

Foreword

The main subjects of essays in this book range in time from the fourth to the eighteenth centuries, and the authors confidently reference intellectual history from Plato (a ubiquitous presence) to Spinoza. The covers of this book shelter a bold array of conceptual schemes, creative projects, scholarly methodologies and interpretative strategies, within many and diverse modern disciplinary areas: literature, history, philosophy, theology, theatre, rhetoric, music, fine arts, medicine and science. The collective direction to the relation of body to mind also functions to display an extraordinary variety of exemplifications and understandings. As the editor suggests in the Introduction, the volume is committed to bringing modern scholarly studies of past mind/body relations into contact with each other, and it celebrates the myriad heterogeneous conjunctions already made between mind (or soul) and body in our long cultural memory.

Without trying to duplicate the editor's outline of where her collection stands in relation to current literature, a good starting point for my reflections is the first essay, where Graeme Miles establishes what becomes an important motif in the book, that the 'Plato' of its title is not a fixed entity but a continually developing influence: 'The Platonic tradition is always transformed in the hands of its major inheritors and the contradictions are among what is most useful in it, most productive.' Miles shows the value of attending to context in interpretation, a context which includes the 'multiple and composite' selves that an individual interpreter might be at different times. So Michael Psellos will sometimes read allegorically, sometimes literally, sometimes for literary pleasure, sometimes for higher truths. As Miles says, '...[t]his implies not just a particular way of being, but also a manner of interpreting, embracing both the earthly and imperfect text and the transcendent meanings produced through its interpretive metamorphosis'. There are times when the body is of more value than the mind, both to the reader/writer and to the human being. In Psellos' appreciation of composite and compositional acts, Miles shows how limiting is the notion of a binarised hierarchy of mind over body as the core of 'Platonism'. In her two essays, Danijela Kambasković traces the cultural influences a very different Plato, sympathetic to the 'madness' of love and alive to the ethical value of mutual gazes, and examines the role of moral interpretations of the human senses in the culture of the European Renaissance.

In the context of later medieval religious lyric, Philippa Maddern points out that soul and body, whilst they seemed locked in mutual hostility, were also by definition mutually self-supporting concepts—each being what the other was not—whose union underwrote full human identity, but whose characteristics often seemed worryingly transferred from one to the other. The ‘Platonic’ idea that the soul is imprisoned in the body, Maddern shows, met opposing insistence that they were interdependent entities and identified in loving union. Like Miles, Maddern acknowledges the importance of interpretative context, specifically in this case whether pre- or post-lapsarian, and to do with salvation or damnation. Although Richard Read’s essay is on a totally different subject, his observation that ‘for both Rembrandt and Descartes true being has more the character of a verb than a noun’ seems relevant here to an approach that treats soul/body relations as dynamic and *in situ*, rather than giving them uniform and static definition. Read evokes the astonishing perspectival potential in the modern experience of the presence in art of a being from the past, where he finds, amongst many other things, ‘the impression of continuity between an abiding soul and a changing self’. Once again, the essay deals primarily with a complex, situational and temporally extended activity centred in a work of art and the possibilities of its interpretative ‘invitation’. In the process, the idea of ‘being’ is again productively extended beyond common limits. Read is one of several contributors to point out that ‘Descartes’ is no simple figure, not the bogey-man of mind/body division that he is sometimes made to stand for. Michael Champion’s essay on grief in Gregory of Nyssa is similar in its ability to rethink the set plays of intellectual history, returning a fixed descriptive binary (material/immaterial) to a specific creative environment where the one being can be imagined simultaneously in both a physical earthly form and a perfected state of sanctity.

Read remarks on the ‘intrinsic differences between painting and philosophy as forms of communication’. Given the importance of the relationship between mind (or soul) and body in theological, philosophical and scientific schemes, the topic could also have been a vital preoccupation in European culture even without any presence in literary tradition, and yet it is now quite unthinkable in distinction from that tradition. Perhaps more than any other theme, it is one that has made scientists and philosophers into poets as they contemplate the borders of physical and metaphysical being. William Schipper’s long contribution ends with Hrabanus Maurus’ mystical contemplation of Christ’s loin-cloth in his *carmina figurata* in honour of the Holy Cross. The same medieval author who distinguishes modes and degrees of sexual sin in his *Penitentials* with bureaucratic zeal is ecstatically moved here to celebrate in the hidden penis of Christ’s human body ‘the creator (or the creative power) who makes the created world visible for all mankind’. Like many contributors to this volume, Schipper is alert to the relation of genre to gender in discussion of the relation of bodily passions to the operations of mind or soul. So too, in his essay on bawdy punning on the Shakespearean stage, Laurie Johnson shows the difference that address to a female character makes in the potential for verbal sexual ‘play’, and also suggests that over time the bodily and gendered connections of Shakespearean punning diminish, perhaps because ‘knowledge’ itself is becoming a conceptually disembodied thing. The early modern ‘body-mind’ cedes to a

‘distinction between the human body and the knowledge that a human being may acquire in the world’.

Johnson’s thesis is a large one to rest on such evidence, but his term ‘body-mind’ reminds me strongly of how medieval and early modern writers without a highly developed metaphysical discourse could well express the body-soul relation in physical terms. As Thomas Malory’s *Galahad* reaches his end, the text says ‘he began to tremble ryght harde whan the dedly fleysh began to beholde the spirituall thynges’. In John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding*, when the author’s conviction of his damnation is suddenly lifted as he reads Hebrews 12, he writes ‘Then with joy I told my Wife, O now I know, I know! but that night was a good night for me, I never had but few better... Christ was a precious Christ to my Soul that night; I could scarce lie in my bed for joy, and peace, and triumph, thorow Christ.’ These are truly both ‘fleshly’ and ‘spiritual’ moments. The flesh embarrasses some historical milieux and some writers more than others—Wim François gives a fine Counter-Reformation ‘Rig- orist’ example—but, as Karen Pratt’s essay on Jean LeFèvre indicates, even the introduction of bawdy satire and erotic adventure was not always incompatible with the discussion of serious religious and theological issues. The very presence of an ‘Ovid’ as protagonist of *De vetula / La Vieille* offers a challenge to readers about how they think bodily sex fits into the divine creative plan, just as it poses questions about what the real decorum of this literary text is: an entertaining and informative compendium, a flashy parody of scholastic method, a satire on the subject of clerical virginity, an eschatological meditation, or some mixture of these. LeFèvre’s method was apparently not designed to let anyone find easy answers to these matters. In a related way, Bob White’s essay on Shakespeare’s theatre looks at mixed emotions in individual characters and in groups, and at the ‘discrepant awareness’ of emotions between characters, and also between characters and audience. In these generic conditions, White suggests, both the utterance and the interpretation of emotional and mental states through bodily gesture and affect make up a volatile collective enterprise. And even in the formal rhetoric of parliament, Daniel Derrin shows, ‘moving’ required a complex co-operation between the persuasive strategies of the speaker and the ‘bodily memories’ of the listeners.

‘Bodies’ and ‘minds’, if no longer ‘souls’, are naturalised in our daily discourse, yet discursive evocations of the body and mind/soul are never free from involvement in the predominant systems of thought of their periods. Even in less learned texts, when hearts swell with anger or faces grow pale with fear, scientific commonplaces of the day about blood and vital spirits are being mobilised. At a more learned level, as Michael Ovens shows, a poet like John Donne uses the analogy of alchemy in a way that ‘overlaps’ with central Christian doctrine in its conception of ‘virtue’. ‘Alchemical metaphors ... diminish... the contrast between a corrupt body and a heavenly soul in order to shift emphasis to the sympathetic relationships which unite them.’ What Donne seeks in alchemy is an image of ‘continuity through transformation’, an elision of the corruption of death. Ovens makes psychological and poetic sense out of an arcane and now discredited ‘science’. Manfred Horstmanshoff reminds us that science itself is a genre dependent on institutional support, and that important switches in research method, like that from analogical

thinking to empirical investigation, both let literary metaphors detach themselves from science and ‘set ancient medical texts free for historical study’. Yet within this view of scientific change, Horstmanshoff presents an Aristotelian ‘hero’ sublimely resistant to Descartes’ new ideas. No shift in thought happens very suddenly or consistently, it seems, so that the pattern emerging from this collection is of multiple over-lapping head-sets and contexts, a long time-space of simultaneously experienced continuities and discontinuities. In a final and very long essay here, Charles Wolfe and Micaela van Esveld trace not only a history of materialist theories of the soul, but of ‘the presence of materialist “components” or articulated wholes *within* philosophical systems that are not themselves materialistic’, and they invite future materialists to ‘take up the challenge of conceptualising material souls’. The book ends, therefore, looking forward, and with no sense that the many matters it considers are now dealt with, safely stored in the past. It seems a long way from the tendencies to totalisation and reification summoned up by titles such as *The Elizabethan World Picture*, fine book though that was.

Carolyn Dinshaw has recently written in *How Soon is Now?* (2012) that ‘...[t]here are temporalities that are not laminar flows of some putative stream of time, not historicist, not progressive or developmental in the modern sense’. For me, one effect of experiencing so many historical ‘conjunctions’ together in these pages is to feel that people of the past have never lived within discrete ‘eras’ or ‘world-pictures’, but, like us, amidst deep incommensurabilities, and that the more informed one becomes about a period or an idea, the less it will submit to neat temporal placement. Although attempting to understand the past depends on sensitivity to images, contexts and forms of mediation whose operations are no longer patent—that is a main rationale for the sheer amount of historical expertise packed between these covers—whatever we think we understand will always be a present event. The event of reading *Conjunctions* will be a different one for every reader. I think that it will be a work returned to on many occasions, rather than read cover to cover, raided for information, appreciated for subtle formulations of complex processes, and, in its editor’s words, treated as a place of ‘enjoyment and enlightenment’.

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Enlightenment

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