinitive captures sentience as an uncertain and fragile motion between the particle *to* and its accompanying verb. Shakespeare’s manipulation of the infinitive anticipates contemporary reflections on the conceptual and affective importance of the grammatical mood. Luce Irigaray, for example, claims that since it is “[d]evoid of any mark of person or number, the verb in the infinitive expresses only the establishment of a relationship.”⁴¹ The action encoded in the verb *to live* “implies a constant actuality that cannot be assimilated to a present whose existence is thinkable only through the separation from a past or a future. The action is always in the process of happening: the condition is always in the process of coming about. Neither is ever repetitive or able to be anticipated, because neither is ever complete.”⁴² Drawing on Irigaray, Gilles Deleuze develops an ontology of the infinitive in which things are effects of verbs and the distinction between subjects and objects collapses. It is from a “pure and undetermined infinitive,” Deleuze asserts, that “voices, moods, tenses, and persons will

⁴⁰ A number of late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth-century lexicons provide this definition: Coote, *The English School-Master*; Cawdrey, *A Table Alphabetical*; Bullokar, *An English Expositor*; and Cockeram, *English Dictionary*.

⁴¹ Irigaray, *To Speak is Never Neutral*, 55.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 58.

be engendered.”⁴³ In this view, the infinitive as a figure of pure becoming is prior to every form of differentiation and distinction; the infinitive expresses life, at least insofar as life cannot, in Deleuze’s view, be possessed, confined, frozen, or divided. Entangled with the logic of the infinitive, this sense of life may strain the capacities of human expression, but Shakespeare provides a model for how its felt valences can nevertheless achieve articulation.⁴⁴ By using the infinitive marker to encode sentience, Shakespeare’s language performs the very phenomenon he invokes. It is the impending loss of Claudio’s “sensible warm motion” that discloses the basic felt quality of aliveness and brings it to the foreground of his attention. Although the feeling was undoubtedly present throughout Claudio’s life, it only truly appears when it is on the verge of disappearance—and will no doubt fade once more into the background after he is released from prison. In exactly the same way, Shakespeare brings the force of *to* (the senses of uncertainty, possibility, and finitude that it carries) into the foreground in this speech, but it quickly fades back into the everyday murmur of a language that cannot proceed without relegating this particle to the semantic background. Sentience and *to* are in fact isomorphic, at least insofar as they both silently subtend and support other modes of significance and only appear under existential or hermeneutical duress.

Disciplining Life

Claudio’s appeal to the feeling of life is a response both to Isabella and the Duke, an assertion of sentience against those who would reduce life to an abstract concept and then subsume its temporal rhythms beneath the claims of atemporal ideals. This refusal of the Duke’s teaching is at the same time a refusal of soliloquy, the very dramatic form on which (through *Hamlet*) the syntax of Claudio’s words are based. Cummings suggests that the “diptych” of speeches delivered by the Duke and Claudio have the “character of monologue although uttered in dialogue,” a “sense of the soliloquy turning itself out into colloquy.”⁴⁵ In my view, the role played by soliloquy in this pairing is even more

⁴³ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 245.

⁴⁴ Writing about Deleuze’s ontology of the infinitive, Donna V. Jones claims that this understanding of life “strains the intelligibility of the sentence but is not for this reason itself irrational.” *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy*, 194.

⁴⁵ Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts*, 197.

complex. The Duke gives Claudio a lesson in soliloquizing; he attempts to teach the prisoner an ancient technique for dialoguing with oneself so as to form one's life according to the strictures of reason. Claudio rejects this exercise by appealing to the felt qualities of a life that refuses to be formed. After advising the prisoner to "[b]e absolute for death" (3.1.4), the Duke delivers an extended protreptic that advocates soliloquizing both as a form of self-development and a way of philosophically preparing for death.⁴⁶

The term *soliloquy* was only explicitly linked to drama in the late seventeenth century, and earlier appearances of the word in English link it to an older meaning.⁴⁷ Take, for example, the definition provided in Richard Rogers's 1603 *Seven Treatises*, which claims that the practice of "communing" with God and oneself "was called of the Fathers of ancient time, their Soliloquie, that is, the talke which they used to have alone by themselves: That as men wearie, desire rest; so wee by the varietie and multiplicitie of business in this world, being troubled and distracted, may seeke ease to our mindes by meditation."⁴⁸ As Brian Stock has shown, the soliloquy was employed and described by such figures as Socrates, Seneca, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and Plotinus.⁴⁹ This long tradition was formalized by Augustine, whose *Soliloquia* coins a "new and harsh name"

⁴⁶ Throughout the play, the Duke is depicted in a Senecan vein as a public figure who, in his own words, does "not like" the "stage" of public life (1.1.69), has "ever loved the life removed" (1.3.8), and, as Escalus observes, always "above all other strifes contended to know himself" (3.1.489). The Duke seems to be following Seneca's advice in the *Epistula morales* to Lucilius. There, Seneca repeatedly claims that the philosopher's life "will be like that of Jupiter, who, amid the dissolution of the world ... can retire into himself and give himself over to his own thoughts. In some such way as this the sage will act; he will retreat into himself, and live with himself" (9.18). On the protreptic as an ancient genre, see Jordan, "Ancient Philosophic Protreptic and the Problem of Persuasive Genres."

⁴⁷ For the introduction of the soliloquy into an explicitly theatrical context, see Hirsh, *Shakespeare and the History of Soliloquies*, 278-97.

⁴⁸ Rogers, *Seven treatises*, 236. Other period texts provide similar insight into the term. Henry Morely could claim that it was the "custome" of the Emperor Constantine to "shut up himselfe close into some secret place of his Palace, where hee used to have both his *Soliloquia*, or private conferences with God." *The Cleansing of the Leper Discoursed*, 14-15. A few decades earlier, Anthony Rudd could "conceive in mind" how Queen Elizabeth might conduct "her *soliloquia* or private meditations." *A Sermon Preached at Richmond*, 50. This dual sense of the term, as both a private meditation and a silent dialogue with God is captured by John Higgins, who claims that the English *soliloquy* means "Babblyng to him self, and no body present" and that the Latin *soliloquium* signifies "Communication, or contemplative talking with God." *Huloets Dictionarie Newelye Corrected*, 125. The last two examples are also quoted in Staykova, "The Augustinian Soliloquies," 124-25.

⁴⁹ Stock, "The Soliloquy."

to describe this practice of self-conversation.⁵⁰ The soliloquy gives philosophy a literary form of expression, and the practice survives well into the seventeenth century.

Although Augustine's *Soliloquia* was available in the various early modern *Opera omnia* edited by humanists like Erasmus, the term and the practice it names were widespread in England through a collection of prayers and meditations that most often circulated under some version of the title *Augustine's Manual, Soliloquies, and Meditations*.⁵¹ A patchwork of passages derived from *Confessions*, Hugh of St. Victor's *Soliloquium*, and others, this text, which first appeared on the continent in the thirteenth century and is attested in Middle English manuscripts in the fifteenth century, went through four separate translations and a total of 27 English editions in the 1550s-1640s. It was also widely available through the 80 Latin editions published on the continent in the sixteenth century.⁵² These pseudo-Augustinian *Soliloquies* were in reader's hands long before English translations of Augustine's genuine works began to appear in the early seventeenth century, and they served as models for devotional practice.⁵³ Much like Aphthonius's exercises, the *Soliloquies* provided cognitive scaffolding that could be used to fashion one's discourse, but they directed this discourse towards a self hard at work to fashion a Christian way of life. The "[t]o be, or not to be" soliloquy may be part of this tradition. Hamlet's speech, Stock claims, "faithfully adheres to ancient and Augustinian guidelines for soliloquies as spiritual exercises, including among its techniques ethical

⁵⁰ Augustine, *The Earlier Writings*, 48. Translated into Old English by King Alfred in the ninth century, this text did not appear again in a full English translation for another thousand years in 1910. For the Old English version of the *Soliloquia*, see *King Alfred's Version of St. Augustine's Soliloquies*. The next English translation of the genuine text of Augustine's *Soliloquia* that I can find is *The Soliloquies of Saint Augustine*, trans. Cleveland.

⁵¹ For the most thorough account of Augustine's publication history in early modern Europe, see Visser, *Reading Augustine in the Reformation*.

⁵² For the appearance of this text in Middle English manuscripts, see Sturges, "The Middle English Pseudo-Augustinian *Soliloquies*." For the numbers cited here and a broader discussion of this text's reception, see Staykova, "The Augustinian Soliloquies of an Early Modern Reader."

⁵³ An Englished section of *De civitate Dei* appeared in 1608 and the entire text was released in 1610. The *Confessions* were translated in 1620. For this point and the attendant argument that this pseudo-Augustinian material actually paved the way for the reception of Augustine's works in England, see Staykova, "Pseudo-Augustine and Religious Controversy in Early Modern England." For a helpful overview, see Cummings, "Autobiography and the Self."

self-questioning and an inquiry into the speaker's existential situation."⁵⁴ If Hamlet presents an articulation of this form of soliloquizing, the Duke provides Claudio with a lesson on how the practice should be carried out.

As this lesson in soliloquizing begins, the Duke commands Claudio to "[r]eason thus with life," before he moves into an exemplary form of address where his spoken *I* stands in for Claudio's internal voice, showing the young man how he can in turn discourse with his own vitality. The Duke advocates an explicitly vital version of the soliloquy, models this contemplative practice in an extended speech, and trains Claudio in an art of soliloquizing that he encourages the young man to continue silently in his cell in the hours leading up to his death. True to the philosophical traditions from which the soliloquy emerged, the Duke instructs Claudio on how the soul can, as Seneca puts it, "advance by means of its own activity"; through this practice, the mind can discover its own good [*animi bonum animus inueniat*] and cultivate a new way of living.⁵⁵ The Duke's lesson suggests that this *bonum* is rational detachment from life. Claudio must reason with life, subject the needs and desires of his vitality to the powers of rationality, and soliloquize his mind away from life so that it can become "absolute for death." The Duke's lesson proceeds according to a series of definitions: "If I do lose thee," he begins, addressing Claudio's life in what should be Claudio's voice, "I do lose a thing / That none but fools would keep; a breath thou art / Servile to the skyey influences / That dost this habitation where thou keeps't / Hourly affect" (3.1.7-11). Positioning the *I* as separate from life's "thee," which can ostensibly be lost without the *I* ceasing to exist, the Duke figures vitality as a "thing," an entity that can be kept or lost like a possession. Since life is a "thing," it can be circumscribed, defined, and reduced to something manageable. It is a "breath," a tremulous, almost non-existent entity that is "[s]ervile" to the atmospheric "influences" that "[h]ourly afflict" the worldly and temporal "habitation" where life is necessarily confined, but from which reason, by virtue of its otherworldly commerce, can escape. As the Duke's speech continues, these definitions multiply.

⁵⁴ Stock, *Augustine's Inner Dialogue*, 64.

⁵⁵ Seneca, *De vita beata* 2.2. Qtd. in Stock, "The Soliloquy," 319.

“Merely thou art death’s fool,” the Duke contends, and begins to accumulate a list of accusations: “thou art not noble,” “Thou’rt by no means valiant,” “Thou art not thyself,” “Thou art not certain,” “Happy thou art not,” and “If thou art rich, thou’rt poor” (3.1.11-28). This speech seeks to define life out of existence: “What’s in this / That bears the name of life?” (3.1.38-39). The Duke’s question separates word from thing; the term “life” does not correspond to anything at all.

Yet the Duke’s efforts are self-undermining, for in claiming that there is nothing “in this / That bears the name [of life],” he deictically gestures towards the “this” that subtends his ability to speak: his own life. Indeed, the Duke’s first definition defies his attempt to pin life down as a “thing,” since “breath” is not an entity, but a process, an embodied activity that ceaselessly unfolds in time. The noun *thing* has meanings that stretch back to Old English and that position the term either as “an entity of any kind” or as “that which occurs, an event.”⁵⁶ Since the Duke’s definitions attack what life is not, his argumentative strategy presupposes that life is an entity, not an ongoing occurrence—for the latter constantly ceases to be what it was and frustrates attempts to pin it down as a substantive entity. A similar counter-logic is at work in the Duke’s claims that life is insubstantial—“Thou art not thyself, / For thou exists on many a thousand grains / That issue out of dust” (19-21)—an argument that suggests life is a process, not a entity. Although this negative definition registers the dust from which Adam was created, the link between human and *humus*, and the Epicurean notion that life is comprised of “many a thousand” atoms, the Duke also highlights the dependency of living beings on food, those “grains / That issue out of dust.” Such dependency suggests that the Duke’s actual topic is *living*, a temporal unfolding. Life is not itself precisely because it never ceases to transcend itself, to incorporate new forms of sustenance. The Duke’s accusations against life mobilize a false basis for comparison, arguing that life is not “noble” because it requires “accommodations” (food, clothing, housing) that come from base materials (3.1.13-15), that life is not “valiant” because its tendency towards self-preservation renders it fearful (3.1.15-17), that life is not “happy” because desire is constitutive of

⁵⁶ *OED*, *thing* n. II; I 4a.

living (3.1.21-23), that life is not “certain” because its “complexion shifts” and constantly changes (3.1.23-25). In each case, a temporal process is found wanting in relation to such abstract, ostensibly atemporal virtues as nobility, valor, happiness, and certitude.

These abstractions belong to the realm of reason, which, as Socrates and others have argued, occupies a timeless zone detached from the living body.⁵⁷ At bottom, the Duke holds that Claudio should be “absolute for death” because life is temporal, bereft of the finality that belongs to death and abstraction. The “absolute” can find a foothold in death, but not in life. To be sure, this argument is troubled by the fact that reason too is a process that unfolds in and requires time. Nevertheless, Claudio initially agrees with the Duke’s assessment that “in this life / Lie hid mo thousand deaths,” and responds to the lengthy lesson on soliloquizing with gratitude: “To sue to live, I find I seek to die, / And seeking death, find life” (3.1.39-43). Both figures agree that since life subsists in time and constantly changes, each change, of which human life contains many “thousand[s],” is a little death. To live is to die because life is temporal. The Duke presents the soliloquy as a technique for realizing this truth. Yet, as the Duke’s confusion between static entities and fluid processes suggests, soliloquies cannot pry the speaking subject free from the life that subtends inner dialogue. If, in Pierre Hadot’s words, the aim of such practices is “the mastery of the subject’s inner discourse,” then the Duke’s lesson works against his intentions and reveals instead the slipperiness of language, whether it is spoken out loud or within the mind.⁵⁸

As the scene continues and Isabella replaces the Duke as Claudio’s interlocutor, she presents once more the arguments already advanced by the Duke, contrasting the “perpetual honour” of her chastity against the “feverous life” that her brother risks losing

⁵⁷ Recent treatments of this topic include Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*; and Sloterdijk, *The Art of Philosophy*.

⁵⁸ Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 135. This insistence on the limitation of the “interior monologue” is commonplace, and was used, for example, by Jacques Derrida in a section entitled “Meaning as Soliloquy” in *Voice and Phenomena*, 27-40. Augustine was already well aware of this problem. See Stock, *Augustine’s Inner Dialogue*, 186-211.

(3.1.76-78). Timeless abstractions win out over temporal, brief, and “feverous” processes, an arrangement that is in keeping with the religious order Isabella is about to enter, which features “fasting maids whose minds are dedicate / To nothing temporal” (2.2.156-57). Isabella is fond of this distinction, and tells Angelo: “Better it were a brother died at once, / Than that a sister by redeeming him / Should die for ever” (2.4.107-09). She can make disturbingly absolute claims—“More than our brother is our chastity” (2.4.186)—because eternal virtue outweighs fleeting existence, and her efforts to form her life according to an unchanging exemplar require the negation of human temporality. Isabella uses the same logic when she tells Claudio that she would willingly throw her life “down for [his] deliverance / As frankly as a pin,” but that she will not consider losing her chastity for the same purpose. “O, were it but my life,” she claims, the issue would be solved (3.1.106-08). Here, she encapsulates the spirit of the Duke’s speech in a single adverbial *but*.

Yet Isabella also introduces a new element into this ongoing catechism on the subordination of life to ideals. After dismissing “feverous life” in favour of “perpetual honour,” she comforts Claudio by telling him that one feels very little at the moment of death: the “sense of death is most in apprehension, / And the poor beetle that we tread upon / In corporal sufferance finds a pang as great / As when a giant dies” (3.1.79-82). The Duke’s lesson on soliloquizing does not acknowledge that human life includes sentience, a feeling of being alive that supports pleasure and pain. By introducing “sense,” “corporal sufferance,” and “pang[s],” Isabella expands what had been an abstract understanding of life into a discourse that appeals to sentience and what it might mean for feeling to cease. If the “sense of death is most in apprehension,” her formulation still implies that although “most” of the unpleasant sensations associated with dying occur in the moments leading up to the end, there nevertheless remains an unknown residue of feeling that accompanies death. Likewise, she intends to comfort Claudio by suggesting that a giant feels as much at the moment of death as does a “poor beetle” trod underfoot. But this relationship of scale works both ways, for she also

implies that a beetle “finds” in death as much “corporal sufferance” as a giant—that all creatures, no matter their size, feel the onset of death in an equally powerful way.⁵⁹ The introduction of feeling here works against this scene’s earlier abstractions by transferring life from the space of rational inquiry into the domain of sentience, encouraging Claudio to look at life not as an abstract concept but rather as the necessary precondition for experience, something primarily felt. Isabella’s counterproductive invocation of sensation is the background from which her brother’s plea emerges. Claudio translates the Duke and Isabella’s arguments against an abstraction called life into a meditation on felt vitality as it relates to the sensations that may accompany and even survive the moment of death.

Formed and Unformed Life

Measure for Measure obsessively returns to the distinction between life in general—whether it be the abstract “life” against which the Duke reasons or the “warm sensible motion” Claudio feels—and forms of life, the ways humans shape their lives into established patterns. Just after Claudio’s lesson in soliloquizing, the Duke uses this distinction against Pompey:

The evil thou causest to be done,
That is thy means to live. Do thou but think
What ‘tis to cram a maw, or clothe a back
From such a filthy vice; say to thyself,
From their abominable and beastly touches
I drink, I eat, array myself, and live.
Canst thou believe thy living is a life,
So stinkingly depending? Go mend, go mend. (3.1.288-94)

Ineffectually repeating his lesson in soliloquizing to a clown unfit for instruction, the Duke insinuates his voice into the projected *I* of a pupil who must “think” and “say” a pre-established speech. According to the Duke, Pompey’s life is supported by a “means to live” that causes “evil.” The Duke commands Pompey to “think” on the connection

⁵⁹ Bawcutt, ed. *Measure for Measure*, 152 n. 80-2.

between the “filthy vice” of his employment and his ability to “clothe” himself and “cram [his] maw,” a phrase that suggests his life is completely appetitive, less than fully human. Pompey should tell himself that it is only from the prostitutes’ “abominable and beastly touches” that he is able to “live.” Abominable and beastly are synonyms, since the Folio spells the former as *abhominable*, which, as N. W. Bawcutt suggests, “reflects what was mistakenly thought to be the etymology of the word, *ab homine*, ‘away from man, inhuman.’”⁶⁰ Those who associate with the *abhominable* are not, the Duke suggests, properly human; their “living” (in the sense of trade or *forma vitae*) does not count as a genuine “life.” When asked by Escalus if he is a bawd, Pompey answers: “I am a poor fellow that would live.” The lord’s reply—“How would you live, Pompey? . . . Is it a lawful trade?”—makes the distinction between an unformed life and its “[h]ow,” the form through which its activities are organized, its being is maintained, and its comportment is related to the law (2.1.212-15).

Shakespeare’s Vienna is full of such characters, many of whom have lost what the play’s moral elite consider a fully human life. Take Barnardine, whose unformed laziness and sloth serve as a counterpoint to the rigorously-maintained philosophical and religious forms of life led by the Duke and Isabella. When the Duke asks how Barnardine is “touched” by his impending execution, the Provost describes the inmate: “A man that apprehends death no more dreadfully but as a drunken sleep, careless, reckless, and fearless of what’s past, present, or to come; insensible of mortality, and desperately mortal” (4.2.142-45). Barnardine is nonchalantly absent, a figure who invests his remaining time with neither care nor fear. Since past, present, and future are meaningless for him, the Duke’s later assessment—“a stubborn soul / That apprehends no further than this world, / And squares [his] life accordingly” (5.1.483-85)—is off the mark, both because Barnardine has no interest in anything that may subsist in the time of “this world” and because he cannot be said to square or shape his life according to any principle at all. Active verbs do not apply to Barnardine, despite his constant refusals, for, as Jacques Lezra points out, “Barnardine refuses to be hanged not because he finds

⁶⁰ Bawcutt, ed., *Measure for Measure*, 164, n.291.

the prospect itself intolerable—just the conditions.”⁶¹ His seemingly active refusal is rooted in the passive lethargy of a hangover.

Life is of no consequence to this “desperately mortal” prisoner, but neither is death, a state he approaches with no more horror than if it were a “drunken sleep,” which is, of course, the same state he occupies when he and a wide-awake Claudio are summoned by the executioners. In Claudio’s words, on the eve of his death, Barnardine is “[a]s fast locked up in sleep as guiltless labour / When it lies starkly in the travail’s bones” (4.2.62-63). This image figures a prisoner “locked up” in what Claudio sees as the prison of sleep, which is death’s cousin and the partner of his imagined imprisonment in “viewless winds” (3.1.126). Barnardine is “locked up” in sleep just as “guiltless labour” lies in the bones of exhausted workers. Claudio’s analogy positions Barnardine’s passive acceptance of sleep as a mirror image of hard physical labor’s felt effects on workers’ bodies. But the jarring dissonance between work-induced fatigue and Barnardine’s drunken sleep only serves to highlight the prisoner’s passivity, his non-relation with “labour” of any kind, “guiltless” or otherwise. When told that he “must be so good, sir, as to rise and be put to death,” Barnardine responds with an imperative of his own: “Away, you rogue, I am sleepy” (4.3.25-27). Given the early modern overlap between sleep and death, Barnardine’s connection to life is tenuous at best. To borrow Garrett Sullivan’s reformulation of a claim made by Giorgio Agamben, Barnardine’s is a “life lived as if one were dead,” for, like Pompey, his sleep-filled and drink-saturated existence makes him the answer to Hamlet’s question: “What is a man, / If his chief good and market of his time / Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more” (4.4.33-35).⁶² This passage relates “time” to the difference between “man” and “beast” in ways that go to the heart of Barnardine’s attitude. Since he ignores temporality, since the “good and market of his time” is filled with nothing but the necessities of organic existence, his life is ultimately formless. Humans shape their lives by ordering their comportment along temporal coordinates, performing, at the most extreme level of cohesion, the time-

⁶¹ Lezra, *Unspeakable Subjects*, 262.

⁶² Sullivan, *Sleep, Romance and Human Embodiment*, 75.

sensitive and constantly reiterated liturgies demanded by monastic orders like those Isabella is about to enter. To live without molding one's activities according to the specifications of even a minimal temporal rule is to exist according to the rhythms of the vitality that churns involuntarily beneath conscious awareness.

Barnardine's lived relationship with time is an absence against which the other characters' beliefs and discipline emerge with greater clarity. The repeated use of the verb *apprehend* in relation to Barnardine's attitude towards both death and the world—the Provost claims that he “apprehends death no more dreadfully but as a drunken sleep” (4.2.142) and the Duke suggests that he “apprehends no further than this world” (5.1.484)—positions him as a foil to Claudio. If the former is “insensible to mortality” (4.2.145), the latter's relationship with both life and death is captured in his horrified reaction to Isabella's claim that the “sense of death is most in apprehension” (3.1.79). The constellation of meanings that adhere to *apprehension* are complex, for the term could mean “to anticipate” but also “to feel emotionally, be sensible of,” and “to understand.”⁶³ All of these senses are operative in the way Claudio apprehends death as a felt absence of life best encapsulated in the existential possibility encoded in the to-infinitive. The *no* that the Provost and the Duke attach to Barnardine's apprehension of death and world suggests an inversion of Claudio's existential orientation, an ignorance of the expansive temporality encoded in *to die*. If Claudio caringly shapes and worries about his relationship with the limits of life, Barnardine is an exemplar of a life that simply *is*, but that takes no stance vis-à-vis that *is* and the way it relates to future events and past conditions. “Unfit to live or die; O gravel heart!,” the Duke states diagnostically, calling Barnardine a “creature unprepared, unmeet for death” (4.3.61-64). The repeated negative prefix *un-* captures the prisoner's peculiar relationship with his own existential conditions, and is epitomized in the notion of a “gravel heart,” an organ that does not feel in the way it should but has not even made the effort to harden fully into stone.

⁶³ OED, *apprehend* v. 10., 7, 9a.

The Duke's invocation of Barnardine's "gravel heart" resonates with descriptions of Angelo throughout the play. Angelo gives the impression of inflexible moral rectitude and strict diligence—a life so rigorously governed that the Duke and Lucio agree in their assessment of his character. "Lord Angelo is precise," the former tells the Friar, "Stands at a guard with envy, scarce confesses / That his blood flows, or that his appetite / Is more to bread than stone" (1.3.50-53). This assessment is mirrored a few lines later by Lucio, who claims that Angelo is "a man whose blood / Is very snow-broth, one who never feels / The wanton stings and motions of the sense, / But doth rebate and blunt his natural edge / With profits of the mind, study, and fast" (1.4.57-61). Using repeated contemplative exercises of the "mind," intensive "study," and practices of bodily deprivation like fasting, Angelo has "blunt[ed] his natural edge" and tamed his body and its desires according to a temporally-ordered regimen of self-improvement. Yet if Barnardine's unformed life is related to a "gravel heart," Angelo's fastidiously formed life produces surprisingly similar metaphoric results: a man who hardly acknowledges that his "blood flows," seems able to digest "stone," and is perceived by others to have blood made of "snow-broth." These two descriptions are parallel, but are inflected with very different value judgments. The Duke, who attempts to channel the Stoic sages, seems impressed by Angelo's steadfast discipline, and wants to "see / If power change purpose, what our seemers be" (1.3.53-54). Fascinated by "a kind of character in [Angelo's] life / That to the observer doth [his] history / Fully unfold" (1.1.28-30), the Duke is curious to know if Angelo's self-control is genuine. Lucio is horrified by Angelo's "ruthless" rigor, an attitude more fully elaborated when he informs the disguised Duke that Angelo's "urine is congealed ice" (3.1.372). From this perspective, Angelo is not quite human, for he has "blunt[ed] his natural edge" and "feels not" the riot of sentient flesh.

By metaphorically aligning Angelo's Stoic discipline with Barnardine's "gravel heart," Shakespeare raises a critique of the Duke's philosophical ambitions. As Richard Strier argues, a large number of early modern writers turned against Stoic ideals that subordinated feeling to reason. Strier's foremost example is Erasmus, who, in the *Praise of Folly*, suggests that by denying feeling to the Stoic sage, Seneca "leaves nothing at all

of the man, and has to ‘fabricate’ in his place a new sort of god who never was and never will be in existence anywhere. Indeed, if I may be frank, what he created was a kind of marble statue of a man, devoid of sense and any sort of human feeling.”⁶⁴ If immoral characters like Pompey and Barnardine are not fully human, then the same judgment applies to their fastidious counterparts, but for very different reasons. Too rigidly followed, a *forma vitae* hardens its practitioner and deprives him or her of a fully developed sense of feeling, a stunted sentience incapable of appropriately responding to the needs of others or even his or her own body. In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare participates in a wider cultural critique of extreme forms of life, and suggests that Angelo’s seemingly well-ordered *forma vitae* achieves a result isomorphic with a totally unformed life. The force of this critique also extends to Isabella, whose attachment to a monastic form of life renders her deaf to her brother’s pleas. She responds without feeling. “Yes, thou must die; / Thou art too noble to conserve a life / In base appliances” (3.1.88-89), she tells Claudio, and is so shocked at his lingering attachment to life that she addresses him with contempt: “Take my defiance, / Die, perish! ... I’ll pray a thousand prayers for thy death, / No word to save thee” (3.1.147-50). Isabella’s overly enthusiastic self-righteousness here embodies Erasmus’s “marble statue,” a “new sort of god who never was and never will be in existence anywhere.”

As I argued above, Isabella’s violent response to Claudio’s moment of weakness stems from her attachment to an atemporal ideal, her attempt to fashion herself according to such eternal values as chastity, which are superior to the temporal flux of this “feverous” earthly life (3.1.76). Lucio uses this aspect of her self-image to flatter Isabella into saving her brother’s life: “I hold you as a thing enskied and sainted, / By your renouncement an immortal spirit, / And to be talked with in sincerity / As with a saint.” Although Isabella sees that Lucio is “mocking” her, his words contain a kernel of truth, for her act of renunciation means that she orients her daily activities in a carefully-timed discipline that shapes her form of life according to a pattern set by “thing[s] enskied” (1.4.34-38).

⁶⁴ Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, 46. This text can be found in a different translation in Strier, *The Unrepentant Renaissance*, 35.

Indeed, the existing rule is not rigorous enough for Isabella. So firm is her desire for “renouncement” that, when her character is first introduced, she is busy “wishing a more strict restraint / Upon the sisterhood, the votarists of Saint Clair” (1.4.4-5). Seeking to make an already extremely “strict” rule even more challenging, Isabella desires more “restraint.” This “restraint” is deeply interwoven in time. Monastic rules were, at least in theory, dedicated to replacing individual, idiosyncratically-spent time with a rigid collective temporality that sought to perfect a constantly reiterated liturgy so that it dimly shadowed the a-rhythm and perpetuity of divine eternity. The temporally-focused *forma vitae* that Isabella seeks to inculcate is interrupted by her re-entrance into the city, with its singular events, messy politics, and entangled desires. Yet she still holds fast to a disciplined sense of time. When the Duke asks if she might “dispense with [her] leisure” long enough to speak with him, her response is immediate and corrective: “I have no superfluous leisure; my stay must be stolen out of other affairs” (3.1.158-62). Her time is not her own, since it still belongs to the eternal aims of her order; and she certainly does not possess any “leisure.” The complete opposite of Barnardine, Isabella’s temporal fanaticism is at the root of her attraction to the monastic life. In attempting to craft a life that resonates with eternity, she abstracts herself from humanity, surpassing both Angelo and the Duke in her rigorous discipline.

All three of these characters try to tame the involuntary passions of the living flesh according to the dictates of the will, a faculty whose movements they orient towards the coordinates of a pre-existing and normative form of life. Yet, as Angelo bemoans, the will is fickle: “we would, and we would not” (4.5.32), he claims, following St. Paul’s words in Romans 7:19 and raising the specter of the divided will, the will that is incapable of obeying its own commands, that will not do what it wills. That Angelo loses his rigor when he encounters Isabella, that he feels “my blood thus muster to my heart, / Making it both unable for itself / And dispossessing all my other parts / Of necessary fitness” (2.4.20-23), that he ends up giving his “sensual race the rein” and consenting to the demands of his “sharp appetite” (2.4.161-63): such behaviour thaws his icy veins and ironically makes him more fully human at the same time as it shows how unrealistic the Duke’s ideals and pedagogical aims actually are. One cannot will oneself beyond

humanity or abstract oneself away from life. *Measure for Measure* suggests that a given form of life, no matter how fervently practiced, cannot subdue and tame the involuntary flailing of sentience, with its impersonal feelings that persist beneath any and all attempts to shape and form one's personality or character according to a prefigured model.

Unformed life speaks with and through feeling, and presents the lived mess inside that refuses to be fully ordered. Perhaps, Shakespeare suggests, true humanity lies there, in an appreciation of sentience, "this sensible warm motion" that refuses to be frozen in place and rejects the impositions of dead abstraction. For all of their considerable social and personal value, the disparate *forma vitae* that populate the play obscure the contours of sentience, and make it nearly impossible to apprehend what is at stake in the simple fact that we feel our lives. By enabling audience members and readers to encounter the force of that feeling alongside Claudio, Shakespeare discloses sentience. He allows us to move into the existential space signaled in Hamlet's *or*, to notice the fulcrum upon which all of our thoughts and actions continually rest—a vaguely and confusedly felt life poised in the possibility of its own annihilation. In this space, opened by both *or* and *to*, we can briefly glimpse the ground of our existence, as singular as it is fragile.

Against Simplification

In this chapter, I have read Shakespeare's grammatical usage in order to isolate the appearance of sentience in Claudio's speech, and I have shown how this phenomenon refuses the constraints of disciplinary control in all of its varied guises. Unformed life escapes from and continues to operate beyond the control of formed life. My chosen terms invoke but do not quote the Greek register favoured by contemporary philosophers of biopolitics and the critics influenced by their views: *zoe* or unformed life and *bíos* or formed life.⁶⁵ In the wake of resurgent interest in the philosophy of Hannah Arendt and the current popularity of such Italian biopolitical thinkers as Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito, these two terms are now commonplace in critical writing.⁶⁶ Arendt

⁶⁵ This is Roberto Esposito's understanding of these terms, which he lays out in *Third Person*, 57.

⁶⁶ For recent influential uses of these terms, see, for example, Lupton, *Thinking with Shakespeare*; and Santner, *The Royal Remains*. For the connections between current biopolitical theorists and the Aristotelian soul, see Sullivan, *Sleep, Romance and Human Embodiment*. For brilliant and thoroughly historicist scholarship that challenges Agamben's understanding of *zoe*, see Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule*.

popularized them in *The Human Condition*, where she draws on Aristotle to argue that *bios* stands for a “specifically human life,” a life able to form political communities, as opposed to “simple *zoe*,” which stands for the life belonging to all other creatures.⁶⁷ Her claims were then augmented by Agamben, who states that “the Greeks” used “two terms” for life: “*zoe*, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, gods), and *bios*, which indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or group.”⁶⁸ These simple oppositions are complicated, as Laurent Dubreuil has shown, by the fact that “the Greeks” had a much more nuanced understanding of how these two terms related: Aristotle, for instance, held that bees and many other creatures possess *bios*.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the opposition has become a critically-accepted shorthand for designating a bifurcation within the concept of life.

My analysis of *Measure for Measure* has avoided these Greek terms because, although I accept and even draw on the usefulness of the *bíos-zoe* distinction, my emphasis on sentience and minimal vital feeling forces me to seek a different language. As they are currently used, these Greek words possess, it seems to me, a conceptual force that is divorced from phenomenological evidence. I have stressed the felt aspects of unformed life, its vague intensities and opaque longings—modes of affect that are, however fuzzily and indistinctly, registered in experience. In the biopolitical paradigms employed by Arendt, Agamben, and Esposito, *zoe* is an artificial construct imposed on individuals and populations when they are stripped of their status as members of a given community. *Zoe* or *vita nuda* (usually translated as “bare life”) is what one can be reduced to when a state or other power structure refuses to accept one’s *bios*; it is thus a fiction of power that attains a certain reality through the imposition of exclusionary mechanisms. In this political sense, the difference between *zoe* and *bios* is largely conceptual. My analysis of *Measure for Measure* suggests that the conceptual division employed by theorists of biopolitics also works at an experiential level: unformed life operates at an affective

⁶⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, rev. ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998), 97.

⁶⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998), 1.

⁶⁹ Laurent Dubreuil, “Leaving Politics: *Bios*, *Zoe*, Life,” *diacritics* 36.2 (2006): 83-98.

register that impinges on and escapes from the efforts, habits, practices, and techniques involved in shaping a formed life.

In drawing out this experiential distinction, I have established the terms of my exegetical treatment of *Measure for Measure* as though unformed life were the hero of a story I am telling. My attempts to foreground the claims of sentience have required an argumentative, slightly polemical edge that elucidates elements of the play while not fully engaging the depths of its complexity. As I conclude this chapter, I want to further nuance my reading by briefly showing how Shakespeare provides an immanent critique of his own valorization of sentience. In this way, I hope to forestall objections that my reading of *Measure for Measure* presents a Romantic, almost Nietzschean vision of the play.⁷⁰ Although Shakespeare acknowledges the importance of sentience and even advances the claims of vital feeling in the face of those who would stifle its voice, he does not suffer from the ideological blinders that Donna V. Jones finds in versions of vitalism from the nineteenth-century German flowering of *Lebensphilosophie* to the twenty-first century disciples of Gilles Deleuze:

If biological life indeed consists in the sum of functions that resists death, cultural vitalism has been the name of a volatile set of doctrines that resists the petrification of social forms and personalities in the name of more of this unfathomable life and urges to return to a raw, un verbalized lived experience through the bracketing of the sedimented categories and schema by which we reflect on and “deaden” it.⁷¹

The vitalist impulse is always, Jones urges, primarily a critique, whether of mechanism or of asceticism. To champion the cause of life, with its impersonal urges and constant mutations, is to reject structures of rationality that are dominant in a given culture, many of which resonate with the types of discipline articulated by the Duke in *Measure for*

⁷⁰ In this way, I am in sympathy with Richard Strier, on whose *Unrepentant Renaissance* I model my section title. Discussing a position taken by Bernard Williams, Strier writes: “[this position may seem] post-Nietzschean. But Bernard Williams took his inspiration more from Homer than from Nietzsche ... and Nietzsche himself drew his inspiration from Aristotle and Homer. In short, William’s ‘Nietzschean’ perspective might not have been unavailable to an early modern person like Shakespeare.” *Unrepentant Renaissance*, 99.

⁷¹ Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy*, 4.

Measure. According to Todd May, the object of critique forwarded by Deleuze's vitalism are those "forms of life that are themselves against life, life that comes from life but is inimical to it."⁷² This critical impulse is, of course, akin to Nietzsche's vitalism, which targeted precisely the forms of discipline embodied by Isabella and the other monastic characters in Shakespeare's play: "The ascetic ideal springs from the protective instinct of a degenerating life which tries by all means to sustain itself and to fight for its existence; it indicates a partial physiological obstruction and exhaustion."⁷³ But if *Measure for Measure* provides, as I have argued above, a vitalist critique of rationally-conditioned ascetic practices, the play does not simply celebrate unformed life at the expense of its formed counterpart.

By making the foolish, gossiping, and philandering Lucio one of the play's most prominent spokesmen of unformed life, Shakespeare suggests that its claims must indeed be disciplined. Responding to the disguised Duke's claim that lechery is "too general a vice, and severity must cure it," Lucio argues that the vice has "great kindred" but that "it is impossible to extirp it quite, friar, till eating and drinking be put down" (3.1.363-66). If one wants to "cure" lechery, one may as well forbid "eating and drinking" and thus life itself, since lechery is, in Lucio's view, coterminous with vitality—both because living creatures seek pleasure for its own sake and because life, in all of its forms, employs this pleasure to reproduce itself. Angelo's juridical severity will put an end to copulation and therefore the species, Lucio warns: "this ungenitured agent will unpeople the province with continency. Sparrows must not build in his house-eaves, because they are lecherous" (3.1.431-34). When Lucio expresses these views, he is at least somewhat convincing because most would agree that, at least in Claudio's case, it is "ruthless" of Angelo to "take away the life of a man" for the "rebellion of a codpiece" (3.1.376-77). But if, in Lucio's estimation, the "life of a man" is intimately related to and perhaps inseparable from the "rebellion of a codpiece," then this spokesman for unformed life is more than a little morally suspect.

⁷² May, "The Politics of Life in the Thought of Gilles Deleuze," 28. Qtd. in Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy*, 68.

⁷³ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 120.

When Lucio first enters the stage, he speaks with Claudio, who is being transported to prison. When asked how he has come to be in “this restraint,” Claudio answers:

From too much liberty, my Lucio, liberty
 As surfeit is the father of much fast,
 So every scope by the immoderate use
 Turns to restraint. Our natures do pursue
 Like rats that raven down their proper bane,
 A thirsty evil, and when we drink, we die. (1.2.123-29)

Left with “too much liberty,” human life tends towards immoderation and surfeit, a lesson Lucio has no desire to learn. “I had as lief have the foppery of freedom,” he responds, “as the morality of imprisonment” (1.2.132-33). Here, Shakespeare diagnoses the goal of unformed life: “the foppery of freedom,” a liberty that is foolish or stupid because it refuses to be tamed and ignores the claims of moderation. That Lucio must, in the end, marry the prostitute he has impregnated (and then subsequently ignored) suggests that vital drives must be curbed and restrained. Even in a play that argues on behalf of sentient vitality against the strictures of reason, Shakespeare is careful to introduce limits. Sentience may churn beneath everyday life, but it nevertheless remains entangled with civil responsibility.

Chapter 4

Sensing Ability and Feeling Effort in Donne's *Devotions*

John Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624) is, among other things, a study of the relationship between sentience and illness. As he translates the prolonged sickness from which he suffered in 1623 into devotional prose, Donne pays close attention to how illness productively alters (and does not simply diminish) his felt sense of aliveness.¹ Donne's meditation on the first-person experience of sickness shows how the phenomenon of sentience is disclosed to attention when the usual practices of everyday life are rendered impossible, when normal relations with both self and world break down. My focus on the *Devotions* in this chapter is thus in some ways similar to my treatment, in Chapters 2 and 3, of how near-death experiences reveal sentience by stripping away more familiar concerns, projects, and desires. Yet Donne's illness differs considerably from the previous two cases; it provides a new angle of vision on how sentience emerges through both temporality and embodiment. Montaigne's accident shoved him unexpectedly into an encounter with felt vitality that corresponded with a division of body from soul and a loss of conscious awareness. An event for which he could neither prepare nor anticipate, Montaigne's fall into intransitive feeling enters awareness only as an occurrence that is already past; it must be reconstructed from a fractured set of vague and imprecise memories. Claudio's encounter with his "sensible warm motion" takes place in a present moment saturated with the pressing future of an impending death sentence. In *Measure for Measure*, an imprisoned but nevertheless able bodied and fully functioning man confronts his ostensibly immediate loss of life and discovers sentience in the "this" of embodied existence. Donne's text adds a new wrinkle to these brushes with mortality by demonstrating how vital feeling is intimately connected with the body as it persists over time. What happens to one's feeling of life when that life lingers for days and weeks on the verge of its own extinction, when the body in and through which that life is felt weakens and loses almost all of its former

¹ On the biographical details relating to Donne's illness and the composition of the *Devotions*, see Bald, *John Donne: A Life*, 450-55; and Raspa, "Introduction," xiii-xix.

capacities? The *Devotions* suggest that sentience is inseparable from a lived sense of ability that is modified as time passes and the body changes.

Donne establishes the link between temporality and the condition of the body in the first sentence of the *Devotions*: “Variable, and therefore miserable condition of man! this minute I was well, and am ill, this minute.”² To be human is to be “[v]ariable,” to have the potential for change woven into one’s being. Put another way, the human “condition” is temporal, caught up in the movements of time, a medium coterminous with change. In the same “minute”—its immediacy flagged by a repeated deictic *this*—Donne falls from health into sickness, from “was” to “am.” Donne foregrounds the unexpectedness of these changes in chapter headings: “*Insultus morbi primus* / The first alteration, the first grudging, of the sickness” (7). There must be a moment when Donne’s health “first” began to alter, when the sickness “first” grudged or “seized” his body.³ Yet as the opening sentence indicates, it is nearly impossible to isolate when the *primus insultus* or first attack began, since in one and the same “minute” Donne is both “well” and “ill.” Sickness emphasizes both how the human condition is inseparable from temporal flux and how difficult it is to determine when in time the moment of change actually occurs. In other words, human existence is subject to “emergent occasions,” to events that arise “unexpectedly,” to the brute fact of “happening.”⁴ The *Devotions* explore how the “condition of man” is predicated on an ontology of the occasion or the event. For Donne, the mode of being proper to the human is figured not as a noun, but as a verb.⁵

The true nature of the human condition, a continual process of becoming, is highlighted by the onset of illness, a happening that is primarily felt:

² Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. Raspa, 7. All quotations are to this edition and are henceforth cited parenthetically. With the exception of quotations from scripture, I have silently removed from Donne’s text the multitude of italicized words, which Raspa preserves.

³ OED *grudge* v. 5a.

⁴ OED, *emergent* adj. 5a; OED, *occasion* n. II 6a.

⁵ I owe this formulation to Levinas, *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, 59. Describing Heidegger’s breakthrough in *Zeit und Zeit*, Levinas writes: “the human being is therefore not a noun, but firstly a verb.” I take this translation from Mackinlay’s translation of Romano, *Event and World*, 13.

In the same instant that I feel the first attempt of the disease, I feel the victory: In the twinckling of an eye I can scarce see; instantly the taste is insipid, and fatuous; instantly the appetite is dull and desirelesse; instantly the knees are sinking and strengthlesse; and in an instant, sleepe, which is the picture, the copy of death, is taken away, that the Originall, Death itself, may succeed, and that so I might have death to the life. (11)

Donne “feel[s]” both the attempt and the victory of the disease in the same “instant,” but the disease is made manifest through a felt diminution in his bodily powers. From one moment to the next, he “can scarce see,” his “appetite” and his capacity to enjoy or accurately “taste” food and drink all but vanish, and his skeletal and muscular infrastructure can no longer support his “sinking” weight. Even sleep, a state most would consider far removed from notions of ability, becomes an achievement, a capacity that can disappear. Donne “feel[s]” the disease’s presence through felt alterations in his ability to perceive, desire, exert effort, and engage in somatic activities. The disease acts upon his body in a way that changes both how the world normally acts upon it (food, for instance, no longer elicits appetite) and how it acts upon the world. Donne suggests that affection and agency are inseparable. In this respect, his first-person exploration of how it feels to suffer from illness resembles the recent account of affect provided by the German philosopher Jan Slaby, for whom “affective states are closely linked to an agent’s *awareness of ability*.” In Slaby’s view, “affective states seem to develop within an ‘*I can*’ or ‘*I can’t*’ schema of relating to the world—an embodied sense of capability (or its marked opposite, a specific sense of *inability* or *incapacity* in relation to something that confronts one).”⁶ The modal verbs of ability and disability—*can* and *cannot*—mark this relation of body and world; they convey both the capacity of an agent and the degree of pliability or resistance with which the world meets a given action. When Donne claims that “in the twinckling of an eye I can scarce see,” he implies both that his power of vision has been reduced almost to nothing and that the world no longer shows up, that it no longer rushes to meet his gaze.

⁶ Slaby, “Affective Self-Construal and the Sense of Ability,” 152.

In this passage, Donne meditates upon two very different aspects of the body. The disease attacks the anonymous physiological processes at work within his body, below the threshold of awareness; but the effects of this attack are felt in the body through which he engages the world. Edmund Husserl draws a clear distinction between these two bodily types: *Körper*, the physical body as a biological and molecular system that obeys the laws of chemistry and physics; and *Leib*, the living body through which one feels, perceives, and expends effort.⁷ Although Donne lacks this linguistic precision, he makes similar distinctions. “Man, who is the noblest part of the Earth, melts so away, as if he were a statue, not of Earth, but of Snowe,” Donne claims, before correcting himself: “[man] feelles that a Fever doth not melt him like snow, but powr him out like lead, like yron, like brasse melted in a furnace: It doth not only melt him, but Calcine him, reduce him to Atomes, and to ashes; not to water, but to lime” (11). Illness changes the composition of the body as a physical entity, as though it were the base materials of an alchemical experiment. The sick body undergoes such chemical processes as melting and calcining, and is ultimately reduced to atoms and ashes, to the constitutive particles shared by all other physical bodies. Yet, as Donne claims in Devotion 1, he is “more than dust & ashes” (8), since his body not only undergoes the material transformations associated with sickness but is also ensouled and thus reflexively “feels” these processes. The body as *Leib* feels what happens to the body as *Körper*, even if the former is nearly reduced, as the disease runs its course, to the corpse that lurks in the etymological echoes of the latter. When Donne claims that at the onset of his sickness he “can scarce see,” he depicts the felt capacities of his lived body pushing up against the instantly contracted limits of a physical body no longer responsive to the exertion of effort.

It is not accidental that Donne employs *can* at the very moment when he introduces the nexus of feeling, ability, and body, and time. For Donne, *can* expresses a fundamental

⁷ The distinction appears frequently in Husserl’s corpus. For example, Husserl writes: “physical body and living body [*Körper und Leib*] are essentially different... [Being related] ‘through the living body’ clearly does not mean merely (being related) ‘as a physical body’; rather the expression refers to the kinesthetic, to functioning as an ego in this peculiar way, primarily through seeing, hearing, etc.; and of course other modes of the ego belong to this (for example, lifting, carrying, pushing, and the like).” *The Crisis of the European Sciences*, 107-08.

aspect of being human: the feeling of ability that persists beneath all experiences, including that most debilitating illness. So long as life persists, some form of ability remains. Indeed, one of Donne's greatest accomplishments in the *Devotions* is the nuance and clarity with which he unpacks the meaning of *can* as it relates to *cannot*. On a superficial reading, Donne seems to share the view of thinkers like Slaby, who argues that illness restricts and almost eliminates the *can* of the lived body: "When the body, as part of a pathological process, ceases to be experienced as a smoothly operating medium of potential engagement with the world, it will increasingly turn into what is felt as a mere object ... One's taken-for-granted relatedness to the world is altered completely as one no longer finds oneself within a context of seamless activity and amidst routinely encountered possibilities."⁸ Donne begins the *Devotions* with such a point of view, by lamenting how the disease has all but eliminated what his body can do. Donne's point of departure thus anticipates the insights of the phenomenological tradition upon which Slaby implicitly draws. In *Ideas II*, Edmund Husserl attempts to account for the freedom of action experienced in everyday activity, and articulates this freedom as the "I can." When I reach out for my cigar, I simply reach out and grab it.⁹ Husserl describes such movements as "a resistanceless doing of things," as "an ability that meets no resistance," one that has its correlative "ability to overcome resistance."¹⁰ Every activity is underwritten by a fundamental "I can" that is always positioned on a "continuum in 'active power' versus the 'inertia' of the resistance."¹¹ Whenever I perform an action, the verb expressing that action must be coupled with a silent but ubiquitous auxiliary *can*.¹² Husserl's reflections clarify the everyday attitude towards ability that Donne believes is normative but naïve. Presupposing the *I can*, Donne subsequently shows how the occurrence of illness forces this position to founder on its own limitations.

⁸ Slaby, "Affective Self-Construal and the Sense of Ability," 154.

⁹ Husserl, *Ideas ... Second Book*, 270.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 270-71.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 271.

¹² Other phenomenologists have followed Husserl in making or even furthering this observation. For example, Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes: "Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of 'I think that' but of 'I can.'" *The Phenomenology of Perception*, 137

Donne revises this naïve notion of personal ability in two ways. First, if Donne begins his reflections certain about the relation between *I* and *can*, he finishes the *Devotions* by suggesting that these two words never truly belong together. Ability, properly understood, always presupposes a *we*. I use the third person plural here to signal both the social sphere, which Donne believes pervades even the emptiness of the quarantined sickbed, and divine transcendence, which is constantly there if one would only recognize its presence. Given the intermingling of life and ability for Donne, the feeling of being alive is always to some degree animated by the presence of another, even if that other is ostensibly absent. My reading of the *Devotions* thus corroborates and extends a number of recent critical insights, including those of Christopher Tilmouth, who argues that early modern inwardness was “an experience situated at the boundary between the person and those to whom he relates, within the dialogic domain of intersubjectivity.”¹³ Drawing a similar conclusion, Brian Cummings claims that Donne’s “selfhood is interchangeable and communicable, rather than self-obsessed.”¹⁴ Yet, to complicate matters, Donne simultaneously insists on a separation between lived ability and intersubjectivity. If illness reveals the continuous presence of the social in one’s sense of ability as it relates to the world, Donne’s disease also sheds light on another sense of ability that is utterly divorced from the world and intersubjective human relations. In this second revision of the naïve *I can*, Donne rejects engagement with the world as a precondition for felt capacity. Silently following Husserl’s account of how ability is always entangled with resistance, Slaby claims that “a sense of agency and capability is, almost by definition, a sense of both *myself* and the *world* (as the space of *my* possible acting/being acted upon), and these aspects are inseparable.”¹⁵ If Donne begins the *Devotions* by presenting a similar position—illness presents a diminution of ability because it prevents the lived body from engaging in such usual world-directed activities as seeing, standing, and eating—he quickly realizes the inadequacies of this view. Even if one cannot engage

¹³ Tilmouth, “Passion and Subjectivity in Early Modern Literature,” 16. For a different take on the sociality of affect, see Daniel, *The Melancholy Assemblage*.

¹⁴ Cummings, “Donne’s Passions,” 56.

¹⁵ Slaby, “Affective Self-Construal and the Sense of Ability,” 152.

with the world, so long as one lives there remains an inner, felt ability that may be invisible to others but is nevertheless integral to any connection with the divine.

In this chapter, I argue that a proper grasp of how Donne mobilizes *can* and *cannot* is key to understanding the organization and argumentation of the *Devotions*. I contend that attention to Donne's use of the modals of ability and disability in the *Devotions* provides a concrete example of how historical materials can broaden the parameters of how sentience is currently understood. If, as Matthew Ratcliffe argues, "existential feelings constitute a sense of the *kinds of possibility* that the world offers," then history matters insofar as the "possibility space" opened in one historical period is radically different from the "possibility space" opened in another.¹⁶ Donne differs from contemporary thinkers who link the feeling of life and a sense of ability because the possibilities Donne finds in sentience are, for the most part, no longer intuitive. This distance should not, however, render these possibilities any less real. As this chapter progresses, I work simultaneously to show both how Donne's account of sentience can speak to present-day theories and how the *Devotions* draws on and speaks to its own historical moment. I argue that the treatment of felt ability in the *Devotions* was informed by the theological controversies of the Reformation. I tie Donne's manipulation of *can* to the foundational debate between Erasmus and Luther about the nature of the will. Using his illness as a brilliant point of entry into a phenomenological account of how the sense of ability imbricates *Leib*, *Körper*, social relations, and contact with God, Donne provides a reassessment of what precisely is involved in the exercise of the will. In the *Devotions*, to feel one's life is to feel a sense of ability, a *can* the complexities of which enable Donne to think the meaning of the ultimate Christian possibility—the resurrection of the body.

Standing, Lying, and the Sense of Ability

The play between the felt difference separating ability from disability is clearest in the two *Devotions* that Donne dedicates to taking and leaving his sick bed. These *Devotions*—numbers 3 and 21—are also the most obvious example of a hitherto

¹⁶ Ratcliffe, "The Phenomenology of Existential Feeling," 28, 33.

unnoticed principle that governs the structure of the *Devotions* as a whole. In loose narrative or horizontal time, the text proceeds through the 23 “stations” of Donne’s illness, from the onset of the disease to his eventual recovery.¹⁷ This ameliorative movement also operates on a vertical axis through which the immanent, bodily condition discussed in the Meditation is transposed into a spiritual and scriptural register in the Expostulation and then resolved or released in the transcendent opening to the divine encoded in each Prayer.¹⁸ Much like Dante’s *Commedia*—which can be read horizontally (following the Pilgrim as he moves, say, from Canto 2 to 3 in *Inferno*) and vertically (following the Pilgrim from, for example, *Inferno* 3, through *Purgatorio* 3, to *Paradiso* 3)—Donne’s *Devotions* are also designed to be read in multiple directions.¹⁹ In addition to the horizontal narration of the progress of Donne’s illness and the verticality of each Devotion resolving the earthly tensions it diagnoses in a turn to the transcendence of prayer, the text is, as a whole, structured to echo or mirror itself. Split in half by the central Devotion 12, the book folds back on itself so that it can be read relationally. Although scholars have treated the structure of this text, they have tended to focus on numerical play and the measurement of time.²⁰ No one, so far as I know, has pointed out either how each Devotion is organized so as to resolve the tensions with which it begins or how the entire text folds back on itself.

As a simple illustration of the carefully-arranged echoes that provide the *Devotions* with its dizzyingly complex structure, consider how the opening sentence of the Meditation in Devotion 1 mirrors a sentence in the Prayer of Devotion 23; how, that is, the opening and closing sections of the text are designed to reverberate. Donne’s opening lament—

¹⁷ For the most substantial discussion of the *Stationes*, see Arshagouni, “The Latin ‘Stationes’ in John Donne’s ‘Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions.’”

¹⁸ A number of scholars have recognized this upward resolution in various individual Devotions, particularly number 12. See, for example, Kuchar, “Embodiment and Representation in John Donne’s *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*.” No one, so far as I know, has pointed out that this thrust towards resolution acts as an organizational principle for the whole text.

¹⁹ Although the practice of vertical reading is venerable in Dante criticism, Cambridge University has just launched the first attempt to read each Canto in Dante’s *Commedia* vertically.

²⁰ Scholarly treatments of the *Devotions* that deal with the structure of the entire text (and do not simply focus on one or two Devotions) are few and far between. The most extensive structural analysis of the text is Frost, *Holy Delight*. Despite Frost’s extraordinarily detailed and rich analysis, she does not notice the mirroring at work in the text.

“Variable, and therefore miserable condition of man! this minute I am well, and am ill, this minute” (7)—is echoed near the end of the final Devotion, which repeats the epanalepsis “this minute . . . this minute” in order to suggest the shift in attitude brought about through the course of Donne’s illness: “Since therefore thy Correction hath brought me to such a participation in thy selfe (thy selfe, O my God, cannot bee parted), to such an intire possession of thee, as that I durst deliver my selfe over to thee this Minute, If this Minute thou wouldst accept my dissolution” (126). The carefully-orchestrated repetition shows the extent to which Donne’s relationship with temporal mutability has altered. If, in the opening line of the *Devotions*, Donne bemoans the fact that health can shift into illness “this minute,” in the final prayer, Donne claims he will “deliver himself” to God “this minute” on the condition that God would accept his “dissolution” in “this minute.” From existential despair about the time-bound processes of decay to a stated acceptance of God’s power, Donne arranges these two passages so that they resonate numerically and structurally across the book and, as a result, suggest the full extent of his altered disposition. The formal complexity of this mirroring operates throughout the entirety of the *Devotions*, but snaps most obviously into focus in the echoic relationship between Devotion 3, when Donne falls into his sickbed, and Devotion 21 (the third from last), when he rises like Lazarus from the bed he so often depicts as a grave. These Devotions stress the modals *can* and *cannot* to articulate the relationship between ability and its absence that sits at the heart of both the immanent experience of illness and, as we will see, the transcendent event of the resurrection.

Donne literalizes the loss of ability—which is, in the naïve view adumbrated above, coterminous with sickness—by the changing axis of the body as the patient takes his bed. Drawing on an ancient scheme, Donne claims that the human body has “but one priviledge, and advantage” over “other moving creatures” (14). Animal bodies are generally stronger and faster than those of humans, and are endowed with keener senses and inbuilt mechanisms of defense. Born both weak and naked, the human body has only one claim to superiority, the fact that it is “of an erect, of an upright form, naturally built,

& disposed to the contemplation of Heaven” (15).²¹ Although looking “to the earth” as all “[o]ther creatures” do is not an activity human beings can altogether avoid—every body must eventually return to earth—humanity’s “naturall forme” directs its contemplation towards a heavenly “home.” Uprightness is “man’s prerogative,” Donne claims, placing human posture in the semantic space of the privileges possessed by monarchs.²² Sickness upends this natural honour, for “a fever” possesses the ability to “fillip” a man “down,” to “depose” him from his regal status, so that his head is positioned “as low as his own foot” (15). Moving from the vertical axis to the horizontal, the human body adopts an “inhuman posture” (16) in sickness, an orientation akin to that of “other moving creatures” (15). If the uniqueness of the human being is encoded in uprightness of stance, then sickness forces the patient to become something less than fully human. Donne reinforces this point by gesturing to the moment of human origins, when Adam, not yet endowed with the “breath of life,” lies “flat upon the ground.” As it waits to become human, the adamic body remains horizontal, a position to which every human body returns as it “prepares” for death by “laying flat” upon a sickbed (15). Donne thus explores his own experience of illness both positively and negatively; he interrogates sickness *qua* sickness and also the silhouette of normalcy that occupies the vertical axis that his now-horizontal body once filled.²³ Confined to his sickbed, a given patient enters a state of suspension from which it is possible to trace the edges of his everyday encounters with the world, to apprehend a boundary that is usually concealed by the seamlessess that rivets the moving and oriented body to its immediate environment.

By eliminating the ability to stand, sickness also suspends all of the activities made possible by the vertically-oriented human body. In this sense, the sickbed is worse than prison, for jail cells allow their captives at least “two or three steps.” Deprived of this

²¹ The weakness of the human body was a popular theme. For an overview of the topic, see Shannon, *The Accommodated Animal*, 141-50.

²² *OED*, *prerogative*, n., etym.

²³ This negative procedure is a fundamental aspect of Donne’s thought. In *The Anniversaries*, for example, Donne attempts to determine what it means to connect by imagining a complete loss of the ability to connect. For this argument, see Harvey and Harrison, “Embodied Resonances.”

basic movement, the patient is even more incapacitated than the “anchorites that barqu’d themselves up in hollowe trees, & immur’d themselves in walls.” The anchorites reflexively embark or enwall themselves within rooted, immobile trees or heavy, unmoving stone—as if the material forms into which they burrow are prosthetic extensions of their own skin.²⁴ Similarly, Diogenes of Sinope “barrell’d himselfe in a Tubb” owned by the temple of Cybele in Athens. Yet both Christian ascetics and Greek cynic are able to “stand, or sit, and enjoy some change of posture”; they maintain the privilege of locomotion (15). Moreover, as Donne’s reflexive verbal constructions indicate, these examples volunteer to embark, immure, and barrel themselves. They willingly enter into confinement, and are not involuntarily “filliped” on their backs. Trapped in place, Donne explores the contraction of world that attends his fever, and notes how this shrinking of possibility prefigures death. “A sickbed is a grave,” he claims; it is a place where he “must practice my lying in the grave, by lying still” (15-16). Suspended in the anticipation of a rehearsal, the patient hovers between vertical human and horizontal animal, between life and death, rooted firmly in place and denied locomotive access to the wider world.

Amplifying his prison metaphor, Donne explores the nature of a confinement in which his body is simultaneously captive and captor. His feet are bound with “[s]trange fetters” and his hands with “strange Manacles.” The appendages by which he normally moves and manipulates things in the world are “bound so much the faster, by how much the coards are slacker.” His “sinews” and “ligaments” are “looser” than they should be, and, as a result, are “less able to do their Offices” (15). Tied to his bed by a drooping internal architecture, his confinement stems from a breakdown in his own bodily processes and an accompanying loss of ability. Donne’s *Leib* is held captive by his *Körper*. Later in *Devotions*, he defines disease as “the disorder, the discord, the irregularitie, the commotion, and rebellion of the body” (97). In sickness, the physical body is thrown out of alignment, its organs disorganized. Yet Donne dwells not on the effects of illness on

²⁴ Donne’s image of monastic reclusivity sheds surprising light on Andrew Marvell’s use of the same image in *Upon Appleton House*: “I, retiring from the flood, / Take sanctuary in the wood; / And, while it lasts, myself embark / In this green, yet growing ark” (481-84).

the *Körper* itself, but on the ways that this physical disorder impedes the ability of his *Leib* to pursue action. Normally, “[a]t night wee tell our servants at what hour we will rise,” but in the sickbed “we cannot tell our selves at what day, what week, what moneth” (15). Unable to control when he will rise, Donne “cannot” regulate his activities in time; his lived temporality has become as slack and loose as his sinews, no longer responsive to measurements like hour, day, week, or month. Even worse, he has returned to infancy: he is a “sucking childe” that “cannot eat,” a “creeping childe” that “cannot goe,” a “weak” and “childish” man that “cannot sit up” (16). Donne repeatedly employs *cannot* to convey the bodily resistance that impedes his attempts to perform the most basic of daily tasks. Sickness seems to diminish the *I can*, to precipitate a dwindling of the lived body’s powers and, as a result, one’s very sense of self.

As Brian Cummings and Lynne Magnusson note, in early modern English, modal verbs belonged to what Thomas Linacre described as the “Potentiall Mode,” a grammatical term adopted by mid-sixteenth-century editions of Lily’s *Grammar* and subsequent grammars.²⁵ In Early Modern English, verbs like *can* tended to work in a manner akin to what are now known as auxiliaries; they were almost always paired with infinitives. I suggest that the grammatical co-dependence required in English to express the potentiality of *can* is central to Donne’s claim in this passage. If, in Magnusson’s words, “Donne is more a poet of grammar and syntax than he is a poet of diction,”²⁶ then his suggestive repetition of *cannot* may be more important than the list of activities in which he can no longer engage: rising, eating, going, sitting. Donne uses the necessary syntactical gap between verbs in the Potentiall Mode and their accompanying infinitives in order to isolate the state of being implied by the verb *cannot*.

Weaving throughout the Meditation, Expostulation, and Prayer, the modals *can* and *cannot* structure Devotion 3 in ways that shed light on the phenomenology of the lived body in a historical context in which connection to divine transcendence was a genuine

²⁵ Magnusson, “A Play of Modals,” 71-72; Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, 209.

²⁶ Magnusson, “Donne’s Language,” 192.

possibility, indeed a socially-dominant ideal. The patient's weakened *I can* is highlighted by the verb's first appearance. It is not Donne whose abilities are most central here, but rather those of the disease: "A fever can fillip [a man] downe, a fever can depose him." Illness is saturated with the potential to toss great men aside like so many coins.²⁷ In the blink of an eye, it "can bring that head" that wears the crown down as low as peasants' feet (15). The abilities of the disease are in a converse position to those of the patient, who is unable to control how long he will lie in bed. As the Expostulation begins, even what he *can* do is phrased negatively: "I cannot say, with thy servant Jeremy, *Lord, I am a child, and cannot speak*" (16). Donne may have lost his ability to eat, to move, and even to sit up, but he is still capable of speaking. Yet he frames this capacity as one that he cannot *cannot* exercise. This reference to Jeremiah begins a catalogue of scriptural examples to which Donne is able or unable to conform his actions. The motivating question behind this catalogue is pressing: how is it possible for the patient to come to God if his illness has denied him the ability to move? The centurion's servant, the man suffering from palsy, and Peter's wife, all described in the Gospel of Matthew, were, like Donne, too ill for locomotion, and "could not" come to Christ (16-17). Lying beneath sheets that enclose him like "thin ... yron doors," Donne likewise "cannot" come into God's house or worship in the "holy temple" itself (17). Throughout the Expostulation, Donne's "I can" dwells permanently in the negative, affixed to a *not*.

As Donne moves from the self-orientation of the Meditation and the scripture-orientation of the Expostulation towards the divine-orientation of the Prayer, his use of *can* changes. In prayer, Donne arrives at a different understanding of *can*. Slaby and other present-day thinkers insist that in severe illness the "objectified, dysfunctional body amounts to a break between oneself and the world" and that this break marks a near-elimination of the sense of ability.²⁸ By contrast, Donne finds ability even after his relation with the world is all but broken. God, he claims, has "removed from me that upright forme, in which I could stand, and see thy throne, the Heavens, yet hast not removed from mee that light,

²⁷ OED, v. *fillip*.

²⁸ Slaby, "Affective Self-Construal and the Sense of Ability," 154.

by which I can lie and see thy selfe” (18). Moving from past to present tense, Donne re-articulates the powers left to him. Although he is no longer able to “stand and see” the heavens, he is still possessed of the inner “light” that allows him to “lie and see” God himself. Likewise, his “bodily knees” “cannot bow” to God, but he still possesses the “knees of [his] heart” (18). Donne here differentiates the external body’s inability to see or kneel from the inner man’s ability to see or kneel; the lived experience of embodied action diverges radically from how an external witness would describe the same body. Lying ill on his sickbed, Donne takes advantage of this disjunction between the perceived and perceiving body, *Körper* and *Leib*. Removed from the vertical, “upright” frame he normally embodies in his worldly engagements, Donne finds a still more primal ability, one that is invisible to onlookers. Robbed of his daily projects, Donne turns to the primordial *can* that rests beneath the *can* of the body acting upon the world. Addressing God, he claims “though thou have taken me off of my feet, [thou] hast not taken me off of my foundation, which is thy selfe” (18). Here, for the first time, the full meaning of Donne’s stress on the “Potentiall Mode” emerges. Earlier, Donne misidentified the *can* that supports all other activities with the powers of the I in-itself, with the embodied capacity to remove one’s sheets and step out of bed. But the ability to walk, talk, sit up, and eat rests on a *can* over which the I has no control.

Donne here draws on a Christian logic articulated by Michel Henry in phenomenological terms. There is a sense, Henry claims, in which “‘I’ means ‘I can.’”²⁹ To be an I is to “be in possession” of bodily “powers”—I take, I walk, I feel, I imagine, I want—and to have those powers “at one’s disposal.” The I coincides with these powers and can “exercise them as often as it wants.” Yet, Henry continues, the I is absolutely powerless with respect to the fact that it finds itself in possession of the power to act or able to exercise any given power.³⁰ The *I can* always rests on a givenness that cannot be outstripped, on a “foundation” that cannot be removed so long as there is an I to found.³¹ In other words, if

²⁹ Michel Henry, *I Am The Truth: Towards a Philosophy of Christianity*, 136.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

³¹ For a slightly different take on the relationship between givenness and the self in the thought of Augustine, see Marion, *In the Self’s Place*, 56-100.

there is an I that cannot *cannot* speak, it will be able to reach out and grasp hold of the *can* that subtends all of its activities—precisely because that *can* is always there. As Donne puts it: “I come unto thee, O God, my God, I come unto thee so as I can come, I come to thee, by embracing thy comming unto me” (18). The necessary split between the Potentiall Mode and its accompanying infinitive grammatically performs the relationship of dependence that Donne seeks to articulate through his use of *can*. All infinitive actions are subtended by an often-unarticulated modal of ability. By foregrounding that modal element, Donne uses illness to make clear the powerlessness that nurtures the relationship of every human being to the powers that he or she possess.

These themes appear throughout the text, but are brought into sharp focus in Devotion 21, the numerical echo of Devotion 3. The latter describes the beginning of Donne’s confinement to his sickbed; the former provides an account of his return to his feet. If the experience of becoming bedridden was undertaken alone and was initially felt as a loss of individual ability, the experience of emerging from bed is framed as a profoundly collective effort that brings home a sense of how constitutive the relationship between ability and dependence really is.³² In Devotion 21, ability is dependent not only on divine assistance but also on sociality and intersubjectivity. Donne roots his Meditation in an acknowledgement of human frailty: “Oh what a Giant is Man, when he fights against himselfe, and what a dwarfe, when hee needs or exercises his own assistance for himselfe” (110). Here, human beings are only “Giant[s]” when they sin or work to destroy themselves—a far cry from Donne’s earlier claim that it is “too little to call Man a little World” because if the pieces of man’s body were “extended, and stretched out in Man, as they are in the world, Man would be the Gyant, and the world the Dwarfe” (19). By this point in his illness, Donne has finally incorporated the knowledge he purported to possess at the onset of his illness, namely that unlike animals “man hath not that innate instinct, to apply those naturall medicines to his present danger, as those inferiour creatures have” (20). Now he truly knows that man is a “dwarf when he needs or

³² For a political reading that suggests Donne’s insistence on the social is in fact a polemic against the individual interiority of Puritan believers, see Strier, “Donne and the Politics of Devotion.”

exercises his own assistance for him self,” that human beings do not have the ability to help themselves or make themselves better.

As Donne’s use of the Potentiall Mode in Devotion 3 already suggested, every human ability is always already dependent on the power of another. In Devotion 21, he renders that implicit lesson startlingly explicit:

I cannot rise out of my bed till the Physician enable mee, nay, I cannot tel that I am able to rise till he tell me so. I doe nothing, I know nothing of my selfe: how little, and how impotent a peece of the world, is any man alone? and how much less a peece of himself is that Man? So little, as that when it falls out, (as it falls out in some cases) that more misery, and more oppression, would be an ease to man, he cannot give himself that miserable addition, of more misery; A man that is pressed to death, and might be eased by more weights, cannot lay those more weights upon himselfe: he can sinne alone, and suffer alone, but not repent, not bee absolved, without another. Another tels me, I may rise; and I doe so. (110)

In this passage, Donne pairs the modal of disability with the recovery of his abilities. He begins by formulating the relationship in an unsatisfactory way—he “cannot” leave his bed until the physician has “enable[d]” him—and then corrects this view with an even deeper sense of his dependency: “I cannot tell that I am able to rise till he tell me so.” If, in the first expression, the physician “enable[s]” Donne, in the second, he is able to rise but is not aware of his own ability. The repetition of the verb *tell* brings home the nature of this intersubjective debt. Donne can only “tell” (recognize or distinguish) his recuperated ability once he has heard the physician “tell” him (that is, reveal through verbal communication) that he is in fact “able to rise.”

He cannot, “of [him]self,” do or know anything, for by himself a man is not only an “impotent peece of the world,” but even more dramatically, a “man alone” is “less a peece of himself.” When alone, a given human being is a helpless “peece of the world,” a physical body among physical bodies, prone to the vicissitudes of natural processes, to illness, degeneration, annihilation. At the same time, the isolated human being is even “less a peece of himself” than he is a piece of the world. If truly alone, one is “less a

peece” of oneself because such a state of aloneness is a refusal of one’s intersubjective ontological makeup, a failure to see that one is already social through and through, that one can never be alone in the true sense of the word. Here, Donne puts into practice the lessons he had learned in his famous encounter with ringing bells. Who, he asks, can “remove” his ear “from that bell, which is passing a peece of himselfe out of this world?” The death of another Christian, signified by tolling bells, is always a diminishment of self: “No Man is an island, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod be washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were ... Any Man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde” (87). The repetition of “peece of himselfe” in Devotion 21 suggests that to be “less a peece of oneself” than one is a “peece of the world” is to engage in an act of self-deception, to believe in a false ontology in which the word *alone* possesses significance when applied to a given human being.

At the same time, the positioning of the two “peece[s]” (world and self) also suggests that to be “less a peece” of oneself is tied up with Donne’s stress on the modal *cannot*, at least insofar as the sense or recognition of one’s abilities is an element of personal experience that is irreducible to the world. Put another way, my sense that I *can* or *cannot* (and the effort that I expend in attempting to turn the latter into the former) is a “peece” only of my experience and does not appear in the world. One is “less a peece” of oneself than one is a “peece of the world” if one believes that one’s own capacities can stand alone, if one believes that, to borrow Henry’s formulation, “‘I’ means ‘I can.’” In Donne’s view, nothing worth doing can be done alone; any and every true ability is in fact a *we can*. To illustrate this point, Donne argues that a given man “cannot give himself that miserable addition of more misery,” and provides an evocative example: “A man that is pressed to death, and might be eased by more weights, cannot lay those more weights upon himself.” Evoking the “thin sheets” like “yron doors” (17) that imprisoned and pressed upon him when he first took his sick bed in Devotion 3, Donne conjures the image of a man pinned in place, unable to add the weights that would end his suffering and his life. This extreme example clarifies the *I cannot* that lies at the base of human endeavour, for although we are able to “sinne alone, and suffer alone” we cannot

“repent” or “bee absolved, without another.” Emerging from his illness, Donne has realized that there is no meaningful connection between *I* and *can*, that any worthwhile ability is always thoroughly intersubjective. “Another tels me, I may rise; and I doe so”: the doing is here dependent on the telling, and the sense of permission conveyed in “may” suggests the social element that permeates any *can*.

Yet, despite the intersubjective nature of ability, there nevertheless remains a deeply private element that persists in any experience of being able or unable to perform an action. No matter how socially conditioned one’s *can* may be, one’s own, lived sense of any given ability is necessarily detached from the intersubjective sphere. As Stuart Shankar puts it, “to the eye of the outside observer, voluntary and involuntary actions look exactly the same. It is only because each individual is able to see and report on his own volitions that we are able to make the fundamental distinction between voluntary and involuntary movements.”³³ If, in Donne’s view, every *I can* is a *we can*, one still experiences that *can* as an *I* because only *I* can tell if a particular action is in fact voluntary. Donne illustrates these different modalities of experience through a striking cosmological image that he uses to convey his initial experience of rising from bed:

I am up, and I seeme to stand, and I goe round, and I am a new Argument of the new Philosophie, That the Earth moves round; why may I not beleieve that the whole earth moves, in a round motion, though that seeme to mee to stand, when as I seeme to stand to my Company, and yet am carried, in a giddy, and circular motion, as I stand? (111)

Standing, Donne merely seems to stand. The word *stand* refers to the complex “force dynamics” that condition a normal but demanding human posture. To stand is to employ a set of muscular and sensorimotor controls that stabilize the upper and lower torso in order to resist the earth’s gravitational pull.³⁴ Put another way, to stand is to balance, to obtain bodily equilibrium both with one’s environment and with one’s proprioceptive

³³ Shankar, “Descartes’ Legacy,” 318-19. Qtd. in Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy*, 33.

³⁴ For an account of the verb *to stand* as it relates to other posture verbs, see Newman, “A Cross-Linguistic Overview of the Posture Verbs ‘Sit,’ ‘Stand,’ and ‘Lie.’”

feeling of self.³⁵ In this passage, Donne introduces a disjunction between the external and internal success conditions for standing: in the eyes of his “company,” his body—an objective entity, a *Körper*, a “peece of the world”—stands, yet his *Leib*, his sense of his own body tells him the opposite, that he is “carried, in a giddy, and circular motion.” His inability to feel balanced denies him the right to claim that he stands, but he maintains the appearance of standing. Donne can and cannot stand. His company witnesses a shared *can* while his own sense of his abilities stresses a private *cannot*. Personal lived experience is here disjoined from the operations of the world, and it is all but impossible to tell which version of events—that of the external observer or that of felt experience—is a mere appearance worthy of shouldering the conceptual burden packed into the intransitive verb *seem*.

Throughout the *Devotions*, Donne isolates the experience of ability manifest in the *Leib*, and repeatedly shows how this experience is very different both from the *Körper* and from the way others perceive the presence or absence of embodied ability. Donne addresses this distinction directly in Devotion 23:

Even in pleasures, and in paines, there is a propriety, a *Meum & Tuum*; and a man is most affected with that pleasure which is his, his by former enjoying and experience, and most intimidated with those paines which are his, his by a wofull sense of them, in former afflictions. ... [I]n bodily paines, in a fit of the stone, the patient wonders why any man should call the Gout a paine; and hee that hath felt neither, but the tooth-ach, is as much afraid of a fit of that, as either of the other, or either of the other. Diseases, which we never felt in our selves, come but to a compassion of others that have endured them; Nay, compassion it selfe comes to no great degree, if wee have not felt, in some proportion, in our selves, that which we lament and condole in another. (121)

Feelings possess a necessary “propriety” in that they are felt only by the person undergoing a given experience. Unless I have experienced the disease that afflicts another, I cannot understand what he or she is going through. Indeed, true “compassion”

³⁵ Gibbs, “Embodied Standing and the Psychological Semantics of *Stand*,” 388-90.

is only possible, Donne claims, if we have felt the pains of the other “in some proportion, in our selves.” Human beings may be thoroughly social—we are all a “part of the maine” (87)—but human beings nevertheless suffer alone, in large part because the felt aspects of the *Leib* are not reducible to the common, shared world of physical matter and measurable events available to others through the *Körper*. Indeed, Donne claims that the “long nights” and “long daies” of illness are “so long, as that Nature her selfe shall seeme to be perverted, and to have put the longest day, and the longest night, which should bee six moneths asunder, into one naturall, unnaturall day” (121). Just as it is impossible to separate physical standing from the feeling of falling in Devotion 21, so here measureable time and felt temporality collide in two modes of appearance that play out according to different sets of rules.

This profound difference between experience and objective reality transforms Donne into a living “argument for the new Philosophie.”³⁶ The earth seems to stand still, but astronomers claim that it moves. Like Donne’s body, the body of the earth is split into two competing and seemingly irreconcilable appearances. Donne’s illness permeates his body with the same conceptual divisions that rive the post-Copernican earth. Nor is Donne alone in linking the radical reorientation of the cosmos introduced by the “new Philosophie” with a disequilibrium of the body, with a personal inability to know whether one is standing still or moving. In the 1584 *On the Infinite Universe and Worlds*, Giordano Bruno claims that “we cannot apprehend motion except by a certain comparison and relation with some fixed body.” Written in England and published in Venice, Bruno’s text employs the same embodied logic used to such effect by Donne:

I might fall into doubt and hesitation as to the quiet and fixity [of our earth]; and I am able to believe that if I were on the sun, the moon, or any other star, I should always imagine myself to be at the center of a motionless world around which would seem to revolve the whole surrounding universe, though in truth the containing body on which I found myself would be spinning around on its own

³⁶ For Donne’s relationship to the new philosophy, see Coffin, *John Donne and the New Philosophy*.

centre. Thus I can feel no certitude of the distinction between a moving and a stable body.³⁷

Bruno articulates the problem identified by Donne. Since Bruno's perspective is always situated in a given body that takes its bearings from its immediate surroundings—the terra firma of the earth, the sun, the moon—even when he stands on a body he *knows* to be moving, he *feels* that he is “at the center of a motionless world.” Thus, the distinction between a “moving and a stable body” is obliterated, since the different but equally necessary criteria of judgment provided by scientific enquiry and lived experience generate contradictory conclusions.

By making his body the scene of this cosmic contradiction, Donne cements the radical distinction he made earlier between his body as both *Körper* and *Leib*: “though thou have weakened my bodily knees, that they cannot bow to thee,” Donne addresses God in Devotion 3, “[thou] hast yet left mee the knees of my heart, which are bowed to thee evermore” (18). In Devotion 21, this distinction is carried forward from the incapacitated body lying in bed to the newly enabled body capable of standing once more. Donne's experience of illness thus troubles the naïve *I can* in two distinct ways. First, in his view, there is no meaningful connection between *I* and *can*, not because ability does not exist but because the singularity implied in *I* is elusive and false. Second, ability persists even in the absence of externally recognizable bodily capacities, even when interactions with the world have become all but impossible. Here, Donne adumbrates an ontological distinction that Michel Henry spent his career fleshing out, namely: the distinction between the “being of the world” and the “being of effort,” the latter of which is not reducible to the world in any way.³⁸ The “being of effort” is, for Henry, the felt sense of one's life that, through exertion, enables one's actions but never appears in the world. The *can* is only ever felt. This second sense of ability as detached from the world and therefore from intersubjective sociality introduces a notion of privacy that may, at first glance, seem at odds with the rejection of singularity required by the first point. Yet

³⁷ Bruno, *On the Infinite Universe and Worlds*, 311.

³⁸ For this early version of Henry's battle against what he calls “ontological monism,” see *Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 35.

Donne's troubling of the *I* takes place both through the social and the divine. In the former case, the *I* alone is fundamentally unable because every human being is always already inextricably entangled in social relations; in the latter, all abilities are underwritten by the constant presence of God. The *can* that persists through the body's immobilization may be separate from the world but it is enabled by the divine. Although private and removed from intersubjectivity, this form of felt ability is, at the same time, not reducible to the *I*.

Reformation Theology and the Being of Effort

Donne's account of his illness treats the sense of ability in ways that resonate with the theological debates of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.³⁹ By focusing on the relationship between *can* and *cannot*, Donne implicitly stresses the experience of effort. When, for example, he claims that he "cannot eat," "cannot go," and "cannot sit up" (16), Donne implies that he has tried to do these things and has failed. He has expended effort and come up short, for that is the only way one knows for certain that one truly cannot do something. The complex treatment of modal auxiliary verbs that I have been tracing in Devotions 3 and 21 is, I suggest, an exploration of various sorts of effort—of exertion that fails and succeeds in disparate ways as the illness proceeds. To take an obvious example, Donne tries to stand and fails, and then days later, despite low expectations and ongoing dizziness, successfully stands. Donne's treatment of the effort involved both in failing and succeeding provides a nuanced experiential account of one of the most vexed issues in Christian theology: the freedom of the will, a topic that became a source of almost unlimited controversy as the Reformation and its consequences unfolded across Europe.⁴⁰ Donne's deconstruction of the relationship between *I* and *can* ties the sense of ability to effort in ways that animate a topic frequently mentioned by Reformation theologians as an important theological concept, but rarely (if ever) treated as an aspect

³⁹ For an account of Donne's relationship to the controversies surrounding the Synod of Dort, see Shami, "Speaking Openly and Speaking First."

⁴⁰ For Donne's understanding of the relationship between free will and grace, see Johnson, *The Theology of John Donne*, 119-47. For the controversy about the will in early modernity more generally, see Trinkaus, "The Problem of Free Will in the Renaissance and Reformation"; and Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, 57-183.

of lived experience. Donne's *Devotions* work to fill in a theological lacuna by appealing to his own first-person experience of illness.

The nuanced engagement with the modals of ability and disability in the *Devotions* drew inspiration both from Erasmus and Luther's disagreement on the nature of the will and the subsequent theological debate that emerged in its wake. Indeed, the notion of effort was at the heart of and yet, at the same time, curiously absent from the famous controversy between Luther and Erasmus in the 1520s. Although this debate took place nearly a century before Donne composed the *Devotions*, the positions expressed in the exchange continued to have intellectual currency long into the seventeenth century.⁴¹ In *De libero arbitrio* (1524), Erasmus defines free will or free choice as a "power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them [*Porro liberum arbitrium hoc loco sentimus, uim humanae voluntatis, qua se possit homo applicare ad ea, quae perducunt ad aeternam salutem, aut ab iisdem auertere*]." ⁴² There exists, Erasmus claims, a power [*uim*] through which one can [*possit*] apply oneself or become enabled to pursue one's salvation. The question for Erasmus is to what extent this *uim humanae voluntatis* is intertwined with divine grace. The will is not absolutely free; it can accomplish its aims only with the assistance of grace. Erasmus outlines a number of traditional ways for classifying the relationship between human will and divine grace, and it is in this context that the notion of effort first appears in *De libero arbitrio*: what Augustine calls "cooperative grace" is "always present in those who strive [*conantibus*] until they attain their end, but on condition that at the same time and in the same work both free choice and grace operate; grace, however, as the leader and not as a companion."⁴³ Erasmus's use of *conatus*—

⁴¹ The debate had major significance for the theologies of Melancthon, Calvin, and other Reformers, but it also had a wider significance. In *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, Brian Cummings shows how the categories and positions set out by Erasmus and Luther were taken up by the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For an argument that the debate between Luther and Erasmus was continued, in different language, in the debate between Descartes and Hobbes, see Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, 101-254.

⁴² Erasmus, *On the Freedom of the Will*, 47. The Latin is taken from Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio diatribe*, b1v. Henceforth, citations will include page numbers to both editions in this order.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 52; b5r.

attempt, effort, exertion, endeavour—introduces a third term between *uim* and *posse*, power and ability. The act of expending effort and attempting to overcome resistance allows Erasmus to include both free will and divine grace in his account of human behaviour. The accomplishment of an act that will lead to or away from eternal salvation relies on the freedom of the will only insofar as one's efforts are supported and furthered by the workings of grace.

As Brian Cummings has illustrated with striking clarity, Erasmus found scriptural support for his account of free will in the numerous imperatives that pervade Old and New Testament alike. For example, Erasmus quotes Deuteronomy 30:15, in which God offers Moses a choice: "I have set before your face the way of life and the way of death. Choose what is good and walk in it." Erasmus sees in this command the fact that God "leaves man freedom to choose," since it "would be ridiculous to say, 'Choose,' if the power [*potestas*] of turning one way or the other were not present."⁴⁴ Such imperatives as "choose" would be irredeemably cruel if the person to whom they were issued was incapable of obeying. Drawing on Isaiah 21:12, Erasmus clarifies this issue: "What would be the point of such an exhortation, to turn and come, if those who are in question have no such power [*potestatis*] in themselves? Would it not be like saying to one bound in chains which he [the master] would not break: 'Bestir yourself and come and follow me.'"⁴⁵ In Erasmus's view, God's goodness means that His imperatives must presuppose ability. In Cummings summary of this interpretive strategy, "[i]f 'ought' implies 'can,' then since the Bible is manifestly full of 'oughts,' the Bible must, and repeatedly, imply 'the power of free choice.'"⁴⁶ There is, however, a space between divine command and accomplishment: although *can* implies the *potestas* or power to complete a given action, one must exert effort in order to meet a goal and this effort must be assisted by divine grace. Zechariah, for example, "shows the effort of free choice, and the grace which responds to this effort" [*arbitrij liberi conatum indicat, & gratiam conanti paratam*] when he writes, "Return [*Conuertimini*] to me, says the Lord of Hosts, and I will return

⁴⁴ Ibid., 54; b7r.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 55; b8r.

⁴⁶ Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, 162.

[*conuertar*] to you, says the Lord.”⁴⁷ Turning towards God requires *conatus*, an effort that works towards actualizing the *potestas* of free will, but succeeds only when God turns towards that *conatus*. Erasmus’s understanding of the *can* implied in the scriptural *ought* thus also includes power, effort, and grace. It is not the case, he argues, that the will “achieve[s] nothing, although it does not attain the things that it seeks [*conatur*] without the help of grace.” Since “our own efforts” are minimal, God often receives credit for the “whole.” If, for instance, a sailor brings his ship safely out of a storm and into port, he “does not say: ‘I saved the ship’ but ‘God saved it.’ And yet his skill and his labor were not entirely useless.”⁴⁸ Despite the minimal nature of human *conatus* in relation to divine grace, effort is not reducible to an illusory epiphenomenon incapable of making a contribution to the completion of a given act. In Erasmus’s formulation, we “work together with grace.”⁴⁹

In response, Luther argues that Erasmus’s exegetical techniques are at odds with the substantive claims they are supposed to support; what Erasmus takes to be scriptural evidence shoring up his position in fact pushes him towards the Pelegianism he so firmly denies. Addressing Erasmus’s text, Luther states his case forcefully: “it is quite inappropriate when you, my dear Diatribe, infer freedom of choice from those expressions [scriptural imperatives], for you were going to prove only an endeavour [*conatum*] and desire for free choice, yet you cite no passage that proves such an endeavour [*conatum*], but instead passages which, if your inferences were valid, would attribute everything to free choice.”⁵⁰ In this view, Erasmus aims to isolate *conatus*, but he can only do so through his own theological claims, since the scriptural sources he cites to justify his views do not treat *conatus* at all, but, under the lens of Erasmus’s hermeneutic procedure, imply one’s ability to complete a given task on one’s own. By focusing on “imperative verbs,” Erasmus has made a simple grammatical mistake, for

⁴⁷ Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio*, 56; b8r.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 79; c1v.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 90.

⁵⁰ Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will*, 191; Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, 448. Henceforth, I will cite both editions in this order.

“what is signified by them is always what men ought to do and not what they do or can do. [*quid debeant, non quid possint aut faciant homines*] ... What is done or can be done [*quid autem fiat vel possit fieri*] must be expressed by indicative verbs.”⁵¹ Cummings provides a masterly reading of the grammatical valences of this debate, so I will not stress how Luther’s exegetical skill separates the *debeo* and *possum* that Erasmus had so carefully fused together.⁵² In my view, however, Cummings does not convey the importance of *conatus*—the key term that slips between Erasmus (who thinks it is implied in divinely uttered imperatives) and Luther (who believes it has nothing to do with the passages his opponent quotes). Erasmus’s book argues, Luther claims, “contrary to her intention and her promise not to maintain [that free will can attain salvation on its own] but to demonstrate a certain conative power [*conatum*] in free choice. Of this, however, she makes little mention in the whole series of her arguments.”⁵³ Luther recognizes the conceptual centrality of *conatus* to Erasmus’s project, but claims that the phenomenon in fact occupies a peripheral position in *De libero arbitrio*. Since Erasmus’s exegetical techniques have marginalized the *conatus* that should be front and center, Luther does not need to deal with the phenomenon of effort as it relates to will or grace. Thus, *conatus* slips from the debate by virtue of Luther’s exacting response to Erasmus’s grammatical and interpretive choices.

In *Hyperaspistes*, a lengthy two-volume response to Luther (1526-27), Erasmus attempts to recuperate *conatus* and to show how it is indeed implied by the scriptural imperatives he mobilized as evidence in *De libero arbitrio*. Continuing to pursue an argument based on everyday language use, Erasmus insists that imperatives should imply not only *ought* but also *can*—albeit a *can* that is far more complex than Luther’s understanding of the word. In *De servo arbitrio*, Luther argues that imperatives teach us that we cannot do what we ought to do; through scriptural imperatives, God chastises us to acknowledge our inability to follow His commandments and therefore moves us towards an acceptance of our own helplessness. In *Hyperaspistes II*, Erasmus summarizes this position: “God, if

⁵¹ Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, 190; 448.

⁵² Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation*, 144-83.

⁵³ Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, 192; 449.

we believe Luther, issues commands that cannot be obeyed, no matter how much effort [*conatum*] is expended or time spent.”⁵⁴ Erasmus believes that if God is not a tyrant then His commands must be at least possible to work towards obeying and, with the aid of grace, perhaps even succeed in obeying. But the *can* implied in every divine imperative is not, as *De servo arbitrio* argues with “Lutherly hyperbole,” a sign of immediate and direct accomplishment. If a given individual is to obey a command, they must possess conative power; they must expend effort over time, and these efforts must cooperate with grace. “Nowhere in what I say do I draw the conclusion ... that free will can do all things without grace and itself being alone,” Erasmus claims, asking: “Where did Luther learn such a dialectic as this: ‘He can; therefore he can do all things by himself’ [*potest, ergo per se potest omnia*] and ‘He cannot do it without assistance; therefore he cannot do anything all by himself’? [*non potest perficere sine praesidio, nihil igitur omnia potest ex sese*].”⁵⁵ Erasmus accuses Luther of rejecting a naïve version of *I can* for an equally naïve version of *I cannot*. Here, he suggests the contours of the position that Donne sketches in the *Devotions*.

In fact, Erasmus’s argument against Luther uses illness as a key metaphor for understanding the relationship between ability, effort, and will. After reiterating his position that “imperfect effort is aided and fulfilled by cooperating grace” against Luther’s suggestion that “the human will cannot do anything either for good or ill [*hominis voluntatem nec in bonum nec in malum quicquàm posse*], but that all things happen by pure and sheer necessity,” Erasmus proceeds to argue that although postlapsarian free will is not absolute it does retain something of its powers. In a very strict sense, it is true that “since freedom has been lost through sin, it is now only an empty name, just as in a sick man lost health is not health.” Yet although the word *freedom* no longer has an absolute referent, there are, nevertheless, “vestiges [*reliquias*] of original freedom which remain in a person even after he has committed a sin; and these vestiges are not nothing simply because they are in themselves insufficient to

⁵⁴ Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes Book 2*, 391. The Latin comes from Erasmus, *Hyperaspistae liber secundus*, 85.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 392; 84.

regain freedom: it is enough that they do something by their own power [*suis uiribus*] and accomplish it also with the assistance of grace.” The vestiges of freedom are still capable of expending effort and are thus not completely without *potestas*. It is as if Luther makes “lost health into death” [*Tu perditam sanitate[m] mortem facis*] and thereby misses any semblance of nuance:

Some natural strength remains in a sick man, fighting with the disease as best he can and sometimes winning the battle without the help of a physician. So too you [Luther] represent reason as totally blind after sin; I say it is dim sighted or blear eyed. For someone whose vision is blurred by rheum is not completely blind, and someone who is struggling against a disease is not completely dead [*prorsus mortuus est, qui cu[m] morbo luctator*].⁵⁶

Here, Erasmus appropriates Luther’s favourite image of man, and attempts to illuminate its flaws. In *De servo arbitrio*, Luther claims that scripture “represents man as one who is not only bound, wretched, captive, sick, and dead, but in addition to his other miseries is afflicted through the agency of Satan his prince, with this misery of blindness, so that he believes himself to be free, happy, unfettered, able [*potentum*], well, and alive.”⁵⁷ In Erasmus’s reading, Luther collapses the distinction between sickness and death, since he equates the state of being “able” with that of health. For Luther, the sick man is “captive,” not “able”; the fallen man is in no way free. Erasmus counters by introducing gradations of ability, by suggesting that the *I can* revealed through *conatus* persists even in illness, which is, after all, something against which one can “struggle.”

In his sermons, Donne articulates a position on the relationship between effort and grace that is much closer to Erasmus than it is to Luther. Nevertheless, as we will see, in the depths of his sickness Donne finds elements of truth in Luther’s position. In the sermons, Donne frequently discusses how effort intersects with grace. The sphere of *conatus* lies between prevenient grace (without which we could do nothing) and cooperating grace (which assists us). “[F]irst Gods preventinge grace prepares us, enables us,” Donne

⁵⁶ Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes liber unus*, 289. The Latin is taken from Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes Diatribae*, o8v-plr.

⁵⁷ Luther, *De servo arbitrio*, 193; 449.

writes, “and then he bends downe with a farther supply of concurring grace, but that is to heere us. For yf we doe nothings then, yf we speake not then, he departs from us.”⁵⁸ God “enables us,” but we must still “doe” something, we must cooperate. When a given sinner “lies in the mud and slime, in the dregs and lees, and tartar of his sinne,” then “Hee cannot so much as wish, that [the grace of God] would shine upon him.”⁵⁹ Without prevenient grace, human beings “cannot so much as wish,” but when they have been touched by such grace, then they can say, “God hath not left me to my selfe, He hath come to my succour, He hath been my Helpe.” Yet, no matter how much assistance God provides, “he hath left some thing for me to doe with him, and by his helpe,” since “Helpe alwayes presumes an endeavour and co-operation with him that is helped.”⁶⁰ Encapsulating his position in a pithy phrase that evokes both the Erasmus-Luther debate and the *Devotions*, Donne writes: “And doe not thinke that because a naturall man cannot do all, therefore he hath nothing to doe for himself.”⁶¹ This phrase seems to cite and perhaps translate Erasmus’s critique of what he sees as Luther’s hurried logic—“He cannot do it without assistance; therefore he cannot do anything by himself” [*non potest perficere sine praesidio, nihil igitur omnino potest ex sese*]⁶²—and reiterates Erasmus’s sense that there must be gradations in the capacity of effort to achieve at least minimal results, so long as divine aid is in place. “Doe not,” Donne insists, blindly accept the claims made by Luther and his followers.

If, in his sermons, Donne argues for the relevance of effort as a theological concept, in the *Devotions*, he goes a step further and writes from the perspective of *conatus*—not as a theological or philosophical principle, but as a vital element of lived experience. The feeling of illness seeping into and disabling his body provides Donne with a directly accessible way of articulating the nuances of effort without succumbing to doctrinal

⁵⁸ Donne, *Sermons*, 2:157. My discussion of this topic in this paragraph is based on that provided by Johnson, *The Theology of John Donne*, 119-47.

⁵⁹ Donne, *Sermons*, 9:299.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 7:63.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 9:85.

⁶² Erasmus, *Hyperaspistae liber secundus*, 392; 84.

pressure.⁶³ Donne takes images from theological discussions of grace and effort, and embodies them, producing a vision of what it is like to experience these images from the inside. In Donne's treatment of his sickness as a form of childhood, we have already seen him reworking a theme treated in depth by Erasmus to exemplify the value of *conatus* as a theological concept. The relationship of our *conatus* to God's grace is akin, Erasmus claims, to a "child who has fallen and has not yet strength to walk, however much it tries," but who is lifted up by its father in order to reach a distant apple:

The child could not have stood up if the father had not lifted it, could not have seen the apple had the father not shown it, could not advance unless the father had all the time assisted its feeble steps, could not grasp the apple had the father not put it into his hand. When, then, can the infant claim for itself? And yet it does something. But it has nothing to glory about in its own powers, for it owes its very self to its father.⁶⁴

Donne's illness forces him to realize that he is not enabled in any naïve sense of the term, that without the presence of a power over which he has no control he is in fact powerless—unable to stand, sit, or even eat. Reduced to a "sucking child" (16), Donne's condition embodies Erasmus's exemplary figure. In trying and failing to stand or sit and finding the limits of his weakened *Leib* in the slack tendons and ligaments of his *Körper*, Donne provides his readers with a glimpse of the effort at stake in Reformation theology. His sickness teaches him that he must ask God to "enable me" even to "commune with mine own heart upon my bed, and be still" (19).

In addition to the figure of childhood, Erasmus unpacks his conception of *conatus* by describing the workings of the human eye, an image to which Donne returns repeatedly in the *Devotions*. In the fullest treatment of this theme in *De libero arbitrio*, Erasmus's text performs the economy it describes: "Let us," he begins, "try [*Conabimur*] to express

⁶³ Richard E. Hughes claims that "[o]nce in the pulpit, Donne's teachings on cooperative grace, free will, and man's role in the redemptive process stand somewhere between Geneva and Rome." *The Progress of the Soul*, 201. Donne's treatment of effort provides a specific lens through which to gain a better appreciation of this doctrinal negotiation.

⁶⁴ Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio*, 91; f2v.

our meaning in a parable.” He implies that the act of writing involves his own effort, that it does not simply emerge from a puppet controlled by the workings of God’s grace:

A human eye that is quite sound [*sanus*] sees nothing in the dark, a blind one sees nothing in the light; thus the will though free can [*potest*] do nothing if grace withdraws from it, and yet when light is infused, he who has sound eyes can [*potest*] shut off [*occludere*] the sight of the object so as not to see, can [*potest*] avert his eyes, so that he ceases to see what he was able to see [*ut desinat uidere, quod uidere poterat*].⁶⁵ When anyone has eyes that once were blinded through some defect, but can now see, he owes even more gratitude. For first he owes it to his Creator, then to the physician. Just as before sin our eye was sound, so that now it is vitiated by sin; what can [*potest*] a man who sees boast for himself? And yet he has some merit to claim if prudently he shuts or averts his eyes.⁶⁶

Healthy eyes can see in the proper conditions, when light illuminates the visual field. Given these circumstances, it is possible to close one’s eyes, to exert minimal effort and employ the power of bodily movement and temporarily negate the ability to see.⁶⁷ Following this analogy, Erasmus contends that even if postlapsarian eyes are “vitiated,” they are not, as Luther argues, completely useless, for one is still able to shut or avert one’s eyes “prudently.” Even when eyes are ill, they are nevertheless able to see something—as Erasmus puts it in *Hyperaspistes I*, “someone whose vision is blurred by rheum is not completely blind” [*enim prorsus caecus est, qui ob pituita[m] caecutit*]—and are also able to close their lids.⁶⁸

Donne plays on these images throughout his career. He adopts a cavalier tone in “The Sun Rising,” when he addresses the sun: “Thy beams, so reverend, and strong / Why

⁶⁵ I have modified the translation here so as to include the sense of ability conveyed in Erasmus’s *poterat*.

⁶⁶ Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio*, 91; f2v.

⁶⁷ Erasmus follows a similar logic in *Hyperaspistes I*, in which he argues: “when our will operates with operating grace, it applies itself to grace, accommodating its natural powers to operating grace, just as when the sun rises we open our eyes, or else it turns away, just as we should close our eyes when the sun is up.” Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes liber unus*, 281.

⁶⁸ Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes liber unus*, 289; Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes Diatribae*, p1r.

shouldst thou think? / I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink.”⁶⁹ Claiming that his *I can* is capable of occluding the sun, Donne playfully gestures towards the power of even minimal embodied effort to change the quality of one’s lived environment; his behaviour is an equal partner in his relationship with the world. Play becomes serious when his sickness first strikes in the *Devotions* and “in the twinckling of an eye, I can scarce see” (11). He is not completely blind. His eyes may be “vitiated” and “blurred by rheum,” to use Erasmus’s terms, but Donne is still able to exert effort towards the goal of seeing, since he can “scarce see.” What was easy is now difficult, since illness blurs his vision and, at the same time, brings into experiential focus the full force of his fallen condition and his reliance on grace.

Eyesight is a prominent theme throughout the *Devotions*, but receives its most extensive treatment in Devotion 15, when Donne discusses his insomnia, his inability to close his eyelids. In illness, death is always “before mine Eies,” Donne laments, but he is no longer able to visit the comforting image of death through which “God hath mollified it to us,” since “in sleepe, I cannot see it.” Indeed, he cannot sleep at all, and thus his state is even worse than the many “prisoners” who have “lein long under heavie fetters, yet at this houre, are asleepe.” Even someone who has seen a friend die today or knows he will see a friend die tomorrow, “will sinke into a sleepe in betweene,” but Donne is unable to accomplish even this simple task:

I cannot; and oh, if I be entering now into Eternitie, where there shall bee no more distinction of houres, why is it al my businesse now to tell clocks? why is none of the heavinesse of my heart, dispensed into mine Eie-lids, that they might fall as my heart doth? And why, since I have lost my delight in all objects, cannot I discontinue the faculty of seeing them, by closing my Eies in sleepe? (78)

Just like falling asleep, closing one’s eyes is a movement that combines both the voluntary and the involuntary, that involves activity and passivity, effort and effortlessness. One can “wink” and purposefully “eclipse” the sun with one’s eyelids, but they will also open and close automatically in so many blinks per minute. In a similar

⁶⁹ Donne, “The Sun Rising,” lines 11-13, in *The Complete English Poems*.

way, one can try to fall asleep, but the process happens automatically, as a surge of involution that swamps the resources of the will. That Donne's eyelids cannot close and that he cannot sleep suggests another way that the experience of illness allows him to nuance the Reformation debate on *conatus*. Recall Erasmus's claim that he who can see "can shut off the sight of the object so as not to see, can avert his eyes, so that he ceases to see what he was able to see."⁷⁰ Although Donne agrees with Erasmus that the notion of effort should, contra Luther, play an important role in the theology of grace, his description of insomnia works to undermine Erasmus's fixation on the *I* involved in the exertion of effort. Donne has, after all, "lost all delight in objects," but he cannot do what Erasmus insists should be possible; he cannot "shut off the sight of the object so as not to see." He is, to repeat Henry's formulation, powerless over his powers, and he cannot "discontinue the faculty of seeing them" by closing his eyes.

Donne's *Devotions* work against the absolute *cannot* implied in Luther's theology of grace; he retains an Erasmian *can*, and finds evidence for it in the felt work of effort. But Donne's insistence on the insufficiency of the *I*, both in intersubjective and divine relations, nuances Erasmus's position, which hangs onto a lonely subjectivity that Donne wants to reject or at least modify. In Erasmus's view, "[w]hen anyone has eyes that once were blinded through some defect, but can now see, he owes even more gratitude. For first he owes it to his Creator, then to the physician."⁷¹ Here, the person whose eyes have been healed owes a debt, but he remains the person who sees. Donne's vision is, I think, more radical, since he positions the ability to see or do anything productive in the sphere not of the *I* but of the *we*. By himself, he cannot even close his eyes, he cannot even sleep. Donne's *Devotions* treat the experience of being ill as a unique first-person encounter with *conatus*, and this perspective allows Donne to navigate between the poles of Reformation theology and produce a truly nuanced position on the nature of ability and the meaning of *can*.

⁷⁰ Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio*, 91; f2v.

⁷¹ Ibid.

The Ultimate Can

Seven years after the brush with death he recorded in the *Devotions*, in February 1630 Donne delivered a sermon while suffering from what would indeed prove to be a terminal illness. Writing about this sermon in his 1640 *Life*, Izaak Walton reports that when Donne returned to London from Essex, where he had been convalescing, his “sickness had left him but so much flesh as did only cover his bones” and his friends “doubted his strength” to successfully preach at St. Paul’s. After calming his friends’ fears, Donne “appeared in the pulpit” much to the “amazement” of his audience, for “doubtless,” Walton claims:

many did secretly ask that question in Ezekiel (37:3), “Do these bones live? or, can that soul organize that tongue, to speak so long time as the sand in that glass will move toward its center, and measure out an hour of this dying man’s unspent life? Doubtless it cannot.” And yet, after some faint pauses in his zealous prayer, his strong desires enabled his weak body to discharge his memory of his preconceived meditations, which were of dying.⁷²

Although the audience’s imagined response appears in quotations attributed to scripture, only the four words of the opening question derive from Ezekiel. Even there, Walton has altered his biblical source by substituting the auxiliary verb *do* for the modal of ability, *can*, which was usually used in early modern English translations of Ezekiel.⁷³ *Can* refers to ability, but *do* reflects a current state of affairs. Walton subtly rewrites English scripture so that the audience wonders whether or not the specter standing before them is actually living, and transplants Ezekiel’s *can* into a subsequent question about the ability of Donne’s soul to “organize” his tongue for even an “hour” of “unspent life.” The audience’s negative reaction to this question (“Doubtless it cannot”) is proven wrong by Donne’s “strong desires,” which “enabled his weak body” to “discharge” or verbalize the

⁷² Walton, *The Life of Dr. John Donne*, 214.

⁷³ The King James bible asks, “Son of man, can these bones live?” and in so doing echoes the Geneva Bible, which asks an identical question. Wycliffe offers a different translation: “Guessest thou, son of man, whether these bones shall live?” Other translators preferred the modal *may* over *shall*. The Bishop’s, the Great (Cramner), and the Coverdale Bibles all render the question thus: “thinkest thou these bones maye live agayne?” Despite these differences, each of these modals (*can*, *may*, or *shall*) suggests a sense of ability absent from the firmer verb *do*.

“meditations” stored in his memory. Walton silently corrects the source of this enablement a few sentences later by aligning Donne’s “strong desires” with a duty the accomplishment of which was made possible by God: the preacher is overjoyed that “God had enabled him to perform this desired duty.”⁷⁴ Yet, whether Donne is “enabled” by God or his own desires, the point of this episode seems to be a carefully orchestrated dialectic between *can* and *cannot* that reveals the force of the preacher’s innate conative powers both as they are simultaneously limited by illness and aided by God.

This dialectic between ability and disability is behind Walton’s decision to discreetly replace Ezekiel’s *can* with *do*, since the biblical passage is tied up with what is perhaps the ultimate possibility of the Christian imagination, the resurrection of the body that stands behind every death. When Ezekiel’s God addresses a valley of dry bones—“I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live”—Christian thinkers heard in this utterance a prefiguration of the Christian resurrection.⁷⁵ For example, in a 1627 sermon, Donne declares that among scriptural authorities, “all understand” that the passage refers to the “Resurrection after which no part of man shall die, or suffer againe.”⁷⁶ The verse is also quoted in the 1630 sermon the delivery of which Walton describes; Donne relates how God “sets the Prophet Ezechiel in the *valley of drye bones*, and sayes, *Sonne of man can these bones live?* as though it had bene impossible, and yet they did.”⁷⁷ The impossibility implied in this divine question is reversed by God’s absolute ability, which can animate the dead. By using *do* instead of *can*, Walton places the question of the resurrection under erasure so as to focus the reader’s attention on the near impossibility of Donne successfully delivering his sermon in a body the vitality of which is so diminished as to seem uncertain or negligible. Precedent for Walton’s arrangement can be found in the *Devotions*.

⁷⁴ Walton, *The Life of Dr. John Donne*, 214.

⁷⁵ Ezekiel 37:6.

⁷⁶ Donne, *Sermons*, 8:111.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 10: 239.

In the central Devotion 12, Donne invokes Ezekiel 37:3 to highlight the depths of sickness into which he has fallen. Addressing God in prayer, he closes the Devotion by imagining renewed health:

As thou hast layed me low, in this Valley of sicknesse, so low, as that I am made fit for that question, asked in the field of bones, *Sonne of Man, can these bones live*, so, in thy good time, carry me up these Mountaynes, of which, even in this Valley, thou affordest mee a prospect, the Mountain where thou dwellest, the holy Hill, unto which none can ascend *but hee that hath cleane hands*, which none can have, but by that one and that strong way, of making them cleane, in the blood of thy Sonne Christ Jesus. (66-67)

Once again, this passage hinges on the meaning of *can*. Donne's illness is so severe that it has rendered him "fit" for the question God asks Ezekiel of dry "bones." Can Donne's body live? Just as God has placed Donne in the position where such a question makes sense, so Donne implores God to "carry" him upwards out of the valley where he now lies dying onto the mountain where divinity dwells. Yet he knows that "none can" ascend this mountain except those who are clean and "none can" be cleansed except through the power of Christ's sacrifice. In the depths of his illness, Donne recognizes that both the life of his "bones" and his fate in the afterlife depend solely on God's absolute *can*. By placing Ezekiel's question in the context of his own sick body, Donne superimposes his seemingly impossible return to health and another seemingly impossible event: the bodily resurrection at the end of eschatological time.⁷⁸

The relationship between Donne's sickbed and the central drama of Christian belief is at the heart of the *Devotions*. From the beginning of the book, Donne identifies his illness with Adam's fall, claiming that the agony of sickness is the result of the fact that, through Adam and Eve, "we blew [the chance of immortality] out by our first sinne" (7). The sweat induced by Donne's fever is simply an amplification of "Adams punishment, *In the sweat of thy brows thou shalt eate thy bread*" (12). Similarly, when he falls into his

⁷⁸ For a recent argument about how the intelligibility of the resurrection is encoded in birth and other bodily processes, see Falque, *The Metamorphosis of Finitude*.

sickbed and loses human verticality, Donne figures this development as a reversion to Adam's pre-vital situation: "When God came to breath into Man the breath of life, he found him flat upon the ground" (15). If Donne's sin and his sickness (the bodily expression of his sin) align him with Adam's inability to stand, his return to his feet at the end of his illness aligns him with the resurrection.⁷⁹ Donne highlights this relationship by identifying with Lazarus in the title of Devotion 21: "God prospers their [the physician's] practise, and he, by them, calls Lazarus out of his tombe, mee out of my bed" (110). If the sickbed is a grave, then the man who emerges from that bed is a figure of Lazarus, a realization of the resurrection in all of its multiple connotations. The complexity of resurrection for Donne is highlighted in the Expostulation based on his dizzy return to verticality:

My God, my God, how large a glasse of the next World is this? As wee have an Art, to cast from one glasse to another, and so to carry the Species a great way off, so hast thou, that way, much more; wee shall have a Resurrection in Heaven; the knowledge of that thou castest by another glasse upon us here; we feele that wee have a Resurrection from sinne; and that by another glasse too; we see wee have a Resurrection of the body from the miseries and calamities of this life. This Resurrection of my body, shewes me the Resurrection of my soule; and both here severally, of both together hereafter. Since the Martyrs under the Altar, presse thee with their solicitation for the Resurrection of the body to glory, thou wouldest pardon mee, if I should presse thee by Prayer, for the accomplishing of this Resurrection, which thou hast begun in me to health. ... I have a Bed of sinne; delight in Sinne, is a Bed: I have a grave of sinne; senselessness of sinne, is a grave; and where Lazarus has beene foure daies, I have beene fifty yeeres, in this putrification; Why dost thou not call mee, as thou diddest him, *with a loud voice*, since my Soule is as dead as his Body was? (112)

⁷⁹ Rami Targoff argues persuasively about the relationship between illness and sin in this text: sickness, she claims, "provided an unusual, perhaps unique occasion in which the body and soul might share nearly identical states of being. Consistent with the Protestant doctrine of original sin, Donne understood the soul to be in a more or less constant state of sinfulness. Whereas periods of bodily health often disguise spiritual disease, physical sickness creates a sudden, unanticipated opportunity, as it were, for the physical and the spiritual to be as one." *John Donne: Body and Soul*, 132.

This brilliant and byzantine reflection of the relationship between resurrection and health shows Donne working to figure his illness as a theological type. In Devotion 3, he lamented his inability to rise in similar terms: “Miserable, and (though common to all) inhuman posture, where I must practice my lying in the grave, by lying still, and not practice my Resurrection, by rising any more” (16). Newly enabled by the physicians, in Devotion 21, Donne can once more “practice [his] Resurrection,” and must work through the implications of such an exercise.

This world, we learn, is a “large glasse of the next world,” in that we can understand certain truths about spiritual transcendence through the immanence of our embodied and enworlded condition. Just as human beings can “cast from one glass to another” in the telescope and carry “Species” or images “a great way off,” so God can illuminate the next world through and in this world. Donne’s illness acts as a sort of optical technology for apprehending what would otherwise remain invisible and atemporal. “[W]e shall have a Resurrection in heaven,” Donne claims, and we currently possess “knowledge” of this future event because God shows us as much through a series of “glass[es]” that are imbricated within the act of his rising up out of bed. The “resurrection in heaven” is revealed through the “glasse” of our “feel[ing]” a “Resurrection from sinne,” which is made manifest through yet another “glasse,” namely that “wee see wee have a Resurrection of the body from the miseries and calamities of this life.” Turning from the general to the individual, Donne frames these interpretive lenses in the first person, and claims that “[t]his Resurrection of my body”—his movement up out of bed—“shewes me the Resurrection of my soule.” This double resurrection reveals itself in two ways: first, his bodily emergence from the sickbed as it is related to but separate from his simultaneous spiritual emergence out of his sinful ways; and second, the indivisible resurrection of body and soul “both together heareafter,” when the dead will break forth, once more animate, from the bounds of the grave. Newly enabled by the physicians and by God, standing on his feet once more, Donne then forces the vocabulary of passivity into an active register, turning *cannot* into *can*. The Meditation of Devotion 21 invokes a “man that is pressed to death, and might be eased by more weights,” but “cannot lay those more weights upon himselfe” (110). In the Expostulation, Donne transforms *press*

from a passive verb, which suggests a combination of gravity and weight slowly crushing whatever is being “pressed,” into an active verb that means to put pressure on or aggressively solicit. Just as, according to doctrines established in the early church, Christian martyrs can, with the merit of their sacrifice, legitimately “presse” God for an immediate, non-apocalyptic resurrection of body and soul together into heavenly glory, so Donne “press[es]” God for a full “Resurrection” to health the first stage of which is signaled by his feet pressing into the ground once more (112).⁸⁰

Switching images, Donne then moves momentarily from his resurrection to the bed from which he has risen. He has “a Bed of sinne,” for “delight in Sinne” (of which he is guilty) “is a Bed.” Even worse, he has “a grave of sinne,” for “senselessness of sin is a grave” (112). The notion of “senselessness” here reaches back to the *Expostulation of Devotion 1*, in which Donne laments: “I fall sick of Sin, and am bedded and bedrid, buried and putrified in the practise of Sin, and all this while I have no presage, no pulse, no sense of my sicknesse” (9). Why, he asks, “is there not alwayes a pulse in my Soule, to beat at the approach of a tentation to sinne?” (8). The approach of sin is unfelt—one cannot simply apply one’s fingers to the pulse of the soul—and so Donne has spent his entire life in the “grave” that is “the senselessness of sin.” Thus, “where Lazarus had been foure daies” in the literal grave, Donne has spent “fifty years in this putrification,” and his soul “is as dead as [Lazarus’s] Body was” (112). The experience of illness has awakened Donne to the felt valences of the sin that saturate his being. And yet God has healed Donne’s body, just as he reversed the consequences of Lazarus’s death.

It is this return to health and bodily abilities that provides Donne with the “glasse” that propels his thought from immanent health to transcendent resurrection: “O eternall and most gracious God,” he begins in the *Prayer to Devotion 21*, “who has made little things to signifie great, and conuaid the infinite merits of thy Sonne in the water of Baptisme, and in the Bread and Wine of thy other Sacrament, unto us, receive the sacrifice of my

⁸⁰ On the development of a doctrine about the immediate resurrection of martyrs in the early church, see Moss, *The Other Christs*, 121-24.

humble thanks, that thou hast not onely afforded mee, the abilitie to rise out of this bed or wearinesse & discomfort, but hast also made this bodily rising, by thy grace, an earnest of a second resurrection from sinne, and of a third, to everlasting glory” (114). Just as baptism and communion signify the “infinite merits” of Christ, so the “little” thing of Donne’s recovery from illness signifies the “great” thing of resurrection. Note the interplay of grace and *conatus* here. Donne claims that God has “afforded me the abilitie to rise out of this bed.” Positioning the pronoun *me* between a God who affords ability and the action of rising made possible by that ability, Donne figures the workings of cooperative grace syntactically. Although God plays a role here, He does so as a power that aids Donne’s own effort “to rise out of this bed” that had metonymically figured his bodily inability. Through the process of signification, “this bodily rising” becomes “by [God’s] grace” an “earnest”—that is, a “foretaste, installment, pledge of anything afterwards to be received in greater abundance”⁸¹—of a “second resurrection from sinne, and of a third, to everlasting glory.” The qualification “by thy grace” is key, since it indicates that these last two forms of resurrection, both from sin and then to heavenly glory at the end of time, are accomplished through God’s grace alone. In other words, although an embodied *can* requires one’s own effort, the *can* in Ezekiel 37:3 belongs to God alone.

The *Devotions* repeatedly circle around the tension between that which human effort can accomplish and that which infinitely exceeds human ability. By drawing typological connections between his ability to rise from bed and the resurrection of the body anticipated in Ezekiel, Donne demonstrates this absolute distance even as he uses the former to illuminate the latter. Tellingly, in the *Devotions*, this fixation on the resurrection is often expressed through the image of the eye Donne inherits from Erasmus. The link between resurrection and the human eye was, of course, canonized by 1 Corinthians 15, in which Paul establishes a series of distinctions: the “terrestrial” and the “celestial,” “corruption” and “incorruption,” the “natural body” and the “spiritual body,” the “earthly” and the “heavenly,” all of which emphasize the gulf separating the

⁸¹ OED, *earnest*, n.2.1.

human from the divine.⁸² Yet despite this radical incommensurability, all humans will cross this ontological abyss instantaneously: “we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”⁸³ Donne uses this verse as the basis for his account of falling into illness: “In the same instant that I feele the first attempt of the disease, I feele the victory: In the twinckling of an eye, I can scarce see” (11). The pairing of “instant” and “the twinckling of an eye” here mirrors Paul’s doubling of a “moment” with a “twinkling” eye.

Indeed, as Donne would have known, this “moment” is a translation of the Greek *atomos*, an “uncut” piece of time or a temporal atom, the smallest unit of time that Latin writers referred to as an *instans*. Augustine unpacks the meaning of Paul’s phrase: “Most people don’t know what “atom” means. It comes from the Greek *tomê*, which means cutting; so *atomos* in Greek means what cannot be cut. But you can talk about an atom in material bodies, and about an atom in time. In material bodies, if anything can be found which is generally held to be impossible to divide, it means some particle so minute that it leaves no room to cut it. But an atom in time is a brief moment, which leaves no room to divide it.”⁸⁴ The temporal instant through which Donne’s fall into illness begins thus resonates with the material units into which his body is crumbling, since in an instant an illness can “reduce [a man] to Atomes” (11). Invoking the atoms of Lucretian physics just two sentences before he cites the English translation of Paul’s *atomos*, Donne draws a tight semantic link between the temporality of change and the matter that is changed. But Donne almost immediately redeems this instant, boomeranging from his use of Paul’s phrase to capture decay right back to Paul’s intended subject: the resurrection, an event that is even swifter than the fall into illness. “For by thy mercy,” Donne addresses God in the Expostulation of Devotion 2:

I consider in my present state, not the haste, & the dispatch of the disease, in dissolving this body, so much, as the much more haste, & dispatch, which my

⁸² 1 Corinthians 15:40-48.

⁸³ Ibid., 50-52.

⁸⁴ Augustine, Sermon 362.20, in *Sermons* 341-400.

God shal use, in recollecting, and reuniting this dust againe at the Resurrection.

Then I shall hear his angels proclaim the *Surgite mortui, Rise, yee dead*. Though I be dead, I shall heare the voice; the sounding of the voice, and the working of the voice shall all be one; and all shall rise there in a lesse Minute than any one dies here. (13)

The resurrection happens in the blink of an eye, “in a lesse Minute” than the moment of death itself. The shared, intersubjective ability to rise once again from the sickbed is, for Donne, an analogue to the social conditions of the final resurrection, when “all shall rise” together.

The instant is the condition of both a fall into sickness or death and the resurrection, but is also figured as the passageway between the immanence of sickness and divine transcendence: “Onely be thou ever present to me, O my God, and this bed-chamber, & thy bed-chamber shall be all one roome, and the closing of these bodily Eyes here, and the opening of the Eyes of my Soule, there, all one Act” (70). The repetition of “bed-chamber” to create the effect of “one room” shared by both Donne and God distorts the meaning of “chamber” and “roome” almost beyond recognition. For Donne, the medium that renders this distortion possible is the instant, a temporal collapse represented by the twinkling of an eye. The “closing” of his bodily eyes in his “bed-chamber” is “one” and the same “act” as the “opening” of the “Eyes of [his] Soule” in God’s “bed-chamber.” The deictic translation of “here” into “there” takes place by means of the familiar movement of closing the eyes, a process that initiates the transition from embodied life, through death, to disembodied afterlife. Unlike Erasmus’s eyes (which can be closed by the will of an embodied person) and Donne’s unsleeping eyes (which he cannot close no matter how hard he tries), the eyes of this passage blur agency in ways that shed light on Donne’s understanding of ability. In this passage, it is impossible to tell whether Donne or God is finally responsible for the impossibly brief closing and opening of his physical and spiritual eyes. Using the gerund form, Donne claims that “the closing of these bodily Eyes here, and the opening of the Eyes of my Soul there” will be “all one Act.” The gerunds *closing* and *opening* reflect happenings but do not betray anything about agency. Is it Donne’s effort or God’s grace that is responsible for this minimal movement? The

syntax of the passage refuses to speculate. Here, the *Leib*—the living, sentient, striving, endeavouring body—is revealed for what, in Donne's view, it is: a nexus of cooperating forces simultaneously bodily, spiritual, intersubjective, and divine.

Chapter 5

The Recognition of Life in *The Winter's Tale*

Holding Cordelia in his arms, King Lear achieves what seems like a moment of clarity: “I know when one is dead and when one lives. / She’s dead as earth.”¹ In a play that corrodes positive claims to knowledge, the line separating living from dead, Cordelia from earth, appears to be a certitude upon which even Lear can stand. Yet this certainty is undermined when he requests a “looking glass” and claims, “if that her breath will mist or stain the stone, / Why, then she lives” (24.257-59). Lear’s insistence on searching for life in a body “dead as earth” troubles his assertion that he “know[s] when one is dead and when one lives.” Even though he eventually returns to his initial diagnosis—“No, no life” (24.300)—Lear maintains hope, seeing in a feather’s movement an indication that “she lives” (24.261). At stake in these lines is one of the foundations of human thought and action, the distinction between the quick and the dead by means of which we determine whom to bury, which bodies require medical attention, and what sorts of beings deserve compassion.² But how, Shakespeare asks in this scene, does one recognize the living *as* living? The opacity of this question has intrigued many, including Ludwig Wittgenstein, who claims that such recognition structures human behaviour:

Look at a stone and imagine it having sensations. — One says to oneself: How could one so much as get the idea of ascribing a *sensation* to a *thing*? One might as well ascribe it to a number! — And now look at a wriggling fly, and at once these difficulties vanish, and pain seems able to get a *foothold* here, where before everything was, so to speak, too *smooth* for it.

¹ Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. Wells, 24.256. All quotations of *King Lear* are taken from this edition.

² There is, one presumes, a good reason why the animal rights movement is able to gain public traction and hardly anyone proclaims the rights of limestone or clay. For a discussion of when and how death is declared, see Sachs, *Corpse*. For a recent account of the relationship between an implicit understanding of life and human action, see Thompson, *Life and Action*.

And so, too, a corpse seems to us quite inaccessible to pain. — Our attitude to what is alive and to what is dead is not the same. All our reactions are different.³

The disposition one adopts towards a fly is completely different from how one treats a stone. In *King Lear*, Gloucester laments that “wanton boys” torture living flies “for sport” (15.35-36), but they cannot be cruel to stones.⁴ If “all of our reactions” to a stone and a fly “are different,” then, as J. M. Bernstein contends, the key word in Wittgenstein’s meditation is “all.” *Is alive* differs from most predicates—is cold, is grey—because it operates in the background, changing the meaning of all the others.⁵ The recognition of a given being as alive alters one’s basic orientation towards it. Yet as Lear’s wavering judgment indicates, the ability to “know” a being as living is often problematic at best.

In this chapter, I examine the recognition of life in Shakespeare’s *Winter’s Tale*, a play that asks its audience to detect the presence of vitality behind what Wittgenstein calls the “smooth” surface of stone.⁶ Throughout his career, Shakespeare consistently returns to the complexities inherent in the recognition of life through episodes where characters waver at the threshold of death.⁷ In *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and many other plays, a living body is mistakenly thought to be dead or a corpse is examined for signs of life. Such scenes weld dramatic action to philosophical questions both about ontological borders and about how those boundaries are revealed to human experience. With their limp and unresponsive limbs, Shakespeare’s ambiguously animate bodies defamiliarize the implicit and routine acts of categorization that condition everyday responses to entities both living and nonliving. When confronted by these bodies,

³ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 104.

⁴ The excesses of mountaintop removal mining have begun to stir muted public outrage on behalf of stone, but only within the context of larger ecosystems. See Burns, *Bringing Down the Mountains*.

⁵ Bernstein, *Against Voluptuous Bodies*, 55-56.

⁶ The connection between Wittgenstein and *The Winter’s Tale* was made by Stanley Cavell, whose analysis of the play highlights “a use of the concept of telling as fundamental as the act of seeing,” a form of engagement that determines “how we individuate things” and “determine what *counts* as instances of our concepts, this thing as a table, that as a chair, this other as a human.” *Disowning Knowledge*, 204-05.

⁷ For recent discussions, see Benson, *Shakespearean Resurrection*; Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*. See also Zimmerman, *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare’s Theatre*.

characters supplement their initial intuitions of life or its absence by seeking and decoding vital signs like breath, warmth, pulse, and movement. Shakespeare stretches the dramatic structure of this encounter to its limits in the concluding scene of *The Winter's Tale*, in which a group of onlookers must recognize life where they least expect to find it—the statue of the long dead Queen. Hermione is presented not as a human body hovering uncertainly between life and death, but rather as inanimate stone transformed into animate flesh. *The Winter's Tale* brackets the mechanics behind this transformation. Refusing to make “manifest where [the Queen] has lived, / Or how stol'n from the dead” (5.3.115-16), Shakespeare stresses instead how the characters recognize the unexpected life of the figure standing before them.

My argument about recognition may seem to fly in the face of current scholarship that focuses on the indeterminacy of life as a category, its fluidity across disparate languages, cultures, scientific practices, and historical moments. Current bioethical debates point to difficulties in defining just what we mean by the term life. For example, the beating heart and working organs of a brain dead patient could suggest a vitality denied by medical and juridical decisions that take the functionality of the brain stem as final arbiter of life's presence or absence.⁸ This sort of category trouble was perhaps even more prevalent in Shakespeare's time. Such scholars as Carolyn Walker Bynum and Mary Floyd-Wilson argue that in premodern Europe, popular practices and philosophical theories alike often attributed life to entities that, by most current standards, would be considered inanimate or nonexistent: relics, magnets, demons, spirits, and so on.⁹ In both current and early modern discussions, then, the actual boundary between living and nonliving remains porous and impossible to pin down in any exact way.¹⁰ Although what I am calling *the recognition of life* is necessarily related to these ontological and

⁸ For a controversial discussion of brain death, see Teresi, *The Undead*. See also, Locke, *Twice Dead*.

⁹ For recent scholarship on this topic, see Floyd-Wilson, *Occult Knowledge*; and Bynum, *Christian Materiality*. For living stones, see Plumpe, “Vivum saxum, vivi lapides.” For the lingering vitality of the dead in early modernity, see Park, “The Life of the Corpse.”

¹⁰ One of the most influential recent attempts to separate the living from the nonliving is the theory of autopoiesis developed by Francisco Varela. For a cogent presentation of this theory, see Thompson, *Mind in Life*. This tendency is at odds with efforts to use the work of Bruno Latour to distribute agency and vitality throughout an entire ecology of creatures. See, for example, Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

scientific distinctions, with this phrase I aim to capture not theoretical reflection on life itself—its properties and limits—but rather the pre-reflective experiential engagement with what is intuitively, perhaps mistakenly, taken to be alive. I argue that Shakespeare both makes and undoes this distinction by manipulating the valences of what linguists now call *animacy*, a term coined in 1976 by Michael Silverstein to express how language registers attitudes towards levels of liveliness and such corollaries as agency and ability.¹¹ Speakers order the world into value-laden animacy hierarchies, which move from absolute lack of animation to maximal vitality, and seep into disparate aspects of language.

In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare employs pronominal shifts that invoke different levels of animacy. Leontes establishes the framework for this grammatical play when he marvels at how the statue captures Hermione's form: "O, thus she stood, / Even with such life of majesty—warm life / As now it coldly stands—when first I wooed her."¹² Expressing the sculpture's verisimilitude, the repeated verb *stand* also invokes the difference between humans and statues: the living Queen "stood" by virtue of muscular control and balance, but her statue "stands" because its weight presses into the ground and it is not top heavy.¹³ The significance of the predicate *is standing* depends on the presence or absence of an implicit *is alive*. Leontes claims that the statue mimics the "life of majesty" once typical of Hermione, but does not possess "warm life." Stone is not flesh, present is not past, and a cold "stands" cannot become a warm "stood." Shakespeare expresses this ontological arrangement through pronouns: *she* and *her*, which are aligned with living flesh; and *it*, which is aligned with nonliving stone. Taking this simple distinction as a point of departure, the scene generates a web of grammatical distinctions that subtly dispute the statue's status and foreground the temporal processes through which humans recognize life.

¹¹ Silverstein, "Hierarchy of Features and Ergativity," 112-71. I treat animacy in section II.

¹² Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Orgel, 5.3.34-36. All quotations of *The Winter's Tale* are taken from this edition and presented parenthetically.

¹³ For the bodily dynamics implied by the posture verb *stand* and how they relate to the use of the same verb in relation to such objects as lamps or statues, see Newman, "A Cross-Linguistic Overview of the Posture Verbs 'Sit,' 'Stand,' and 'Lie,'" 2-7.

The pronominal oscillation underpinning Hermione's return to life marks the culmination of a sustained engagement with animacy that subtends *The Winter's Tale*, a play that explores how words and syntax are implicated in the de-animation of the living and the re-animation of the dead. If the intersection of grammatical categories and animacy is intertwined with the phenomenological experience of recognizing the living *as* living, this nexus is also at work both in the denigration of vitality at work in insults that align people with animals, plants, or things and in the intensification of liveliness in complements that align people with social superiors or gods. Human speech constantly positions others on an implicit chain of being, often, as *The Winter's Tale* suggests, with dire consequences. Animacy can be deployed both to express the genuine recognition of life and to obfuscate, negate, or intensify that recognition in ways that conform to a given speaker's hopes, desires, fears, and hatreds. When, for example, Leontes tells Hermione that she is a "thing, / Which I'll not call a creature of thy place" (2.1.81-82), he minimizes or even erases the claims of her humanity by verbally pushing the Queen down the animacy scale into a thinghood bereft even of "bare life."¹⁴ Shakespeare balances this linguistic violence with a grammar of re-animation that supports and prepares the way for Hermione's resurrection. The processes of death, decay, and regeneration that constitute the thematic and narrative core of *The Winter's Tale* are embedded in the organization of Shakespeare's language. Set against the backdrop of a play that constantly invokes and manipulates the blurred lines and broken edges between living and nonliving, Hermione's return reveals the all too human miracle through which a singular life is recognized, despite all odds, for what it is.

Grammar, Phenomenology, and the Intuition of Life

Wittgenstein's connection between stone and corpse draws on an ancient set of distinctions. In this chain of being, stones possess existence but not life; upon dying, a human body returns to a state akin to stone.¹⁵ The import of such distinctions was beyond doubt for Shakespeare's contemporaries, but it was far from clear how humans were capable of making them. A number of humanists tried to determine how people sort

¹⁴ See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*; and, for a different view, Roberto Esposito, *Bíos*.

¹⁵ I discuss these distinctions in detail in Chapter 1.

things into such categories as species and genera. As Lodi Nauta has shown, they developed solutions to account for such practices as simply identifying the animal on one's lap as a cat. For instance, the sixteenth-century rhetorician Mario Nizolio claims that an act of *comprehensio* provides an "instantaneous grasp of a group" and enables humans to think and talk about all members of a class simultaneously.¹⁶ The ubiquity of Aristotle's *Categories* and their influential diagrammatic treatment by Porphyry tied logic to life in the Western tradition.¹⁷ Learning logic in classrooms across Europe meant, in part, learning how to distinguish the living from the nonliving. Take, for example, the Porphyrian tree presented in Thomas Wilson's 1551 *Rule of Reason*, a popular logic textbook with which Shakespeare was most likely familiar.¹⁸ On the way from substance in general to such individual men as Socrates, the tree renders a distinction between a compound body that is "a living thing" (a category that subsumes plants, animals, and humans) and a compound body that is "Without life" (a category that includes "Stones, Metalles, Liquores").¹⁹ Such conceptual schemes were commonly interwoven with grammatical categories. For example, in the 1586 *Pamphlet for Grammar*, William Bullokar claims that the pronoun *it* is "mor-proprly applied too a thing not hauing lyf."²⁰ Grammar could register and express ontological distinctions.

This chapter's exploration of grammar expands the work of Lynn Enterline—who has shown how Shakespeare adapts Ovid and Petrarch to develop a "rhetoric of animation"—by demonstrating that this animation coheres at the minutest levels of language.²¹ As Enterline's study of the relationship between grammar-school pedagogy and literary production has revealed, Shakespeare's works emerge from intense and formative language training.²² Indeed, Magnusson has recently argued that exercises from Lilly's

¹⁶ Nauta, "Anti-Essentialism and the Rhetoricization of Knowledge," 51. For the ways Lorenzo Valla approached similar issues, see Nauta, *In Defense of Common Sense*.

¹⁷ For Aristotelian logic in early modern England, see Schmitt, *John Case and Aristotelianism*, 29-40.

¹⁸ On Wilson's popularity, see Howell, *Logic and Rhetoric in England*, 29.

¹⁹ Wilson, *The Rule of Reason*, B7r.

²⁰ Bullokar, *Pamphlet for Grammar*, 11.

²¹ Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body*, 198-226. The literature on Shakespeare's debts to Ovid is rich. See Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh*, 243-88; and Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*.

²² Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom*. See also Wallace, *Virgil's Schoolboys*.

royally-sanctioned *Grammar* appear almost verbatim in *Richard III*.²³ I show how, for Shakespeare, grammar is intertwined with the experience of distinguishing living from nonliving. I link grammatical analysis with phenomenology. In making this connection, I follow Bruce R. Smith, who joins the study of Shakespearean pronouns to the experience of being situated in a populated world.²⁴ Historicizing the conceptual resources of current phenomenology, I explore what Gail Kern Paster calls the “heuristics of similarity,” the ways that the otherness of the past illuminates aspects of human experience that were and remain foundational.²⁵ In recent years, phenomenologists have wrestled with the recognition of life. Renaud Barbaras argues that in order to study life, biologists must intuit the living as different from the nonliving: “to work on his object, the biologist must first recognize it, that is, distinguish it within reality; he must distinguish what is living and what is not. This discrimination is the province of an intuition or an experience that escapes objectification, because an intuition or an experience is the condition of its possibility.”²⁶ The “intuition” to which Barbaras refers is an experience that founds biology and cannot be understood by biological thinking. For phenomenologists, an intuition is an intentional relationship with a phenomenon that is present or manifest to experience.²⁷

Following the Kantian notion of intuition, Edmund Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*, the text that constitutes the “breakthrough” into phenomenology proper, argues that one intuits the cat on one’s lap because it is *there*, given to experience.²⁸ For Kant, intuition grasps singular entities (objects, properties, events), but not generalities; one intuits this

²³ Magnusson, “Grammatical Theatricality in *Richard III*.”

²⁴ Smith, *Phenomenal Shakespeare*, 54-81.

²⁵ Paster, “The Pith and Marrow of our Attribute,” 247. Julia Reinhard Lupton phrases her most recent project in similar terms: “Rather than reconstructing the significance of Shakespeare for later traditions of thinking or staging his uncanny echoing of current events, I am concerned with constellations that *persist*, that appear in, before, and after Shakespeare.” *Thinking with Shakespeare*, 18.

²⁶ Barbaras, “Life, Movement, and Desire,” 4.

²⁷ For a concise treatment of phenomenological intuition, see Hintikka, “The Notion of Intuition in Husserl,” 57-79.

²⁸ For the *Logical Investigations* as the “breakthrough” to phenomenology, see Marion, *Reduction and Givenness*, 4-5.

cat here, but not the category of cat, which is a concept one brings to the object.²⁹ Drawing on the Scholastic understanding of *intuitio*, Husserl submits this Kantian concept to a “widening,” which extends the sense of intuition so that it includes non-sensible entities and generalities.³⁰ When one looks at a cat, one intuits both a cat here-and-now and the category of cat. Husserl takes the traditional Aristotelian categories—a way of discussing such predicable attributes as substance (the cat *is* black), quality (the cat *is black*), or quantity (*the* cat *is* black)—and claims that they are immediately given to experience through what he calls “categorical intuition” [*kategoriale Anschauung*].³¹ For Husserl, categories are not imposed upon the world, but are “set before our very eyes”; they are “not merely thought of, but intuited.”³² Martin Heidegger explains: “When I perceive simply, moving about in my environmental world, when I see houses, for example, I do not first see houses primarily and expressly in their individuation, in their distinctiveness. Rather, I see universally: this is a house.”³³ I do not initially see a boxy structure with transparent holes and a sloping top, and then interpret this collection of properties as a house. In the first instance, I simply see the house *as* house; only later can I interpret why I intuited the boxy structure in that way.³⁴ Departing from Husserl—who, in *Ideas III*, claims the “experience of animate organism” involves an “interpretation” [*Eindeutung*] that analogically transfers my own experience of lived embodiment to others—Barbaras suggests that one simply and straightforwardly intuits life.³⁵ When I apprehend something as living, I engage in categorical intuition; I “see universally.”³⁶

²⁹ For Kant’s understanding of intuition, see, for example, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 155-56. Elsewhere, Kant writes: “All cognitions, that is, all representations related with consciousness to an object, are either *intuitions* or *concepts*. An intuition is a *singular* representation (*repraesentatio singularis*), a concept a universal (*repraesentatio per notas communes*) or *reflected* representation (*repraesentatio discursiva*).” *Lectures on Logic*, 91.

³⁰ For Husserl’s description of this “widening” or “broadening,” see *Logical Investigations*, 6.6.45.

³¹ I model this description of the categories on Critchley, *On Heidegger’s Being and Time*, 19. The basic text on categorical intuition is Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 6.6.40-52.

³² Husserl, *Logical Investigations* 6.6.45. This section is entitled: “Widening of the concept of intuition.”

³³ Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, 66-67. The relationship between Husserl’s categorical intuition and Heidegger’s thought is admirably sketched by Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time*, 368-75; and Critchley, 17-28.

³⁴ Marion glosses Heidegger’s claims with precision: “I see *the* house, *as* house, before seeing (and in order to see) *a* house; or rather, the *as* of the house precedes a particular house and allows it to appear as such.” *Reduction and Givenness*, 14.

³⁵ Husserl, *Ideas*, 4-9. See also 103-112.

³⁶ For Barbaras’s treatment of categorical intuition, see *Desire and Distance*, 11.

As Heidegger argues, this sort of intuition occurs when I “perceive simply, moving about in my environmental world.” To adopt a term from *Being and Time*, categorial intuition is a mode of apprehension that is “ready-to-hand” [*zuhanden*]; that is, it belongs to the attitude through which one normally engages in everyday activities, when walking down the street or hammering a nail.³⁷ I immediately recognize another entity as living when I am immersed in the business of living, caught up in such activities as cutting a stone or petting a cat. For Heidegger, this pre-theoretical aspect of categorial intuition is tied up with language, since “it is a matter of fact that our simplest perceptions and constitutive states are already *expressed*, even more, are *interpreted* in a certain way. ... It is not so much that we see the objects and things, but rather that we first talk about them. To put it more precisely: we do not say what we see, but rather the reverse, we see what *one says* about the matter.”³⁸ In this view, human perception is always laden with meaning, and language is intertwined with recognition. To recognize the living *as* living is to experience the mutual dependence of linguistic order and perceptual givenness.³⁹ If, as Heidegger and present-day linguists suggest, grammar is folded into experience, then written artifacts can, in turn, encode the intuition of life.⁴⁰ Phenomenology enables the isolation of this intuition as a human process set off against the actual ordering of the world. Close attention to thinkers like Husserl, Heidegger, and Barbaras complements the efforts of such scholars as Julia Reinhard Lupton to read Shakespeare in relation to biopolitics. With Lupton, I see life as a “definitional conundrum, internally caught up among creaturely and human as well as religious and political formulations,” and I also hold that Shakespeare’s plays examine “the ways in which humans appear as human to themselves and others, in tandem with other life forms.”⁴¹ Phenomenology, I contend, opens a view onto the *how* of this appearing, the intuition by which we distinguish living human from sculpted stone. *The Winter’s Tale* positions the recognition of life against a manipulable animacy hierarchy in which, to borrow Lupton’s words, “forms of life do

³⁷ For the ready-to-hand, see Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 98-99.

³⁸ Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, 56.

³⁹ For an exploration of this view, see Thompson, *Life and Action*.

⁴⁰ For recent research on the relationship between grammar and ways of experiencing the world, see Roeper, *The Prism of Grammar*; and Hinzen, “Human Nature and Grammar.”

⁴¹ Lupton, *Thinking with Shakespeare*, 8.

not name a priori divisions” but “are subject to continual redistricting.”⁴² That the play concludes with an intuition of life suggests that recognition is intertwined and in tension with practices of “redistricting,” with the ways that language de-animates, re-animates, and creatively combines disparate forms of life.

When Leontes first gazes on Hermione’s statue, he is caught up in a lived situation in which the sculpture is ready-to-hand and the distinction between “thus she stood” and “now it coldly stands” expresses a categorial intuition. Figuring the stony *it* of the statue against his memories of a living *she*, his utterance shows both that the sculpture reveals itself to him as lifeless and that his apprehension of lifelessness is imbricated with grammar. For Stanley Cavell, this scene employs “a use of the concept of telling as fundamental as the act of seeing,” a form of engagement that underlies “how we individuate things” and “determine what *counts* as instances of our concepts, this thing as a table, that as a chair, this other as a human.”⁴³ The phenomenological concept of intuition corresponds to this “telling as fundamental as the act of seeing,” and allows a reading of the scene that is rooted both in linguistic analysis and lived experience. If, as Wittgenstein states, “*Essence* is expressed in grammar,” then *The Winter’s Tale* explores the complex syntactical channels through which the presence or absence of life is apprehended and conveyed.⁴⁴ Shakespeare examines how vital recognition is yoked to verbal categories generative of experienced ontological distinctions. *The Winter’s Tale* offers a meditation on how vitality is recognized when normal conditions are placed under duress, for Leontes and his fellow onlookers must detect life where they least expect to find it, behind what Wittgenstein calls the “smooth” surface of stone.

Pronominal Recognition

Contemporary linguists would claim that the pronouns Leontes uses to distinguish wife from statue reflect the animacy hierarchy, a context-dependent scheme according to

⁴² Ibid., 2.

⁴³ Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, 204-05.

⁴⁴ Wittgenstein, 371, 123; qtd. in Beckwith, 175 n.14.

which speakers assign levels of liveliness.⁴⁵ The scale moves from maximal to minimal animacy, and tends to progress from first-person speaker (*I*); through second-person interlocutors (*you*), other human beings (proper names, *she*, *he*), infants, animals, and personified objects; and on to stones, dirt, and other entities that can, in most cultural settings, consistently be referred to using such inanimate pronouns as *it*.⁴⁶ Although this scale is primarily organized around notions of liveliness, it also expresses agency—the subjects at the top possess more than the objects at the bottom—and affect, since, in Mel Y. Chen’s words, “animacy hierarchies are precisely about which things can or cannot affect—or be affected by—which other things within a specific scheme of possible action.”⁴⁷ One might assume that animacy classifies entities that are actually living or dead, but, as Anette Rosenbach points out, “animacy as a linguistic factor crucially depends on whether and to what extent speakers treat referents linguistically *as if they were animate*.”⁴⁸ Language is anthropocentric, and animacy is assigned in relation to human interests: a nonliving ship is often called *she*, a living wild animal is frequently an *it*, and a pet is usually a *he* or *she*. Since the details of such a scale differ between languages and cultures, it is important to determine what Chen calls the “relatively dominant formulations of animacy hierarchies.”⁴⁹ In the final scene of *The Winter’s Tale*, Shakespeare establishes the context for dramatic expectation by carefully adumbrating the animacy scale that Hermione’s living presence will violate.

The scene opens with Leontes telling Paulina about “the great comfort / That I have had of thee” (5.3.1-2), a phrase that positions his *I* above her *thee*. Despite the King’s politeness, he is speaking down to Paulina, using the conventional form for addressing a person of lesser stature, a figure whose social position endows them with less agency and therefore less animacy.⁵⁰ As Silvia Adamson has shown, Shakespeare registers layers of

⁴⁵ The standard account of the general animacy scale is Comrie, *Language Universals and Linguistic Typology*, 185-200. For a more thorough treatment, see Yamamoto, *Animacy and Reference*.

⁴⁶ Comrie uses “stones” as the privileged example of “noun phrases of very low animacy.” *Language Universals and Linguistic Typology*, 190.

⁴⁷ Chen, *Animacies*, 30.

⁴⁸ Rosenbach, “Animacy and Grammatical Variation,” 154.

⁴⁹ Chen, *Animacies*, 29.

⁵⁰ On *thee* as a form used to “speak down the social hierarchy,” see Hope, *Shakespeare’s Grammar*, 74.

social differentiation by employing pronouns like *who* and *what*, which encode “distinctions between ‘animate’ and ‘inanimate’” as a ways of negotiating class.⁵¹ Paulina’s response acknowledges her position by speaking up to Leontes: “What, sovereign sir, / I did not well, I meant well; all my services you have paid home” (5.3.2-4). She too possesses the presence required to anchor the *I*, but her relationship with Leontes is not symmetrical, since she is a *thee* addressing a *you*.⁵² Leontes subsequently addresses Paulina as *you*, but only in relation to the collective *we* of the visiting courtiers:

We honour you with trouble; but we came
To see the statue of our Queen. Your gallery
Have we passed through, not without much content
In many singularities, but we saw not
That which my daughter came to look upon,
The statue of her mother. (5.3.8-14)⁵³

This passage twice introduces Hermione as the dead absence behind a sculpture—“the statue of our Queen,” “The statue of her mother”—so that she is a memory etched in marble, displaced by the syntactical distance generated by the preposition *of*. The absent Queen soon enters the pronominal system: “As she lived peerless,” Paulina claims, “So her dead likeness I do well believe / Excels whatever yet you looked upon” (5.3.14-16). A “dead likeness” that mimics the Queen’s once-living *she*, Hermione occupies a different discursive space. As Emile Benveniste argues, the “third person” is “completely different from *I* and *you*,” since the latter take their meaning only from the “present instance of discourse” and the former refers not to active speakers but to objects being discussed.⁵⁴ Hermione is introduced with a less-animate but still living pronominal form that is quickly replaced with the verbal sign adequate to a “dead likeness”: “I keep it / Lonely, apart,” claims Paulina, “But here it is—prepare / To see the life as lively mocked as ever / Still sleep mocked death” (5.3.17-23). The repeated *it* positions the statue at the

⁵¹ Adamson, “Questions of Identity in Renaissance Drama,” 59.

⁵² For a full treatment of this distinction, see Freedman, *Power and Passion in Shakespeare’s Pronouns*. See also, Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue*, 2, 149-50.

⁵³ If this *we* were not the collective but royal, presumably Leontes would say *our* daughter, not *my* daughter.

⁵⁴ Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, 221.

bottom of a hierarchy that achieves fullest intensity with the King's spoken *I*. Although "life [is] lively mocked" by the sculpture, Paulina frames the stone as an *it*.

In his initial response, Leontes slides into fantasy: "Chide me, dear stone, that I may say indeed / Thou art Hermione—or rather, thou art she / In thy not chiding; for she was as tender / As infancy and grace" (5.3.24-27). He asks the statue to chide him so that he can truly call it Hermione, but then changes tactics so that he can continue to align stony *thou* with missing *she*; the statue's failure to chide signals the validity of the copula Leontes wants to hold true. The dream of perfect artistic representation embodied in the King's wishful "thou art she" points to what Paulina calls the "carver's excellence" (5.3.30) and to a long tradition of aesthetic animation stretching back at least to Zeuxis's grapes, so realistic that they fooled birds, and Parrhasius's curtain, which fooled even Zeuxis.⁵⁵ Art objects possess a slippery sense of liveliness induced by human practices of making. Yet if the sculpture occupies an ambiguous position on the animacy scale and encourages Leontes to address it as *thou*, it is nonetheless rooted in a nonliving ontology. Despite his urge to treat the statue as if it were alive, Leontes knows that, as Aristotle argues, if "an eye cannot see," it is an eye "only in name, like a dead eye or one made of stone."⁵⁶ Although the statue "makes" Hermione as "she lived now," the nature of that making can only present the Queen "[a]s now she might have" lived, with wrinkles that merely approximate the form of her long-dead face (5.3.31-32). Despite the statue's capacity to mock life, Leontes does not initially encounter the sculpture as an ontological question, an ambiguously animate creature; he sees it as artful but nevertheless nonliving stone. These initial reactions separate Hermione from Shakespeare's previous treatments of bodies that may or may not be dead, since these are always inflected by the interrogative mood. When, for example, Romeo confronts Juliet, who will awaken just a little bit too late, he addresses what he believes to be her dead body by noting how it retains the look of life: "Death, that hath sucked the honey of thy breath, / Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty. / Thou art not conquered. Beauty's ensign yet / Is crimson in thy lips and

⁵⁵ The anecdote is most famously presented in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, 35.65. For a thorough discussion of this theme in ancient sculpture, painting, and literature, see Bussels, *The Animated Image*.

⁵⁶ Aristotle, *Meteorology*, 390a10-14.

cheeks, / And death's pale flag is not advanced there."⁵⁷ Although she is entombed and does not noticeably breathe, Romeo's belief in her death is complicated by the ruddiness of her complexion. The absence of death's "flag," those external signs of putrefaction, prompts Romeo to voice the question demanded by Juliet's ambiguous appearance: "Why art thou yet so fair?" (5.3.102). To take one more example, in *Pericles*, Thaisa's body is greeted with Cerimon's question: "What's here—a corpse?"⁵⁸ Highlighting the uncertain ontological status of this body from the outset of its appearance, Cerimon's question is rooted in genuine ambiguity, for it is unclear if she has actually died. "Death may," the doctor claims, "usurp on nature many hours, / And yet the fire of life kindle again / The o'erpressed spirits. I have heard / Of an Egyptian nine hours dead / Who was by good appliances recovered" (12.80-82). If Thaisa is akin to the Egyptian, then her body is indeed a corpse. However, as the scene progresses and it becomes clear that the "queen will live," Cerimon's diagnosis seems to change: "Nature awakes, a warmth / Breathes out of her. She hath not been entranced / Above five hours" (12.91-92). If the queen has been "entranced" or unconscious, then she has never truly been a corpse; although her vitality may have been hidden, under the terms of Cerimon's second diagnosis she was nevertheless always alive. In these scenes and others, the human body is depicted as ambiguously vital both because death can, in some cases, be reversed, and because those who are merely "entranced" can also appear to be dead.

The notion of appearance is key to these moments of failed or successful recognition. Directing attention to Thaisa's "corpse," Cerimon tells the bystanders to "look how fresh she looks" (12.76), a phrase that uses repetition to verbally blend the act of looking with the look of the body. Between these two "looks" lies the fragile accomplishment of recognition. As *The Winter's Tale* reaches its conclusion, Shakespeare again invokes the authority of appearance. Deflecting Polixenes's request for an explanation, Paulina responds: "That [Hermione] is living, / Were it but told you, should be hooted at / Like

⁵⁷ Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Greenblatt et al., 5.3.92-96. Subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically.

⁵⁸ Shakespeare, *Pericles*, ed. Greenblatt et al., 12.61. Subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically.

an old tale. But it appears she lives” (5.3.116-17). It is the look of Hermione that tells the onlookers how they should look. Yet in this scene, the successful pairing of looks is rendered almost impossibly difficult by the certainty that the queen’s statue is unquestionably painted stone, not a corpse conveying potentially ambiguous signs. In *The Winter’s Tale*, Shakespeare makes the act of recognition more difficult by removing the interrogative mood under which his previous treatments of the successful or failed recognition of life took place.

The weight of the seemingly absolute distance between perceived, nonliving stone and remembered, living flesh pushes Leontes into adopting Paulina’s linguistic parameters: “O, thus she stood ... As now it coldly stands.” (5.3.34-36). Leontes begins his encounter with the statue by intuiting an absence of life. Although he is guided to refer to the statue as *it* by Paulina, his experience of the sculpture remains an encounter with nonliving stone. However much he may wish the statue were alive, his grammatical usage articulates the nature of his intuition. If, as Heidegger argues, “we see what *one says* about the matter,” then Leontes’s use of *it* both expresses his intuition grammatically and conditions what he sees. To augment Heidegger, “our simplest perceptions” of the distinction between living and nonliving are already “interpreted in some way,” for they involve a categorial intuition nourished by a linguistically-encoded animacy hierarchy.⁵⁹ Yet as the scene progresses, Leontes’s initial intuition of inanimate stone is troubled by an accumulation of signs that contradict his intuition, and must be genuinely interpreted, subjected to prolonged hermeneutic procedures capable of declaring the actual presence of life. Slowly decoding the statue’s vital signs, Leontes interprets explicitly. Yet he intuitively feels the presence of life in the statue and expresses this intuition grammatically long before his hermeneutical exploration yields any positive conclusions. Shakespeare establishes a staggered temporal relationship between the intuition of life, expressed grammatically, and the achievement of clear interpretive results.

⁵⁹ Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, 56.

Paulina is the first to suggest that the statue might display vital signs when she tells Leontes: “No longer shall you gaze on’t, lest your fancy / May think anon it moves” (5.3.60-61). She attaches to stone the specter of motion, which was viewed as central to life. The king agrees with Paulina, and takes her observations further: “What was he that did make it? See, my lord, / Would you not deem it breathed, and that those veins / Did verily bear blood?” (5.3.63-65). Leontes claims that he detects the motion of life as it expresses itself in the rhythms of breath and pulsating veins. Yet despite his apprehension of these signs, his language follows Paulina’s lead, and continues to categorize the statue as *it*. Polixenes is the first in this discussion to transfer the statue grammatically up the animacy hierarchy. Responding to Leontes’s question, he employs the genitive pronoun *her*: “The very life seems warm upon her lip” (5.3.66). The verb *seems* suggests an appearance separate from reality, but this hesitancy is undermined by *her*, which attributes the “very life” *seems* withholds. Leontes’s reply grants the statue more animacy: “The fixture of her eye has motion in’t” (5.3.67). Both pronoun and “motion” suggest that the statue should be classified as living. Despite his stated conviction that they are “mocked with art” (5.3.68), Leontes grammatically conveys his tacit recognition that the statue lives. His intuition of life precedes any actual acknowledgment of the conclusion that his interpretation is only beginning to encourage. The King’s switch in pronominal usage signals a vital intuition he cannot yet verify.

A critic savvy to historical linguistics might suggest that Leontes’s use of *her* reflects not a movement up the animacy scale, but a reluctance to employ a new grammatical form, since the neuter genitive *its* was a seventeenth-century development. Is it possible that when Leontes and Polixenes use *her*, they could actually mean what contemporary English speakers mean when they say *its*? Prior to 1600, the most widely used neuter genitive was *his*, and it was not until the late seventeenth century that *its* became standard. John Dryden was perhaps the first to censor *his* as a viable placeholder for the neuter genitive when, in 1672, he called such usage “ill syntax.”⁶⁰ In 1611, when *The*

⁶⁰ Dryden, *Of Dramatic Poesy*, 175. On Shakespeare’s use of *his* as it relates to *its*, see Blake, *Shakespeare’s Language*, 76-77.

Winter's Tale was first performed, *its* was far from standard, and Shakespeare was not on the cutting edge of pronominal change; Hope notes that *its* “can be found only occasionally” in Shakespeare’s works.⁶¹ Terttu Nevalainen and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg have outlined how English acquired a new neuter genitive pronoun. As the language experienced a prolonged “semantic drift” in the gender system, and gender became not grammatical but notional, a number of alternatives arose to compensate for the ambiguity created by the use of *his* as a neuter genitive: *it*, *its*, *of it*, and *thereof*.⁶² *The Winter's Tale* employs one of these variants when Hermione describes how Perdita is taken from “my breast, / The innocent milk in *it* innocent mouth” (3.2.97-98, emphasis mine). If Shakespeare had wanted to use a version of the neuter genitive pronoun that would not create the ambiguity generated by referring to the Queen’s statue with *his*, there were a number of strategies at his disposal. *Her* was not one of the options in circulation. Shakespeare uses the word strategically in order to generate meaning. Immediately following Polixenes’s and Leontes’s use of *her*, Paulina corrects her royal guests: “My lord’s almost so far transported that / He’ll think anon *it* lives” (5.3.69-70, emphasis mine). Pronouns allow Paulina to stage an ontological argument.

It is likely that Shakespeare learned this interplay of language, stone, and life by reading Arthur Golding’s translation of Ovid’s marriage of linguistic animacy and ontological transformation, the *Metamorphoses*, a book he knew well.⁶³ In Golding’s English, Pygmalion’s statue occupies a low position on the animacy hierarchy: “He often touched it ... Yet could he not persuade / Himself to think it ivory. For he oftentimes it kissed / And thought it kissed him again. He held it by the fist / And talked to it.”⁶⁴ In these lines,

⁶¹ Hope, *Shakespeare's Grammar*, 87. Five of the ten appearances made by *its* in Shakespeare’s corpus are found in *The Winter's Tale*, a fact that, according to Hope, “strongly suggests that they have been introduced by a compositor or scribe.” *Shakespeare's Grammar*, 87. If Hope’s suggestion were true, this compositor or scribe did not see fit to change Leontes’s and Polixenes’s use of *her* into *its*.

⁶² My account of these developments is drawn primarily from Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg, “*Its* Strength and the Beauty *Of It*,” 171-216. See also Dons, *The Descriptive Adequacy of Early Modern English Grammars*, 70-72; and Seppänen, “The Genitive / Possessive Pronoun *Its*,” 136-38.

⁶³ For a cognitive view on the central role played by animacy in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, see Kelly and Keil, “The More Things Change.”

⁶⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Golding, 10.273-77. Subsequent citations to this edition are cited using the abbreviation O.

the difference between Pygmalion and his statue is inscribed in pairings of *he*, *him*, and *himself* with *it*. Sculptor and sculpture belong to different orders of being. Then, from one sentence to the next, the statue enters linguistic animacy: “He believed his fingers made a dint / Upon her flesh.”⁶⁵ Golding’s *her* reflects Pygmalion’s belief that his fingers can press into the statue’s flesh, that it is a she. From this point, the statue is designated not by neuter but by feminine pronouns:

In gorgeous garments, furthermore, he did her also deck
 And on her fingers put me rings and chains about her neck.
 Rich pearls were hanging at her ears and tablets at her breast.
 All kinds of things became her well. And when she was undressed
 She seemed not less beautiful. He laid her in a bed
 The which with scarlet dyed in Tyre was richly overspread
 And, terming her his bedfellow, he couched down her head
 Upon a pillow soft, as though she could have felt the same.⁶⁶

The feminine pronoun is here used in the accusative case (“he did her also deck”) and the genitive case (“chains about her neck”) before slipping into the nominative form (“when she was undressed”). The ontological disjunction between sculptor and sculpture is obliterated when “He laid her” in bed and terms “her his bedfellow.”

When Golding’s statue awakens, her ontological properties become adequate to a grammatical animacy that the text has already established. Golding more or less invents this reflection of desire in grammar. Ovid does not begin to attribute animacy to the statue until much later in the narrative, when he subtly employs the feminine pronoun *hanc* as Pygmalion lays the statue on the bed: *conlocat hanc stratis*, which Golding translates, “he laid her in a bed.”⁶⁷ Colin Burrow notes how Ovid uses the feminine future participle *sensura* to convey how the ivory sculpture will become a woman, a trick of grammar that “teasingly makes readers participate in the transformation of the

⁶⁵ O 10.277-78.

⁶⁶ O 10.285-92.

⁶⁷ O 10.267. All quotations from Ovid’s Latin are taken from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. Warmington.

statue.”⁶⁸ Golding thus takes and significantly expands a hint in Ovid’s text. For the most part, Ovid’s Latin remains ambiguous; he employs a concatenation of verbs that leave the attribution of animacy more or less in the reader’s hands. The place at which Golding changes *it* into *she* is not based in Ovid’s lines: *oscula dat reddique putat loquiturque tenetque / et credit tactis digitos insidere membris / et metuit*.⁶⁹ In order to translate Ovid, Golding needed to tame the ambiguity of Latin into the categorical divisions required by English syntax, to render the grammatical gender of Latin into the notional gender of English. Golding capitalized on English’s pronominal resources for depicting animacy, and introduced a new form of narrative complexity to the tale of Pygmalion.⁷⁰ Golding’s use of animate pronouns betrays Pygmalion’s belief in the statue’s vitality long before it actually possesses life. Burrow claims that Ovid’s “minute effects of grammar defy transposition to [Shakespeare’s] stage.”⁷¹ I contend that Shakespeare translates Golding’s reworking of Ovidian grammar onto the stage and that the final scene’s pronominal play reworks and even nuances Ovid’s “minute effects of grammar.” As Golding’s treatment of Pygmalion suggests, Leontes’s intuition of and implicit belief in the statue’s life begins when his choice of pronouns elevates Hermione’s position on the animacy scale. Yet Shakespeare reverses this relationship between grammar and life. If Golding grammatically imposes Pygmalion’s desire on a statue that only transforms into a living body much later, Shakespeare uses the same pronominal strategy to express the belated recognition of a body that was already living, only pretending to be stone.

As Shakespeare’s scene progresses, Paulina’s attempt to lower the statue back down to an *it* falls flat, and Leontes’s attention to the signs manifested by the statue continues: “There is an air comes from her. What fine chisel / Could ever yet cut breath? Let no man mock me, / For I will kiss her” (5.3.78-80). Paulina convinces Leontes to “forbear,” but is no longer able to speak of Hermione in inanimate terms. She follows Leontes’s lead, and uses *her*: “The ruddiness upon her lip is wet; / You’ll mar it if you kiss it, stain

⁶⁸ Burrow, “Re-embodiment Ovid,” 310.

⁶⁹ 10.256-58.

⁷⁰ For an account of how the translation of Latin works into English facilitated an understanding of vernacular grammar, see Cummings, 206-13.

⁷¹ Burrow, 310.

your own / With oily painting” (5.3.81-83). Paulina’s use of *it* has migrated away from the whole of Hermione’s statue, now nominated *her*, and has fastened to such parts as lips. After Hermione descends, Leontes discovers that the signs exhibited by the statue are indeed vital: “O, she’s warm!” (5.3.109). The contracted copula connects pronoun with adjective in a manner that is doubly binding. She is she because she is warm. In this moment, the interpretation of signs finally catches up to the intuition of life. In addition to confirming his wildest hopes and desires, Leontes’s exclamation verifies the intuitive recognition he expressed with his initial use of animate pronouns. In Wittgenstein’s terms, the predicate *is warm* receives the force of the predicate *is living*, and becomes a fully vital sign. All of the previous predicates the onlookers assigned to the statue—is moving, is breathing, is red in the lips—are retroactively designated genuine signs of life. The warmth revealed by touch assures Leontes that his grammatically-expressed intuition of life aligns with reality, for until this moment, it is possible that the statue is a sophisticated automaton. As Scott Maisano argues, *The Winter’s Tale* was performed at a Jacobean court for which French and Italian designers were busily creating hydraulic automata that “looked and moved like real human beings.”⁷² Hermione’s statue could be nothing more than moving gears and causal pressures capable of generating the illusion of life. The location of the scene—a “gallery” full of “many singularities” (5.3.10-12)—legitimizes this option; the onlookers have already seen a number of unique and wondrous objects from Paulina’s personal *wunderkammer*.⁷³ They are primed to witness something truly unusual, something that, like many of the “singularities” collected by wealthy seventeenth-century gentry, will challenge preconceived categories.⁷⁴ An automaton could move and even seem to breathe, but it could not feel like flesh.

Hermione’s warmth confirms Leontes’s prior recognition of life. That such intuition requires confirmation reveals its fragility and fallibility. After all, the King first intuits the statue as inanimate. In order to seriously interpret the statue’s signs, Leontes needs to

⁷² See Maisano, “Infinite Gesture,” 74; Kolb, “To me comes a creature.”

⁷³ For the argument that Paulina’s “singularities” most likely belong to a collection in a *wunderkammer*, see Platt, “Believing and Not Believing,” 21.

⁷⁴ On the ability of wonderful objects to slip between categories and challenge preconceived notions of order, see Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*.

presuppose the presence of life, but this presupposition could be misleading and requires validation. In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare portrays the recognition of life as a hermeneutical circle: one cannot confirm the presence of life without interpreting vital signs and these signs cannot be interpreted as vital unless one intuitively feels something is living. In such ambiguously animate entities as Hermione's statue, the intuition of life is inherently tied to the interpretation of signs; the ground of vital recognition slips from intuition towards interpretation. These processes ground one another and are mutually constitutive of the capacity to demarcate the quick from the dead. *The Winter's Tale* suggests that the way living beings appear phenomenologically is tied both to grammar and the animacy hierarchy that orders human relations with the world.

The Flux of the World and Grammatical Ambiguity

In the 1934 *Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, biologist Jakob von Uexküll claims that time, which “frames all events” and seems to be “objectively consistent,” is in fact controlled by living beings. Different creatures experience and produce different temporalities. Uexküll uses the common blood sucking tick to introduce this idea. Attached to a branch or shrub, this parasite waits for the approach of a warm-blooded animal. Since such encounters are rare, the tick is capable of “living a long time without nourishment”; under clinical conditions, von Uexküll reports, ticks have been kept alive and hungry for eighteen years. Upon reporting this astonishing fact, the biologist claims: “it is simply impossible for an animal to endure an unchanging environment for eighteen years. We shall therefore assume that the tick is, during its waiting period, in a state similar to sleep, which also interrupts our human time for hours.”⁷⁵ In what state does the tick pass this unbelievable amount of objective time? Is it living throughout? Or does it undergo a death of sorts, only to resurrect upon the appearance of mammalian flesh? Is “a state similar to sleep” an adequate description for such an extended absence? The “wide gap of time” (5.3.154) from which Hermione emerges is only two years short of that survived by von Uexküll's death-defying tick. Although, as Katharine Park

⁷⁵ Uexküll, *A Foray*, 52. Uexküll's work was significant for the development of phenomenology. See Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 263-64; and Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 167-78. Giorgio Agamben has done much to popularize Uexküll's work. See *The Open*, 39-48.

demonstrates, early modern northern European cultures often believed that the corpse maintained a life of sorts for up to a year after death, there is no historical precedent for the Queen's sixteen-year ordeal.⁷⁶ I do not want to liken Hermione to a parasite, but the question that underlies the biologist's research is the same as that which underpins the surprise at the Queen's return to life at the end of *The Winter's Tale*. Polixenes foregrounds the issue when he asks Paulina to "make it manifest where [Hermione] has lived, / Or how stol'n from the dead" (5.3.114-15).

The Winter's Tale systematically troubles the distinction between living and nonliving on which the concluding drama of Hermione's awakening depends. From the play's obsession with the lifecycles of plants and bears, through its treatment of the myth of Proserpina, to the indeterminacy of Hermione's sixteen-year preservation, *The Winter's Tale* is obsessed with the murky space between life and death, the time when a living being ceases to display vital signs but cannot be declared dead. Hermione's wrinkles gesture towards this temporal and existential complexity. Leontes is disturbed by how "aged" the statue "seems," since at the moment of her death "Hermione was not so much wrinkled" (5.3.28-29). As markers of time, wrinkles inscribe difference into identity and manifest the process of controlled becoming that is the constant condition of living creatures. Wrinkles are patterned expressions of the processes that support the maintenance and degeneration of flesh. The Queen's awakening partakes in the play's larger inquiry into the multiplicity of relations between living and nonliving. The question prompted by the evidence of Hermione's aging should be: do wrinkles grow on bodies suspended between life and death? Such a question troubles the ability of the onlookers to straightforwardly intuit the presence of life in what they initially believed to be a statue. Although many of Shakespeare's contemporaries held that stones were easily distinguishable from living bodies, a good number of thinkers were not so sure. Theologians and religious practitioners explained rituals and miracles alike by appealing to the vitality of all matter.⁷⁷ Such influential writers as the alchemical physician

⁷⁶ Park, "The Life of the Corpse."

⁷⁷ See Bynum, *Christian Materiality*.

express their “desire to live” introduces agency and an element of plasticity into the existential boundary they confront each day. The passing of time is necessarily imbricated with dying: Leontes makes this connection when he claims that “three crabbed months had soured themselves to death” before Hermione accepted his proposal (1.2.101). But temporality is also tied up with living. To live in time is to be perpetually dying, but the processes of dying are isomorphic with those of living. At least since St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, the Christian term for this imbrication has been *vitam mortalem*, “living death.”⁸¹ Beginning with the play’s opening scene, Shakespeare foregrounds the evasiveness of ontological boundaries.

Famous mainly for its appearance in an unexpected stage direction, the figure of the bear embodies this slipperiness. Like the torture proposed by Autolycus—in which the Clown will be assailed until “he be three-quarters and a dram dead, then recovered again with aqua vitae” (4.4.780-81)—the bear enters the recesses of the earth, adopts a state of being verging on death, and then re-emerges into life.⁸² The bear’s lifecycle thus echoes the notion of resurrection that underpins Hermione’s reawakening and Perdita’s rediscovery, but it also naturalizes these fantastic events by linking them to patterns of recurrent pastoral temporality. At the same time, as one of Bohemia’s “creatures / Of prey,” the bear demonstrates how life feeds itself through death (3.3.11-12). The Clown provides a graphic description of Antigonus’s grisly demise: “the bear tore out his shoulder-bone” and “he cried to me for help” (3.3.92-93). Appealing to anatomical specificity, Shakespeare conjures an image of a living body being torn apart to feed the appetite of another. The Clown explains that bears “are never curst but when they are hungry,” a statement that attributes need to the animal, which kills Antigonus so that it can continue living (3.3.125-26).⁸³ The death of the man is necessary for the life of the bear. In passing away, Antigonus is thus literally reincorporated into nature, both in the sense that

⁸¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.6.7.

⁸² For an early modern understanding of the bear’s life cycle, see Topsell, *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes*, 37-38.

⁸³ For a discussion of the isomorphism between life and hunger, see Garrido, *On Time, Being, and Hunger*.

his body now nourishes that of the bear and in the sense that the Clown will bury his remains in the earth.

Throughout the play, language toys with or even eliminates the break between living and dead. Leontes tells his counselors that they “smell” the “business” of Hermione’s adultery “with a sense as cold / As is a dead man’s nose” (2.1.151-52). Setting up an analogy, Leontes claims that his court grasps the truth of his claims as a “dead man’s nose” is able to smell. Yet in making his case, the King attributes “sense,” however “cold,” to a nonliving, non-sensing nose. The play’s first scene in Bohemia features a similar moment, when the Old Shepherd incites his son to marvel at the infant Perdita: “If thou’lt see a thing to talk on when thou art dead and rotten, come hither” (3.3.77-78). Like the sense of smell, speech is a bodily activity not usually attributed to corpses. In visceral terms, the Shepherd conjures the “dead and rotten” body describing what happened one rainy evening. This thread of imagery receives perhaps its fullest treatment during the sheep-shearing festival. Desiring to give springtime flowers that might “become the time of day” belonging to the young shepherdesses, Perdita invokes a mythical figure: “O Proserpina, / For the flowers now that frighted thou letst fall / From Dis’s wagon!” (4.4.116-18). Wishing for seasonal flowers she does not possess, Perdita calls on the goddess whose abduction by Dis is responsible for the changing seasons. Forever shuttling between the fertile fields of her mother Ceres and the dank, dead underworld of her new husband, Proserpina embodies the blurring between life and death that preoccupies *The Winter’s Tale*. Suspended between her earthly home in Sicily and the realm of the dead, she occupies an in-between space of decay and renewal that she in turn bestows upon the seasons.

Expanding this categorial play, Perdita again laments her inability to give seasonally appropriate flowers to Florizel, and the young prince initiates a conversation that intertwines notions of life and death:

PERDITA O, these I lack,
 To make you garlands of, and my sweet friend,
 To strew him o’er and o’er.

FLORIZEL What, like a corpse?
 PERDITA No, like a bank for love to lie and play on,
 Not like a corpse; or if, not to be buried,
 But quick, and in mine arms. (4.4.127-32)

Perdita attempts to declare the strength of her affection through repetition, as though her love were best invoked through the excess of ritual. Florizel jokingly transforms this erotic image into a funerary register, and changes his young, spring-like form into a “corpse” fit for winter, a dead body covered in flowers by mourners. This movement from love to death, so prevalent in early modern English literature, is then reversed once more, as Perdita puns on “corpse” so that its meaning returns to the realm of the living.⁸⁴ Derived ultimately from the Latin *corpus*, the original sense of the English *corpse* was “a (living) body; a person.”⁸⁵ In the early seventeenth-century, this meaning was still in play. For example, in the 1607 *Optick Glasse of Humors*, Thomas Walkington describes those with “a faire and beautifull corpes, but a foule vgly mind.”⁸⁶ The word also designated a “dead body,” but carried within it a semantic potential for resurrection that Perdita activates when she claims that since Florizel’s “corpse” is “not to be buried” it will be “quick, and in [her] arms.”⁸⁷ Yet the true insight of Perdita’s response lies in how it contains the conditions of possibility for this movement from life to death and back again. Perhaps playing with an aural resonance with the arboreal *copse*, Perdita aligns Florizel’s “corpse” with the body of the earth, “a bank for love to lie and play on.” In this analogy, the young Prince’s body is to the earth as the love he makes with Perdita is to the flowers that spring from soil. The earth is both the foundation from which plants—and, by extension, all bodies—grow into life and the destination to which they return in death. Like Proserpina, the earth is a hinge that allows for ontological motion; it is the ultimate ground for the demarcation of and confusion between living and nonliving.

⁸⁴ For a new interpretive twist on the connection between love and death in Shakespeare and his contemporaries, see Watson, *Back to Nature*.

⁸⁵ OED, *corpse*, n. 1.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ OED, *corpse*, n. 2.

Perdita's playful insight is prepared by the play's fascination with plants, creatures that come to life at a particular season, wither and die, return to the earth, and then emerge into life once more at their appointed time. The cyclical existence of vegetation reveals the complexity of creaturely existence, how it is most at home in between definable states of being. When Perdita laments that she can no longer bestow spring's flowers on her young friends, she presupposes that even though these plants are no longer living, no longer able to be touched, they nonetheless continue to possess an existence of sorts; they have not passed into oblivion. Perdita premises her famous refusal to plant artificially engendered flowers on this natural fluidity. After giving Camillo and Polixenes "rosemary and rue," plants that "keep / Seeming and savour all the winter long" and are thus in keeping with the "ages" of her guests, Perdita defends her choice by claiming that her ethics do not permit her to present flowers befitting the time of year:

Sir, the year growing ancient,
 Not yet on summer's death nor on the birth
 Of trembling winter, the fairest flowers o'th' season
 Are our carnations and streaked gillyvors,
 Which some call nature's bastards; of that kind
 Our rustic garden's barren, and I care not
 To get slips of them. (4.4.79-85)

The natural world persists in a state between life and death. Perdita claims that the "year" is "growing ancient," progressing towards autumn, but each year rolls ceaselessly into the next. The seasons operate in the same way, and Shakespeare blurs the lines between generation and decay by scrambling traditional epithets. Summer, normally depicted as the peak of life, is nearing its "death," and winter, traditionally a personification of extreme old age and the end of life, is awaiting its "birth." Into this thoroughly mixed pastoral ontology, where living and nonliving are nearly univocal, Perdita introduces her rejection of artificial plants. I suggest that she refuses the imposition of simplistic human categories—aesthetic, ontological, ecological—onto the complexity of the world, the reduction of nature's inexhaustible playfulness to the grid of anthropocentric theoretical understanding. For Perdita (herself a figure of the in-between), the attempt to remake plants in man's image is an attempt to apply categories that do not truly apply to the

world they seek to demarcate. Her discussion of the seasons suggests that life and death are not easily recognizable, let alone knowable.

As Hermione's statue migrates into the realm of the living, the grammatical softening from *it* into *her* and *she* reveals how language struggles to remain adequate to the flux of the world it attempts to describe, especially if that world includes situations that violate the ontological boundary between life and death. Everyday experience also includes moments that generate friction between animacy hierarchies and the language in which those hierarchies are encoded. These moments tend to cluster around transitions into or out of life. For example, in present day English, expectant parents unaware of their baby's gender must call the developing fetus *it*, despite that word's acknowledged and unwanted de-animating and de-personalizing consequences. Hermione's surprising return to life occurs against a background where such moments abound. Leontes's pronominal slippage is rooted in everyday language relating to ontological transitions—what the Old Shepherd refers to as “things dying” and “things newborn” (3.3.109-10).

After Mamillius's death, Paulina confronts Leontes: “This news is mortal to the Queen. Look down / And see what death is doing” (3.2.146-47). Paulina's use of the imperative *look* implies that life's absence can be straightforwardly intuited. When she re-enters, bearing with her news of the queen's actual death, she employs a catalogue of extinguished vital signs as proof:

I say she's dead. I'll swear't. If word nor oath
Prevail not, go and see. If you can bring
Tincture or lustre in her lip, her eye,
Heat outwardly or breath within, I'll serve you
As I would do the gods. (3.2.201-05)

Paulina appeals to the absence of vital signs, and encourages the King to “go and see” Hermione's death. The verb *see* carries a double meaning. Paulina wants Leontes to “see” that Hermione is “dead”—as she commanded him to “see what death is doing”—and that the Queen lacks “lustre” in her lips and eyes, heat on her flesh, and the motion of breath. To “see” death is both to intuit the absence of life and to interpret bodily signs.

Intuition and interpretation are again entangled. Yet Paulina's repeated use of *she* suggests that language struggles to express the transition down the animacy hierarchy from living body to lifeless corpse. "She's dead," says Paulina, in a commonplace that crosses the present tense of the still-existing corpse with a linguistically animate *she* who is absent and cannot legitimately occupy the present tense. Later, the Clown offers a more precise version of Paulina's statement. Returning to Antigonus's bear-devoured body, the Clown says: "If there be any of him left, I'll bury it" (3.3.126). The Sicilian nobleman is grammatically ambiguous; whatever is left of *him* is an *it* that must be buried. A corpse is not a living body, but the man who once animated that corpse still deserves the respect afforded by language imbued with animacy.

If dead bodies present a challenge to linguistic categorization, newborn children generate similar difficulties. As an infant, the as-yet unnamed Perdita is almost invariably an *it*. When Paulina first introduces the child to Leontes, she states: "The good queen— / For she is good—hath brought you forth a daughter; / Here 'tis; commends it to your blessing" (2.3.64-66). Such language use is not surprising, since in early modern England, children under the age of seven, not yet distinguished by gendered clothing, were generally referred to as *it*.⁸⁸ Even when Paulina seeks to situate the infant in the highest levels of social hierarchy, she still employs *it*, telling Antigonus that his hands will be "For ever / Unvenerable" as he "Tak'st up the princess by that forcèd baseness / Which [Leontes] has put upon't" (2.3.76-79). It is only when Paulina seeks most ardently to sway the king's opinion that she employs an animate pronoun: "Look to your babe, my lord, 'tis yours—Jove send her / A better guiding spirit" (2.3.125-26). Nudging the "babe" up a grammatical hierarchy, Paulina leaves Leontes both with a statement of ownership—" 'tis yours"—and with an appeal to Jove that changes *it* into *her*, and thereby endows the infant with a maximal amount of empathy-generating animacy. The king refuses this offer to fully humanize his daughter. "My child?" he asks incredulously, "Away with't! ... And see it instantly consumed with fire" (2.3.131-33). I cannot help but think that if Leontes had taken Paulina's grammatical invitation and acknowledged

⁸⁸ See Wall, *Staging Domesticity*, 177.

the child with gendered pronouns, he would have had more difficulty saying “take her to the fire.” The lower animacy of *it* invites violence in a way that fully human pronouns do not. Although Leontes does not decide to kill the child immediately, he does sentence an *it* to be taken to “some remote and desert place” so that “chance may nurse or end it” (2.3.174-82). In the play’s concluding scene, the movement from *it* to *her* and *she* signals an unexpected intuition of life. Here, Paulina and Leontes manipulate pronouns to debate the value of a life they both recognize, but that remains grammatically ambiguous.

Animacy and Linguistic Violence

Animacy is at the heart of how Shakespeare traces Hermione’s movement from sovereign queen, to dead body, through stony statue, and back again. Shakespeare de-animates and re-animates language in ways that echo Hermione’s ontological status. At the height of Leontes’s anger, he unleashes a cascade of accusations that seek to alter the Queen’s public image. To those lords inclined “To say she is a goodly lady,” the King pre-emptively states that “she’s not honest.” Using the copula as weapon, Leontes continues: “be’t known, / From him that has most cause to grieve it should be, / She’s an adulteress!” (2.1.66-78). This claim about Hermione’s virtue does not remain in the sphere of morals, but seeps into the ontological ground from which the copula draws its force. When the Queen suggests “you, my lord, / Do but mistake,” Leontes’s reply thrusts her down the animacy hierarchy, stripping her of social status and liveliness:

You have mistook, my lady,
Polixenes for Leontes. O thou thing,
Which I’ll not call a creature of thy place
Lest barbarism, making me the precedent,
Should a like language use to all degrees,
And mannerly distinguishment leave out
Betwixt the prince and beggar. (2.1.80-87)

Ironizing Hermione’s speech by savagely mirroring its forms of politeness, Leontes’s insult begins by moving from the *you* of equal address to the downward-oriented *thou*, a shift justified because Hermione’s supposed adultery means she is no longer a “creature of thy place.” Since she is a “bed-swerver, even as bad as those / That vulgars give

bold'st titles" (2.1.92-94), Leontes can align her more with "beggar" than with "prince." Unless Leontes is to become the "precedent" for a "barbarism" that uses "like language" to "all degrees," he cannot treat Hermione with verbal respect. Her social standing has fallen with her moral standing, and this disgrace is reflected grammatically.

Hermione's precipitous decline in social position is coupled with a realignment of her ontological status. "O thou thing, / Which I'll not call a creature of thy place": at the same time as Leontes links his wife with societal "vulgars" not of her royal "place," he also pushes her from a human "place" into a zone of unspecified thinghood. As Bradin Cormack perceptively notes, the "generality of the insult is in fact its terrible perfection," for it reduces Hermione to the level of "undifferentiated being" suggested by "thing."⁸⁹ Yet even more awful than this lack of specification is the absence of vitality in Leontes's use of "thing," the way it proleptically conjures both Hermione's corpse and the lifeless stone from which her statue is made. The juxtaposition of "thing" and "creature" stresses the animation that separates the term by which Leontes addresses his wife and the word that he refuses to "call" her. To be sure, in one traditional sense, a creature is anything created by God; "thing" and "creature" could act as synonyms. However, Leontes's rhetoric forces the two terms apart, so that *creature* must be taken to mean "a living or animate being."⁹⁰ In my view, the force of Leontes's insult lies in its withholding of life, its claim that Hermione is now a "thing," dead to him and the court. She understands the insult in this way, for she immediately swears an oath—"No, by my life" (2.1.95)—that foregrounds the very property her husband would like to negate. Chen argues that insults often employ animacy in this way: "When humans are blended with objects along this cline [the animacy hierarchy], they are effectively 'dehumanized,' and simultaneously de-subjectified and objectified." Leontes's "O, thou thing" generates what Chen calls "a fraught collision between humanity and 'zerness.'"⁹¹ Note how both the ontological and social elements of Leontes's insult rely upon animacy. "Thing" intensifies the loss of

⁸⁹ Cormack, "Shakespeare's Other Sovereignty," 513.

⁹⁰ *OED*, *creature* n. 3a. On the concept of *creature* as it relates to life, see Thacker, *After Life*, 96-156; Santner, *On Creaturely Life*; and Lupton, "Creature Caliban."

⁹¹ Chen, *Animacies*, 40.

liveliness, agency, and affect already at work in the shift from “prince” to “beggar.” But the King’s language cannot carry out the implications of his insult, for he continues to use gendered pronouns that grant her animacy: “She’s an adultress,” “she’s a traitor,” “she’s a bed-swerver” (2.1.88-93). The linguistic violence Leontes seeks to inflict is predicated on a continued intuition of the very life his words deny.

The Winter’s Tale carefully yokes this verbal violence to animacy. The opening scenes show how harmless figurative language contains within it a harmful potential, a capacity to de-animate. In the exchange following Polixenes’s decision to stay, the Bohemian king claims that in his youth, he and Leontes “were as twinned lambs that did frisk i’th’ sun, / And bleat at one another” (1.2.66-67), an assertion that moves the youths down the animacy hierarchy towards an innocence deprived of proper language. The playful quality of this slip away from humanity is then taken up by Hermione, who asks for complements by comparing herself to domesticated animals: “cram’s with praise, and make’s / As fat as tame things... You may ride’s / With one soft kiss a thousand furlongs ere / With spur we heat an acre” (1.2.90-95). Overfed as a “tame thing,” Hermione calls herself the very term that Leontes will render abusive. Figuring herself as an animal is a humorous way of engaging the King, but her language carries with it a threatening undertone, an implication that she could just as easily be spurred as kissed. Later, Leontes’s instructions to Mamillius use animacy in the same way:

Why, that’s my bawcock—what, hast smutched thy nose?
 They say it is a copy out of mine. Come, captain,
 We must be neat—not neat, but cleanly, captain.
 And yet the steer, the heifer and the calf
 Are all called neat. —Still virginalling
 Upon his palm?—How now, you wanton calf,
 Art thou my calf? (1.2.120-26)

Leontes’s original use of “neat” forces a correction to “cleanly,” since he means to employ “neat” in its adjectival sense of “habitually clean and tidy” but accidentally

invokes “neat” in its nominal sense of “bovine animal.”⁹² The King’s recognition of this grammatical blurring occurs in relation to his observation of Hermione and Polixenes’s “virginalling” hands, for if Mamillius is indeed a “copy” of Leontes, who already feels his “brows” changing (1.2.118), then his son is a “calf” in more ways than one. As Leontes imagines himself slipping down the animacy hierarchy with the progressive “hard’ning of [his] brows” (1.2.144), the terms of endearment he bestows on his son become progressively less lively. Described as a “collop” or “piece of flesh” (1.2.135), the boy then migrates down from the animal realm into the vegetative, transformed into a “kernel” and a “squash,” before returning to his princely state as a “gentleman” (1.2.158-59).⁹³ These early instances reveal an inchoate ferocity simmering within seemingly innocent networks of simile and metaphor.

As the play proceeds, this latent violence becomes increasingly overt. Spying on Hermione and Polixenes, the King de-animates her body by depriving it of the mouth requisite for human language: “How she holds up the neb, the bill to him!” (1.2.181). This linguistic strategy recurs again only lines later when Leontes informs Camillo that unless one is a non-sentient thing possessing “nor eyes, nor ears, nor thought,” it is obvious that his “wife’s a hobby-horse, deserves a name / As rank as any flax-wench that puts to / Before her troth-plight” (1.2.270-75). Again, the king’s insults couple societal and ontological descent, since “hobby-horse” refers to an easy-to-ride whicker prop aligned with prostitution.⁹⁴ This verbal attack recalls Hermione’s description of herself as a horse that prefers not to be spurred, a connection cemented by Leontes’s claim that she and Polixenes are “[h]orsing foot on foot” (1.2.285). It is in this context of progressive de-animation that Leontes claims his wife is a “thing” that he will “not call a creature of thy place.” The King’s manipulation of animacy has effects beyond language, for, reduced to the status of an animal, Hermione is treated more like a thing than a Queen. Separated from her children, she is “with immodest hatred / The childbed privilege denied, which ‘longs / To women of all fashion” (3.2.100-02). Post-delivery bed-rest

⁹² OED, *neat*, adj. 4a; OED, *neat*, n. 1.

⁹³ OED, *collop*, n.1, 3a.

⁹⁴ OED, *hobby-horse* 1; 2a.

belongs to women of “all” societal ranks simply because they are women, but Leontes has stripped all rights from his wife’s bare life. The King enacts Antigonus’s strange statement, and decides to “keep” his “stables” where he “lodges” his wife (2.1.134-35).

The relationship between linguistic violence and de-animation is highlighted when Polixenes repeats the structure of Leontes’s insults as he berates Florizel: “Mark your divorce, young sir, / Whom son I dare not call—thou art too base / To be acknowledged” (4.4.414-16). Just as Leontes claims he will “not call” Hermione a “creature of thy place” (2.1.83), so Polixenes dares “not call” Florizel his son, for his affection for a shepherdess makes him “too base” for such a title. Polixenes quickly provides an ontological correlate to this social descent: “we’ll bar thee from succession, / Nor hold thee of our blood, no, not our kin, / Far’r than Deucalion off” (4.4.426-28). Threatening to revoke Florizel’s birthright, the King claims that he will exile him from kinship and bloodlines, in Stephen Orgel’s words, “as far as genealogy can go.”⁹⁵ By invoking Ovid’s Deucalion, Polixenes gestures to the mythic origins of humanity, but also to the primordial movement from stone to flesh, the moment when, to borrow Leonard Barkan’s formulation, the Promethian creation of life transitions into the human capacity for procreation.⁹⁶ Holding Florizel “not of our kin, / Far’r than Deucalion off” deprives the Prince of living flesh, turns him into the stone that pre-existed Deucalion’s magical bestowal of life. Polixenes threatens to reduce his son to the lowest level of the animacy hierarchy. Yet the king’s invocation of Deucalion also works against his intentions, for it demonstrates how the possibility of a return to life—the softening of stone into flesh accomplished by the Ovidian myth—resides within verbal de-animation.

Singularity and the Language of Re-Animation

The Winter’s Tale employs animacy to figure death and resurrection. To sketch how the play imbues language with very different levels of liveliness as the play progresses, I will chart the semantics of *creature* as it is used in relation to Hermione and Perdita. When Leontes insults the Queen by calling her a “thing, / Which I’ll not call a creature of thy

⁹⁵ Orgel, ed. *The Winter’s Tale*, n. 4.4.428.

⁹⁶ Barkan, ““Living Sculptures,”” 642.

place” (2.1.82-83), he assigns Hermione a level of animacy below that of a living creature, a verbal claim that soon becomes all too real. Paulina’s announcement of Hermione’s death gestures back to Leontes’s linguistic violence: “the Queen, the Queen, / The sweet’st, dear’st creature’s dead” (3.2.198-99). Bereft of creaturely vitality, Hermione appears days later to Antigonus in a state between life and death, as one of the “spirits o’ th’ dead.” “To me comes a creature,” the doomed nobleman says, recounting his vision (3.3.15-18). From de-animating insult, through actual death, to the state of being undead, *creature* loses liveliness as the Queen slips from the play. The word reappears at the very moment Perdita returns to Sicilia, when a servant claims that the visitor “is a creature, / Would she begin a sect, might quench the zeal / Of all professors else” (5.1.106-08). The connection between the former liveliness of the Queen and vitality of Perdita is solidified in the first recognition scene, in which one of the key “proofs” is “the majesty of the creature in resemblance of the mother” (5.2.32-36). Both women possess the same “life of majesty” (5.3.35). Shakespeare ties the death and birth of generations together by endowing a single word with fluctuating degrees of animacy.

The re-animation of Hermione is verbally prepared by the progressive intensification of animacy surrounding Perdita. The play’s introduction of the young woman stages an elevation of animacy that reverses the de-animating force of Leontes’s insults.

Complementing Perdita’s appearance, Florizel claims:

These your unusual weeds to each part of you
Does give a life; no shepherdess, but Flora
Peering in April’s front. This your sheep-shearing
Is a meeting of the petty gods,
And you the queen on’t. (4.4.1-5)

His praise intensifies her animacy by “giv[ing] a life” to “each part” of her, and raising her from a “shepherdess,” above the human social hierarchy, so that she becomes the “queen” of the “petty gods.” Addressing Perdita as “your” and “you,” Florizel grants her pronominal equality. She is not at all convinced by this flattery, and sees herself as a “poor lowly maid, / Most goddess-like pranked up” (4.4.9-10). Yet however much she worries that the “difference” between them “forgets dread” (4.4.17), Shakespeare’s

language endows Perdita with a vitality capable of repairing the Queen's de-animation. When confronted by Polixenes, Perdita claims: "This dream of mine / Being now awake, I'll queen it no inch further, / But milk my ewes and weep" (4.4.445-47). Using a grammatical process known as "zero-derivation," Shakespeare translates *queen* from a noun (associated with the dead Hermione or the "pranked up" Perdita) into a verb, a linguistic form that is, according to Chen, endowed with greater animacy than nouns, which are "arguably less 'alive.'"⁹⁷ This moment in *The Winter's Tale* is the first known instance of *queen* appearing as a verb.⁹⁸ Despite Perdita's claim that she will "queen it no inch further," her speech re-animates a word that had died sixteen years earlier.

The appearance of this vital creature in Sicilia sets in motion the processes of re-animation that re-unite Hermione with family, friends, and community. In the play's final scene, the recognition of life is imbricated not only with the interpretation of vital signs, but also with the attribution of animacy. As critics have often noted, in the moments leading up to the statue's awakening, Shakespeare toys with imagery of animated stone: in the first recognition scene, those who were "most marble changed colour" (5.2.88); and when Leontes sees the statue he asks, "Does not the stone rebuke me / For being more stone than it?" (5.3.37-38), attributing agency, affect, and therefore animacy to an *it* capable of "rebuk[ing]" the King. Leontes then addresses the statue using grammatical strategies to elevate its levels of animacy: "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" (5.3.39-41). The liveliness of Perdita is transferred to her mother in a movement of vital "spirits" that adds animacy to stone.

Leontes, who still uses *it* to address the statue at this point, employs the downward-looking "thy" and "thee" when he addresses the statue, endowing stone with second-person grammatical status, but maintaining a differentiation between his royal

⁹⁷ Chen, *Animacies*, 74. On zero-derivation, see Bauer and Valera, "Conversion and Zero-Derivation."

⁹⁸ A search on EEBO TCP validates the findings of the OED, *queen* v.

personhood and what he still intuitively feels to be inanimate stone. Perdita is alone among the onlookers in directly and immediately intuiting the presence of life:

And do not say 'tis superstition, that
I kneel and then implore her blessing. Lady,
Dear Queen, that ended when I but began,
Give me that hand of yours to kiss. (5.3.43-46)

Never once using the inanimate *it*, Perdita asks Hermione for *her* blessing. Then, addressing the “Dear Queen” directly, the Princess asks for “that hand of yours,” attributing liveliness to the statue and using an upward-looking pronoun, a choice that suggests the social relation between mother and daughter as well as an ontological equality among living humans. Paulina employs a similar strategy when, after commanding Hermione to “be stone no more,” she states: “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” (5.3.99-103). The immediate juxtaposition of Hermione’s *you* and Leontes’s *you* declares the social and ontological equality that the latter’s earlier *thee* refused. Hermione’s grave has been filled in part by linguistic re-animation.

Now that it is obvious to all of the onlookers that Hermione is indeed a living creature, two questions remain. First, is she a speaking creature? And second, is she really Hermione? Traditionally, the possession of language distinguishes the elevated animacy of humans from that of creaturely life in general, and the onlookers are eager both to hear what Hermione might have to say and to confirm the fact that she can speak. When Paulina offers to make the stone “descend, / And take you by the hand,” Leontes asks for more: “‘tis as easy / To make her speak as move” (5.3.87-94). Camillo seconds this request in a conditional statement that clarifies the connection between a fully human life and linguistic capacity: “If she pertain to life, let her speak too!” (5.3.113). Speech operates as a sign that the statue lives and as proof that the living being in question is indeed Hermione, an equation that Paulina encourages when she claims, “it appears she lives / Though yet she speak not. Mark a little while” (5.3.117-18). Hermione’s full emergence into animacy takes place after this “little while” has passed, when she is told that “Perdita is found” and speaks to her living daughter:

You gods look down,
 And from your sacred vials pour your graces
 Upon my daughter's dead! Tell me, mine own,
 Where hast thou been preserved, where lived, how found
 Thy father's court? For thou shalt hear that I,
 Knowing by Paulina that the oracle
 Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserved
 Myself to see the issue. (5.3.121-28)

First addressing the gods that look down with an upward-looking *your*, Hermione positions herself in relation to a daughter that is hers—"Tell me, mine own"—and is kneeling with the filial piety registered in the Queen's *thou*. Moving down an animacy hierarchy that stretches from heaven, through herself, towards her daughter, Hermione then gives the linguistic sign of maximal animation. "I," she declares, "have preserved / Myself." This formulation not only expresses her subjective liveliness, but also attributes to the *I* a remarkable power of reflexive preservation, a relation between personal activity and passivity that has sustained itself away from society for sixteen years "to see the issue." Hermione's speaking voice is literally re-animated by the presence of Perdita, just as the language associated with the Queen is re-animated in the play's closing Acts.

The true miracle of *The Winter's Tale* is not that a statue comes to life, but that Hermione is in fact Hermione, that she lives in all of her glorious singularity. Throughout the final scene, Shakespeare toys with the ways the recognition of life in general is inseparable from the presence of a unique living being. Leontes claims that the company has already seen a number of "singularities" (5.3.12), a word Robert Cawdrey defined in 1604 as "being like no body else."⁹⁹ Leontes desires to move past the "many," and arrive at the thing he desires to behold. Paulina's response is telling:

As she lived peerless,
 So her dead likeness I do well believe
 Excels whatever yet you looked upon,

⁹⁹ Cawdrey, *A Table Alphabetical*, singularity.

Or hand of man hath done; therefore I keep it

Lonely, apart. (5.3.14-18)

Paulina's positioning of the statue "Lonely, apart" from the "many singularities" implies that Hermione is different from wondrous objects like the moving statues and miraculously animated matter that populated standard early modern galleries.¹⁰⁰

The ultimate source of Hermione's singularity is not the verisimilitude of her statue, but the fact that she is an individual creature possessed of a unique life. The miracle of Hermione's auto-revelation is simply that she has continued to live. When Golding's Pygmalion prays to Venus, he asks that the statue "'be like / My wench of ivory'" only because he "durst not say 'be yon same wench of ivory.'" ¹⁰¹ The relationship between *like* and *be* is the same as that which courses through Leontes's desire to say and truly mean "Thou art Hermione" (5.3.25). It is this copula—this inextricable mingling of life, personal history, habit, memory, and body—that is revealed in the final scene of Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*. Leontes's "art," which binds Hermione to her statue, also registers and collapses the distinction between art and nature at work throughout the play and in the onlookers' descriptions of the sculpture. Blurring the boundary between being and art through an acoustic and semantic doubling, the copula becomes a homonym that mingles Hermione's unique form of life with the aesthetic. Shakespeare unites the copula with an invocation of his art, suggesting how both the recognition and the theatrical conjuring of life emerge through grammatical processes. Hermione is to stone as Cordelia is to earth: both proper names represent the vibrant coalescence of a singular life within which the recognition of life as general category fades into the background. Leontes must recognize his wife as living through an intuition of life in general, but then he must embrace her vital singularity and enter with her into the flux of the world. When Polixenes demands that it be made "manifest where [Hermione] has lived, / Or how

¹⁰⁰ Miraculous matter, such as Eucharistic hosts that had manifested the blood of Christ were often positioned alongside other wondrous phenomena in *wunderkammers*. See Bynum, *Christian Materiality*. For the link between automata and *wunderkammers*, see Daston and Park.

¹⁰¹ O 10.299-300.

stol'n from the dead" (5.3.114-15), Paulina dismisses his queries, suggesting that explanation is beside the point. What matters is "That she is living" (5.3.115).

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Education

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Scholarships and Fellowships

2014-15 Mellon Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Humanities at McGill University (declined)
2014-15 Killam Postdoctoral Research Fellowship at the University of British Columbia (declined)
2014-15 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Postdoctoral Fellowship (declined)
2013-14 Ontario Graduate Scholarship, Gov. of Ontario
2012-13 University of Toronto Fellowship
2012-13 Shane Baghai Fellowship in English
2011-12 Michael Smith Foreign Study Scholarship, Gov. of Canada
2009-12 Canada Graduate Doctoral Scholarship, Gov. of Canada
2010-11 Grant-in-aid, Folger Shakespeare Library
2010-11 Viola Whitney Pratt Scholarship
2008-09 Canada Graduate Master's Scholarship, Gov. of Canada
2008-09 Kathleen Coburn Graduate Award
2007-08 Winston and Stephanie Ling Award
2006-07 Peter F. Bronfman Leadership Scholarship
2006-07 Walter O'Grady Undergraduate Scholarship
2006-07 John King Scholarship in English Literature
2005-07 University of Toronto Excellence Award
2005-06 University of Toronto Scholar, Faculty of Arts and Science

2005–06	Millennium Excellence Scholarship, Gov. of Canada
2004–05	Christopher Shelton Memorial Scholarship

Honours and Awards

2013	The Albert C. Labriola Award, Milton Society of America
2008–13	Junior Fellow, Massey College, Toronto
2011	Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award, Department of English
2007	Governor General of Canada's Silver Medal, Gov. of Canada
2007	John Black Aird Award, University of Toronto
2007	Gordon Cressy Student Leadership Award, University of Toronto

University Teaching Experience

2014–	Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Chicago
2014	Course Instructor, Department of English, University of Toronto
2009–13	Teaching Assistant, Department of English, University of Toronto

Administrative Experience

2014–17	Shakespeare Delegate, Delegate Assembly of the Modern Language Association
2011–13	Graduate Fellow, Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, University of Toronto

Publications

2013	“Adamic Awakening and the Feeling of Being Alive in <i>Paradise Lost</i> .” <i>Milton Studies</i> 54 (2013): 29–58. 13,500 words. [Recipient of the Milton Society of America's Albert C. Labriola Award.]
2013	“Embodied Resonances: Early Modern Science and Tropologies of Connection in Donne's <i>Anniversaries</i> .” Co-authored with Elizabeth D. Harvey. <i>English Literary History</i> 80 (2013): 981–1008. 13,000 words.