

Introduction: **Shakespearean Sensations: Experiencing Literature in Early Modern England**

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SHAKESPEAREAN SENSATIONS

Experiencing Literature in Early Modern England

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Introduction: Imagining audiences

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IMAGINING LITERATURE'S EFFECTS

How did early modern writers imagine the effects of plays and poems on minds, bodies, and souls? In what ways does the history of theatrical or literary experience overlap with the history of humors, passions, and emotions? Throughout early modern texts, writers depict playgoers and readers responding to imaginative literature both affectively and physiologically. In tragedies, audiences at plays-within-the-play are devastated, brought to tears, startled, and killed; in comedies, they are moved to laughter, driven to lust, and agitated into redirecting the plot. Letters and poems within plays of all genres, meanwhile, lead readers to react with anger, grief, or pleasure. Poems, similarly, meditate on the transformative effects of reading, watching, and hearing. Satires and epigrams describe pricking readers into states of aggrieved indignation, or galling, lancing, or purging their targets. Love poems envision pressing readers into states of longing or embarrassment, epithalamia are described as festive restoratives, and elegies aim to nourish and console the bereaved. Poems and plays alike were imagined to affect those who encountered them in ways that could be threatening, inflammatory, dangerous, or soothing, comforting and therapeutic.

Despite the prominence of scenes of reading and watching imaginative literature in early modern texts, and authors' insistent attention to the consequences of such encounters, critics have had surprisingly little to say about the period's investment in imagining literature's impact on feeling. The absence of this discussion is striking given how urgently the topic impinges on current critical conversations. For some time now, histories of the body and sexuality have been at the fore of early modern studies. Influential scholarship by Gail Kern Paster, Jonathan Sawday, David Hillman and Carla Mazzio, Jonathan Gil Harris, and Michael Schoenfeldt established the pervasiveness of the period's anatomical and

humoral assumptions, and their significance for our understanding of literary representations of bodies and selves.¹ More recently critical attention has turned to early modern conceptions of emotion and its relationship to the body. Important books by Paster, Mary Floyd-Wilson, Katherine Rowe, Bruce Smith, and Matthew Steggle have delineated the distinctive contours of emotional experience in a pre-Cartesian moment in which bodies and minds were understood to be intimately intertwined.² Floyd-Wilson and Garrett Sullivan, like Paster, have called attention to the permeability not only between minds and bodies, but between selves and their surrounding environments at a moment when the boundary between external and internal was indistinct.³ Relatedly, a number of critics have directed our attention to the period's conceptions of the senses and their functions: the contributors in Elizabeth Harvey's *Sensible Flesh* have examined early modern theories of touch, and those in Lowell Gallagher and Shankar Raman's *Knowing Shakespeare* have explored the role of the senses in shaping cognition.⁴

Beyond this surge of attention within the early modern period, the interface between bodies and emotions has come to occupy a crucial position in a wide range of conversations. In particular, the ambiguous and powerful concept of affect has attracted attention from scholars across a wide range of disciplines, including social and biological sciences as well as humanities.⁵ Theresa Brennan has distinguished affect from emotion by defining it as "the physiological shift accompanying a

¹ See Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); David Hillman and Carla Mazzio, eds., *The Body in Parts* (London: Routledge, 1997); Jonathan Gil Harris, *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Michael Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

² See Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (University of Chicago Press, 2004); Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson, eds., *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Bruce Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (University of Chicago Press, 1999); and Matthew Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping in Early Modern Theatres* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

³ See Garrett Sullivan and Mary Floyd-Wilson, eds., *Inhabiting the Body, Inhabiting the World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), and Paster, *Humoring the Body*.

⁴ Elizabeth Harvey, ed., *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), and Lowell Gallagher and Shankar Raman, eds., *Knowing Shakespeare: Senses, Embodiment and Cognition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010).

⁵ See Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Patricia Clough, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the*

judgment,” and claiming that “all affects, including even ‘flat affects,’ are material, physiological things.”⁶ In recent years cultural linguists have similarly explored the relationship between biology and emotional responses, raising provocative questions about ethnically specific and linguistically determined factors in emotional experience.⁷ Scientists, meanwhile, are pursuing links between brain circuits and the expression of emotion, seeking to measure emotional impulse and to explore the innate or acquired nature of emotional landscapes. Scientists now widely acknowledge that knowledge garnered by the emotions contributes in important ways to processes of reasoning, particularly the rapid form of judgment we call intuition. Their work has challenged the mind/body dualism long central to western medicine, so that emotion is increasingly understood as rooted in the body rather than as “an elusive mental quality.”⁸

The attention to embodiment in current conversations about affect makes the early modern period, with its assumptions about the intrinsically material and physiological nature of emotion, an especially rich site for exploring the nature of affect. *Shakespearean Sensations* is informed by recent interdisciplinary conversations about emotion, but adds historical, social, rhetorical, and especially literary perspectives to these conversations. Late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century writers not only identified emotional experience firmly with the body, but also privileged the sensations aroused by imaginative literature. In the texts explored in this volume, men and women respond to plays and poems not only with their minds and souls but also with their hearts, hands, viscera, hair, and skin. Such responses suggest an important prehistory for current psychobiological investigations; they also uncover the ways that authors aspired to affect the inner equilibrium of readers and audience members, and the cultural consequences of such aspirations.

Social (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); and Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁶ Brennan, *Transmission of Affect*, 5 and 6. Massumi writes: “Call the coupling of a unit of quasi corporeality with a unit of passion an *affect*: an ability to affect and a susceptibility to be affected. An *emotion* or *feeling* is a recognized affect, an identified intensity as reinjected into stimulus-response paths ... Emotion is a contamination of empirical space by affect, which belongs to the body without an image” (*Parables for the Virtual*, 61).

⁷ See, for example, Anna Wierzbicka, *Emotions Across Language and Culture: Diversity and Universals* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. 11 and 28.

⁸ Antonio Damasio’s *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (London: Vintage Books, 1994) investigates “the neural underpinnings of reason” (xxi); the quotation appears on xxiv. Daniel Gross provides a cogent discussion of the limitations of Damasio’s approach in *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle’s Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), 28–39.

Exploring early modern ideas about literature's effects on mind and body involves close consideration of the period's theories about literary forms and functions. In fact, these topics have also experienced a surge of critical interest. Recent work on rhetoric and early modern literature has been enlivened by historically attentive studies of how style and genre inform meaning.⁹ Early modern audiences approached literary genres with the expectation that they would move, stir, or enrapture them in particular ways. Theories of genre therefore overlap with theories of affect, since both inform our understanding of reader and audience response.¹⁰ The essays in this volume consider tragedy, comedy, epigram, and narrative poetry, and define their formal properties less through thematic content than by way of the emotional and physical states they describe, enact, and claim to induce. The work of our contributors therefore combines sensitivity to literary and theatrical form with insights drawn from early modern philosophical and medical thought in order to deepen our understanding of the period's conception of literature's relation to sensation.

The combination of this renewed critical interest in form with the recent "affective turn" in so many disciplines makes it surprising that contemporary scholarship has by and large shied away from the interface between literary texts and their physical and emotional consequences, especially in the context of early modern writers' intense interest in literature's impact on audiences.¹¹ Literary studies of the emotions and the body have focused primarily on their textual representations, rather than taking seriously the complex and intimate reciprocity between books, bodies, and selves. Now, as in the early modern period, people seek out plays, poems, and other literary forms in large part for the intensity of feeling that they produce: the involuntary flush, pang, or shiver.¹² Our longstanding habit

⁹ See, for instance, Mark David Rasmussen, ed., *Renaissance Literature and Its Formal Engagements* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); Stephen Cohen, ed., *Shakespeare and Historical Formalism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); and Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown, eds., *Reading for Form* (special issue of *Modern Language Quarterly*, 2000).

¹⁰ Heather Dubrow has described genre as "a code of behavior established between the author and reader." Dubrow, *Genre* (London: Methuen, 1982), 2. See also Stanley E. Fish, "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics," in *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 389.

¹¹ On the idea that current criticism is experiencing an "affective turn," see Patricia Clough, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). Recent work directly addressing the relationship between early modern affect and literary texts includes Katharine A. Craik, *Reading Sensations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007); Tanya Pollard, *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2005); and Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping*.

¹² Frank Kermode examines the "shudder," which T. S. Eliot identified as the body's automatic response to true poetry, as illuminating what he describes as Eliot's "physiology of poetry"; see Kermode, "Eliot and the Shudder," *London Review of Books*, 13 May 2010, 13–16.

of separating bodily responses from intellectual reasoning has deterred critics from exploring their interdependence. Although early modern literary theorists often described the body as frail, it nevertheless emerged as a powerful site for forming and articulating aesthetic response. Neglecting literary sensations therefore cuts us off from the heart of early modern conceptions of literature and its purpose. It also blinds us to the historical specificities of the period's vocabulary for describing consumers' experience of literature, and the ways in which these descriptions challenge our own assumptions about what literature is and does.

THE PHYSIOLOGY OF AFFECT

Who were the imagined audiences of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and how did they understand their emotional and physical responses to be constituted? The period's understanding of minds and bodies was substantially shaped by medical models inherited from the Greek physician Galen and the Hippocratic corpus, in which the mind and body were understood as inseparable components of the self.¹³ Humors, the four defining fluids that coursed through the body, were simultaneously literal substances and affective dispositions. They were also both innate and subject to change: although a person could be inclined towards being sanguine, choleric, melancholic, or phlegmatic, various factors could alter that balance, either temporarily or permanently. The six non-naturals that could interfere with one's humoral balance were air, food and drink, exercise and rest, sleep and wakefulness, retention and evacuation of wastes, and perturbations of the mind, or emotions.

These perturbations, or passions, were understood to derive from the stirrings of the sensitive or sensory soul, where impressions from the outside world were received, and processed by the five outward senses. Following Aquinas, early modern thinkers identified the sensitive soul's faculties of inward apprehension as the *sensus communis* or common sense, the imagination, and the memory.¹⁴ Of these faculties, the imagination was most closely allied to sensory appetite and least responsive to the tempering effects of the soul's most exalted aspect: reason, or intellect.¹⁵ The

¹³ For an overview of the period's medical thought, see Nancy Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (University of Chicago Press, 1990).

¹⁴ Ruth Harvey discusses *imaginatio* and the *sensus communis* in *The Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: Warburg Institute, 1975), 43–44.

¹⁵ Katharine Park and Eckhard Kessler, "The Concept of Psychology," in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt *et al.* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 455–63.

imagination was also the faculty most intimately linked with the body, as Margaret Healy's essay in this volume details. The physician Thomas Fienus explained the power of the imagination to bring about physiological change:

The imagination is fitted by nature to move the appetite and excite the emotions, as is obvious, since by thinking happy things we rejoice, by thinking of sad things we fear and are sad, and all emotions follow previous thought. But the emotions are greatly alterative with respect to the body. Therefore, through them the imagination is able to transform the body.¹⁶

Fienus's account offers important insights into the period's assumptions about literature's transformative power. Books and plays ignited the imagination of those who wrote, read, and saw them, and exerted a direct impact on the body by virtue of the imagination's ability to stimulate emotion.

In its role as conduit between external stimuli and internal responses, the imagination reveals a complex relationship between inner and outer realms. Significant changes in early modern medical thought and practice were placing this relationship under increasingly close scrutiny. The flourishing new science of anatomy and dissection, driven especially by Andreas Vesalius's 1543 *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, challenged traditional assumptions about the body's interior, and heightened interest in exploring its inner workings.¹⁷ The influential writings of the Swiss physician Paracelsus also complicated the Galenic model by redefining disease as an external agent rather than a matter of internal balance.¹⁸ Paracelsus's interest in exogenous threats helped explain the spread of infectious and airborne disease, and involved early modern thinkers in a broader refinement of their understanding of homeostasis. Men and women were never left unchanged by their experiences in the world they inhabited.

The impact of both ancient and modern ideas about internal regulation is especially striking in the work of physician and moral theorist Thomas Wright. Wright explained that the passions could be altered by internal forces, such as the imagination, and by encounters in the world. As he remarked in his 1601 treatise *The Passions of the Minde in Generall*, "By [the] alteration which passions work in the wit and the will, we may understand the admirable metamorphosis and change of

¹⁶ Thomas Fienus, *De Viribus Imaginationis* (Louvain, 1608), trans. in L. J. Rather, "Thomas Fienus' (1567–1631) Dialectical Investigation of the Imagination as Cause and Cure of Bodily Disease," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 4 (1967), 349–67; 356.

¹⁷ On some of the consequences of these discoveries, see especially Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*.

¹⁸ See Harris, *Foreign Bodies*.

a man from himself, when his affects are pacified, and when they are troubled."¹⁹ Wright understands the faculty of apprehension, driven by the passions, as one of perpetual change and adjustment in response to encounters with people, places, and things.²⁰ The passions of early modern subjects were constantly and actively engaged, whether pacified or troubled, and passionate feeling was a continual, dynamic activity rather than an occasionally arising state. The unsettling unpredictability of this reactive, improvisational process led physicians such as Wright to emphasize the importance of exercising scrupulous vigilance over the emotions. The essays in this volume explore one particular kind of encounter out of the many considered by Wright and his contemporaries: those occasioned by imaginative literature. Books and plays were among the external agents capable of profoundly altering humoral balance, implicating readers and theatergoers in complex processes of transaction or exchange.

The volatility of the early modern embodied self is still evident in the material vocabulary we use to describe emotional experience. We are now speaking metaphorically when we call someone hot-headed or cold-blooded, and recent work on the language of emotion has explored the cultural consequences of such figurative expressions. Zoltán Kövecses, among others, has surveyed "metaphoric aspects of emotion concepts in English," concentrating on how these have developed over the last ten years or so and arguing that an appreciation of figurative language (both metaphoric and metonymic) is essential for a full and nuanced understanding of emotional experience.²¹ Anger can boil; sorrow can weigh us down; fear and embarrassment can inflame. Language of containment, such as being *filled* with sorrow, fear, or pride; or *overflowing* with love or happiness, suggests that emotion is bounded by the sealed unit of the body. The insistent materiality characteristic of early modern affect, however, complicates the metaphorical nature of this vocabulary. Understanding the period's psychophysiology requires recognizing that the boundaries between metaphorical and literal language were radically unstable. As Gail Kern Paster has shown, the humoral body was implicated in a network of sympathies with the wider world where the cosmic macrocosm

¹⁹ Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall*, sig. E6r.

²⁰ Damasio identifies a similar dynamism in what he calls our emotional "background state"; see *Descartes' Error*, 143–44.

²¹ Zoltán Kövecses, *Metaphor and Emotion: Language, Culture and Body in Human Feeling* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 20 *et passim*; see also Paster, *Humoring the Body*, 6; and Paster, Rowe, and Floyd-Wilson, eds., *Reading the Early Modern Passions*, 16–18.

was understood to be as sensible – and as vulnerable to change – as the subjects who lived in it.²²

At their most straightforward, sensations are feelings (in body or consciousness) caused by the operations of the senses as they perceive objects in the world. Many of the sensations discussed in the following essays are accordingly states of consciousness, or changes in the body, caused by multi-sensorial encounters with plays and poems. Reading and playgoing were not only visual and auditory experiences, as we might expect, but also tactile, gustatory, and even sometimes olfactory. The five senses were not thought equally useful or valuable, however, and the ways of knowing that they facilitated were imbricated in patterns of spiritual, emotional, and ethical conduct.²³ Sense perception was understood in turn to alter the passions, or affections; and, through them, the cognitive processes of reason, memory, and the will. The sensations aroused by plays and poems therefore emerge most clearly when they leave impressions on the interior landscapes of those who experienced them. Described at different moments as abrasive or fortificatory, sensations felt in the passionate soul suggest the powerful effects of both the written and the spoken word. A particular aim of this volume, indeed, is to consider together the sensations aroused by reading and playgoing. Plays and poetry are often regarded separately in present criticism but, as we will see, early modern writers who discussed how it felt to experience them shared a conceptual and discursive vocabulary.

STAGING SENSATIONS

The susceptibility of bodies and emotions to external perturbations was a central controversy in early modern discussions about the theater. With their visibility and economic power, the new commercial playhouses in early modern England brought the theater to the forefront of debates about literature's effects on audiences.²⁴ The medium's dependence on

²² See Paster, *Humoring the Body*.

²³ See Gallagher and Raman, *Knowing Shakespeare*, 8–10.

²⁴ Scholarship on early modern theater audiences is indebted to the work of Alfred Harbage, Ann Jennalie Cook, and Andrew Gurr; see Harbage, *Shakespeare's Audiences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941); Cook, *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London: 1576–1642* (Princeton University Press, 1981); and Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, 3rd edn. (Cambridge University Press, 2004). More recent studies of the period's playgoers include Cook, "Audiences," in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 305–20; Jeremy Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Charles Whitney, *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Matthew

actual bodies, both onstage and in the audience, highlighted the intimate physicality of its relationship with consumers. Plays were widely seen as attracting audiences especially through their ability to seduce, entice, tickle, anger, frighten, please, and soothe. As sixteenth-century writers began probing more deeply into the nature of plays and their consequences, concerns about these sensations escalated, and engaged a wide range of responses.

Perhaps surprisingly, a powerful catalyst for debates about the theater's emotional and physiological effects on audiences came from the Hellenistic revival of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The influx of Greek manuscripts and scholars from the East after the 1453 sack of Constantinople led to both a sharp interest in the Greek dramatic tradition and a renewed study of Galen and Greek medicine, often by the same humanist scholars. Thomas Linacre (1460–1524), founder of England's Royal College of Physicians, joined other humanist scholars in studying Greek language and literature in Italy in the 1480s and 1490s, and went on to translate Greek medical texts and promote the study of Galen, Aristotle, and the Hippocratic tradition. At the same moment, and within the same humanist circles, the Aldine Press in Venice began producing the first printed editions of Greek texts, which sparked significant changes in literary thought.²⁵ As Daniel Javitch has demonstrated, the newly visible Greek plays prompted a surge of interest in genre theory, which in turn intensified interest in the newly published and translated text of Aristotle's *Poetics*.²⁶ Aristotle's influence directed Renaissance writers to identify audiences' emotional responses as the proper focus for literary theory, just as newly unearthed medical texts encouraged scholars to explore more fully the implications of Greek theories about the mind's embeddedness in the body.²⁷

Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping in Early Modern Theatres*; Jennifer Low and Nova Myhill, eds., *Imagining the Audience in Early Modern Drama, 1558–1642* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011); and Tanya Pollard, "Audience Reception," in *The Oxford Handbook to Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur Kinney (Oxford University Press, 2012), 452–67.

²⁵ On the early printing of Greek plays, see especially Rudolf Hirsch, "The Printing Tradition of Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles and Aristophanes," *Gutenberg Jahrbuch*, (1964), 138–46. On the impact of Greek texts and theory on the period, see Pollard, "Audience reception," and Pollard, "Tragedy and Revenge," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, ed. Emma Smith and Garrett Sullivan (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 58–72.

²⁶ See Daniel Javitch, "The Emergence of Poetic Genre Theory in the Sixteenth Century," *Modern Language Quarterly* 59.2 (1998), 139–69.

²⁷ On the new Renaissance emphasis on audience following the printing of Aristotle's *Poetics*, see Nicholas Cronk, "Aristotle, Horace, and Longinus: the Conception of Reader Response," *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 3: *The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn Norton (Cambridge

Continental literary critics seized upon the affective and physiological assumptions implicit in Aristotle's account of the effects that tragedy should have on audiences. In particular, they responded to his famous claim that through arousing pity and fear, tragedy should bring about the catharsis – a technical medical term referring to purgation, purification, or cleansing – of such emotions.²⁸ At the same time, they were also keenly interested in Aristotle's juxtaposition of the discomfort typically linked to purgation, pity, and fear, with a very different sensation: pleasure. Arguing that tragedy generated its own distinctive form of pleasure, Aristotle had written that "the poet must by 'representation' (*mimesis*) produce the pleasure (*hedone*) which comes from feeling pity and fear."²⁹ Aristotle's compressed evocation of a complex web of emotions, as well as his allusion to a formal medical procedure, established the groundwork for a wide range of interpretative responses. For some, catharsis suggested a hostile process. "A physician," wrote Antonio Minturno in his 1564 *L'Arte Poetica*, "will not have greater capacity to expel with poisonous medicine the fiery poison of an illness which afflicts the body, than the tragic poet will to purge the mind of mighty perturbations with the force of the passions charmingly expressed in verses."³⁰ Others contrasted these violent associations with an emphasis on the voluptuous appeal of surrendering to the emotions: Lodovico Castelvetro wrote that literary purgation could be "with the utmost propriety called *hedone*, that is, pleasure or delight."³¹ Yet through their varying interpretations, literary commentators consistently credited plays with the ability to bring about emotional and physical transformation, typically linked with the possibility of therapeutic cure.

Although Aristotle confined his use of the term *catharsis* to tragedy, Renaissance commentators incorporated the idea into their conceptions

University Press, 1999), 199–204; also Timothy J. Reiss, "Renaissance Theatre and the Theory of Tragedy," in the same volume, esp. 242.

²⁸ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 49b20. In identifying theater with purgation, as the term was most frequently translated, Aristotle drew on his own study of the Hippocratic medical tradition; the term must have resonated with early modern authors especially because the same medical legacy was so central in shaping their own understanding of mind–body relations. On the period's overwhelming interest in "the notion of tragedy as a genre defined by its therapeutic effect on the audience," see Stephen Orgel, "Shakespeare and the Kinds of Drama," *Critical Inquiry* 6:1 (1979), 107–23, 117.

²⁹ *Poetics*, 53b10. In the same section, Aristotle writes suggestively that "One should not seek from tragedy all kinds of pleasure but that which is peculiar to tragedy."

³⁰ Antonio Minturno, *L'Arte Poetica*, 1564, trans. Allan H. Gilbert, in *Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden*, ed. Allan H. Gilbert (New York: American Book Company, 1940), 274–303, 290.

³¹ Lodovico Castelvetro, *The Poetics of Aristotle. Translated and Annotated* (1571), trans. Gilbert, in *Literary Criticism*, 305–57, 350. Castelvetro also suggested that the pleasure of purgation "ought properly to be called utility, since it is health of mind acquired through very bitter medicine" (350).

of other genres as well. Giambattista Guarini, for example, explained that comedy "purges melancholy, an emotion so injurious that often it leads a man to grow mad and to inflict death on himself."³² The purgative qualities of comic laughter could therefore temper the dangerous physical and emotional effects of excessive melancholy or black bile.³³ Comedy's potential to purge melancholy was especially useful to English playwrights, who drew on this notion to justify a genre that was highly popular with audiences, but widely regarded as morally dubious because of its tendency to appeal to lust, scorn, and ridicule. Even in defending poetry, Philip Sidney worried about "the comic, whom naughty play-makers and stage-keepers have justly made odious," and Ben Jonson complained that whatever "is a wry, or depraved, doth strangely stirre meane affections, and provoke for the most part to laughter."³⁴ Opponents of the stage were predictably fiercer: the antitheatrical critic Stephen Gosson claimed that "when *Comedie* comes upon the stage, *Cupide* sets upp a Springe for Woodcockes, which are entangled ere they discrie the line, and caught before they mistruste the snare."³⁵

In the Induction to *The Taming of the Shrew* (1593–94), the messenger who introduces the play seems to anticipate and confront these skeptical reactions in his justification of comedy's function. He directs Sly to watch a comedy:

For so your doctors hold it very meet,
Seeing too much sadness hath congealed your blood,
And melancholy is the nurse of frenzy.
Therefore they thought it good you hear a play
And frame your mind to mirth and merriment,
Which bars a thousand harms, and lengthens life.³⁶

Although the messenger does not explicitly refer to purgation in this passage, his allusions to melancholy and congealed blood clearly point to the humoral model underlying his purported strategy. The prescribed

³² Giambattista Guarini, *The Compendium of Tragicomic Poetry* (1599), trans. Gilbert, in *Literary Criticism*, 504–33, 514.

³³ On the complex and morally ambiguous properties attributed to laughter in the period, see especially Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping*.

³⁴ Philip Sidney, *An Apologie for Poetrie* (London: James Roberts, 1595), sig. F3r; Jonson, *Timber, or Discoveries*, lines 2644–46, in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford, Percy Simpson, and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925–52), vol. 8, 643–44.

³⁵ Stephen Gosson, *An Apology of the School of Abuse* (London, 1579), sigs. L8v–M1r. On Gosson and early modern antitheatricalists, see especially Jonas Barish, *The Anti-theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

³⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. Ann Thompson, New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge University Press, 2003), Induction, 2.126–31.

mirth and merriment will heat Sly's cold, congealed blood, cleansing his body of the melancholy humor that nourishes his frenzy. This model does not, however, work exactly as planned. The actors in fact come more to mock than to cure, and Sly's primary response to their performance is a declaration of erotic desire for the young page pretending to be his wife. "Servants, leave me and her alone," he tells them; "Madam, undress you and come now to bed" (Induction 2.115–16). In keeping with English comedy more broadly, the medicine the play offers seems more abrasive than soothing, and more aphrodisiac than purgative. Yet the common-sensical tone of the messenger's explanation, and the ease with which it is accepted, suggests that medicinal affect played an important role in legitimizing a genre widely held in suspicion for its potentially inflammatory nature.

As this example suggests, early modern English literary critics followed continental writers in employing a medical vocabulary to describe the impact of plays on their audiences. In some cases, these writers responded directly and explicitly to Aristotle's *Poetics*, which had been studied in English universities since early in the sixteenth century.³⁷ Academic literary discussions produced Latin orations on literature by scholars such as Henry Dethick, Alberico Gentili, and Caleb Dalechamp, which allude to Aristotle and emphasize literature's affective value.³⁸ Oxford's Regius Professor Alberico Gentili wrote explicitly in 1593 that "Poets are doctors. They certainly cure through the emotions in a powerful way. And so Aristotle makes a note of that in defining tragedy."³⁹ Although critics have typically argued that the *Poetics* had little or no direct influence on writers in sixteenth-century England, the period's scholars suggest not only that they were familiar with the treatise, but that they had followed continental writers in emphasizing and expanding Aristotle's medical vocabulary.⁴⁰

Outside of the universities, similar ideas made their ways into vernacular conversations by way of writers such as Philip Sidney and Jonson, whose immersion in classical and Italian literary traditions influenced

³⁷ See Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster* (London, 1570), sig. 52v, and Marvin Herrick, *The Poetics of Aristotle in England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), esp. 24–29.

³⁸ *Latin Treatises on Poetry from Renaissance England*, ed. & trans. J. W. Binns (Signet Mountain, TN: Summertown Texts, 1999).

³⁹ Gentili, "Commentatio ad Legem III Codicis de Professoribus et Medicis," in *Latin Treatises*, 91.

⁴⁰ See Bruce Smith, *Ancient Scripts and Modern Experience on the English Stage 1500–1700* (Princeton: University Press, 1988), 40ff.; Charles B. Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); Elder Olson, "Introduction," in *Aristotle's "Poetics" and English Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 1965), xviii.

both their literary treatises and their popular imaginative literature. Sidney, who refers to Aristotle in his *Apologie for Poetrie* (published in 1595, but written c. 1580), and whose explicit engagement with Italian Aristotelian theorists is well established, draws on poetry's therapeutic legacy in describing it as "a medicine of cherries," and emphasizes theater's engagement with the body in defending "the high and excellent tragedy, that openeth the greatest wounds and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue."⁴¹ Sidney's bracing imagery evokes the virile violence of Minturno's "poisonous medicine," and sets the tone for Jonson's defense of satirical drama. "If men may by no meanes write freely, or speake truth, but when it offends not," Jonson asks rhetorically, "why doe *Physicians* cure with sharpe medicines, or corrosives? Is not the same equally lawfull in the cure of the minde, that is in the cure of the body?"⁴² Defenses of the theater similarly drew on medical imagery, although rarely in such aggressive terms. In his 1612 *Apology for Actors*, Thomas Heywood claimed a soothing and restorative power for plays, arguing that comedies could "recreate such as of themselves are wholly deuoted to Melancholly, which corrupts the bloud: or ... refresh such weary spirits as are tired with labour, or study, to moderate the cares and heauiness of the minde."⁴³

As each of these writers suggests, ideas about drama's therapeutic potential were central to defenses of theater. The affective assumptions on which these ideas relied, however, also formed the basis for the period's many attacks on the medium. Gosson famously complained that plays' seductive appeal to the senses gave them a dangerous invasive power. With their "straunge consortes of melody, to tickle the eare; costly apparel, to flatter the sight; effeminate gesture, to ravish the sence; and wanton speache, to whet desire too inordinate lust," plays seek out multiple routes of attacking the body in order to entice, indulge, and usurp. Most disturbingly, they "by the priuie entries of the eare, slip downe into the hart, & with gunshotte of affection gaule the minde, where reason and vertue

⁴¹ Sidney, *Apologie for Poetrie*, sigs. F1r and F3v. On Sidney's role in introducing Italian Aristotelian literary theory into England, see Joel Spingarn, *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1908), 268; and Herrick, *The Poetics of Aristotle in England*, esp. 24–29.

⁴² Ben Jonson, *Timber, or Discoveries*, 2313–17, in *Ben Jonson*, vol. 8, 634. Katherine Duncan-Jones has suggested that Jonson is the model for Shakespeare's Jacques, who insists, "give me leave / To speak my mind, and I will through and through / Cleanse the foul body of th'infected world, / If they will patiently receive my medicine." See Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Michael Hattaway, New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2.7.58–61; and Duncan-Jones, *Ungentle Shakespeare* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2001), 123–25.

⁴³ Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (London, 1612), sig. F4v.

should rule the roste." Gosson's account of this anatomical and spiritual invasion suggestively conflates vulnerable bodily organs with the passionate and cognitive faculties they fail to defend.⁴⁴

Gosson's vivid sensory images simultaneously attack and imitate the seductive powers he attributes to theatrical representation. His particular attention to the ear as a privileged point of entry to the heart and mind highlights contemporary ideas about the invasive effects of sound, and the potential dangers of hearing.⁴⁵ In the context of his own elaborately poetic language, it also reminds us that Gosson, a failed playwright and eventual preacher, had his own motives for exploring and exploiting the power words could hold over audiences. For the theater's critics, part of the problem of plays' affective power lay in their success at competing with sermons and religious tracts, as the lure of hedonism could all too easily override moral responsibility.⁴⁶ The sensations inspired by playgoing had consequences not only for spectators' bodies and emotions, then, but also for their minds and souls, with implications for the stability of broader social structures as well as individual well-being.

Antitheatricalists' concerns about plays' physical and emotional consequences centered especially on their potentially aphrodisiac effects. In 1583 the moralist Philip Stubbes asked, rhetorically:

Do they not maintain bawdry, insinuate foolery, and renew the remembrance of heathen idolatry? Do they not induce whoredom and uncleanness? Nay, are they not rather plain devourers of maidenly virginity and chastity? For proof whereof, but mark the flocking and running to theaters and curtains, daily and hourly, night and day, time and tide, to see plays and interludes, where such wanton gestures, such bawdy speeches, such laughing and fleering, such kissing and bussing, such clipping and culling, such winking and glancing of wanton eyes, and the like is used, as is wonderful to behold.⁴⁷

If Gosson imagines plays as invading audiences' souls through their senses, Stubbes sees them as "plain devourers of maidenly virginity and chastity" in particular. Yet Stubbes's audiences are hardly passive: their eager "flocking and running to theaters" suggests that lust is as much a

⁴⁴ Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuses* (London, 1579), sigs. B6v–B7r.

⁴⁵ On sound and hearing, see especially Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*; and Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

⁴⁶ On competition between sermons and plays, and the recurring complaint that churches lay empty because of attendance at theaters, see Peter Lake with Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ Philip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses* (London: John Kingston, 1583), sig. L8v.

motive for playgoing as a consequence of it. People attend plays in order to experience erotic pleasures vicariously, and to reproduce onstage flirtation in their own playhouse encounters. In positing imaginative identification as the precursor to an inevitable imitation, Stubbes and Gosson echo a literary tradition rooted in Plato and the Latin church fathers, and gesture towards theories of sympathy more formally developed in eighteenth-century philosophy.⁴⁸ The mimetic responses they anticipate provoked all the more alarm given the forms of erotic desire depicted in plays. Not only were lovers at best unmarried and at worst adulterous or incestuous, but with female parts played by men, they were essentially always of the same sex. Antitheatrical writers complained that plays used their considerable affective power to encourage not only illicit lust and fornication, but effeminacy and homoerotic desire.⁴⁹

Beyond their predominant concerns with sexual mores, attackers of the stage worried about the emotional responses identified with specific dramatic genres. In 1582 Gosson wrote:

The beholding of troubles and miserable slaughters that are in Tragedies, drive us to immoderate sorrow, heaviness, womanish weeping and mourning, whereby we become lovers of dumps and lamentation, both enemies to fortitude. Comedies so tickle our senses with a pleasanter vaine that they make us lovers of laughter, and pleasure, without any meane, both foes to temperance, what schooling is this?⁵⁰

For Gosson, the classical genres of tragedy and comedy assault audiences with emotions beyond control or limit. Tragedies drive audiences to tears while comedies tickle them to laughter, in both cases weakening spectators and stripping them of moral agency. Both responses were widely understood as physiological: humoral imbalances, triggered by sensory stimulus, led to uncontrollable bodily spasms.⁵¹ Associated with pleasurable and often involuntary release, tears and laughter were highly ambivalent phenomena. As the public setting most forcefully identified with both

⁴⁸ On the possibility of "a prehistory for the problem of sympathy" in this period, see especially Heather James, "Dido's Ear: Tragedy and the Politics of Response," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52:3 (2001), 360–82. On the relationship between sympathy and literary representation in a later period, see David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley* (University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁴⁹ On antitheatricality and homoeroticism, see Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodomities* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1992); Laura Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-theatricality and Effeminization 1579–1642* (Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁵⁰ Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (London, 1582), sigs. C5v–C6r. On this topic, see especially Matthew Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping in Early Modern Theatres*.

⁵¹ See Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping*, 11–23.

laughter and tears, the theater similarly attracted both the pleasures and the disapproval linked with these responses. For moralizing critics striving to limit attendance at playhouses, the theater's popular associations with intense emotion offered a firm platform for attacking its effects as irrational and immoral.

READING SENSATIONS

Anxieties about the theater were accompanied by fears about the immorality of poetry. In "A Brief Apologie of Poetrie" (1591), Sir John Harington summed up (and refuted) the principal objections: "it is a nurse of lies, a pleaser of fools, a breeder of dangerous errors, and an inticer to wantonness."⁵² Poetry's *vanitas* was thought to corrupt manners and morals; and conversations among its detractors, like those among antitheatricalists, were anchored in a humoral and affective vocabulary.⁵³ The nature, quantity, and quality of printed matter available was changing rapidly at this time, and many lamented readers' neglect of the Bible and their appetite instead for literature designed to be read for pleasure, including romances, lyric poetry, sonnets, popular histories, jest books, satires, and ballads. Just as Gosson and his contemporaries described the pleasures of the theater as a dangerous poison that crept into the ears and eyes, moralists such as Henry Crosse warned in 1603 that books with enticing covers and pretty titles were "within, full of strong venom." Their dangerous properties, once assimilated, harm "as poison doth by little and little disperse it self into every part of the body."⁵⁴ Others, such as Richard Braithwait, described the symptoms of improper reading habits spreading like "infection," corrupting readers' minds and bodies in the same way as "contagious Ulcers." The caustic term Braithwait used to describe authors who deliberately undermined their readers' inner equilibrium was "humour-mongers."⁵⁵

Recent work on material practices of reading in the period has stressed that reading, like playgoing, was a multi-sensorial experience. Poetry could be tasted, ingested, touched, and held as well as seen and heard,

⁵² Harington, "A Briefe Apologie of Poetrie," in *Orlando Furioso in English Heroical Verse* (1591), sig. 53v.

⁵³ In a chapter on "The physiology of reading," Adrian Johns explores the anatomy of the eye, brain, and nervous system, and argues that "reading exercised a remarkable power over body and mind alike." See *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 380–443 (382).

⁵⁴ Henry Crosse, *Vertues Common-wealth: Or The High-way to Honour* (1603), sigs. N4v and O2r.

⁵⁵ Richard Braithwait, *A Nursery for Gentry* (London, 1638), sigs. T3v, V3v, and N3r.

so that the intellectual processes involved in absorbing words become inseparable from “sensual encounters with material forms.”⁵⁶ Embodied practices of reading (and writing) had important consequences for the lives of individuals and societies, and often involved intense self-scrutiny and self-reflection. Theories of poetry and affect therefore overlapped in important ways with principles of emotional self-government, and writers of conduct books emphasized the importance of achieving composure, both physical and emotional, and of controlling the wayward affections with the application of reasoned judgment. Following *The Nicomachean Ethics*, an important text for many early modern writers on conduct, William Fennor warned his readers that “thine affections itch after this and that, look thou do curb them.”⁵⁷ Reading was one experience among many in which the rational faculties struggled to maintain control over irascible feeling. Since “the inordinate motions of Passions ... are thorny briars sprung from the infected root of originall sinne,” it was, however, crucial to find a way of mastering them.⁵⁸

Among the many situations and objects that Thomas Wright identifies as likely to stir up perturbations, or extreme emotions, “corrupted books” are described as particularly appealing to the sensitive appetite, which hankers after pleasure. Such books make a direct appeal to the imagination, which presents matters to the understanding “very intensively, with more show and appearance than they are indeed,” stirring up immoderate emotions and jeopardizing bodily integrity – for, as Wright points out, “there is no Passion very vehement, but that it alters extremely some of the four humors of the body.”⁵⁹ Reading was therefore an intensely involving experience (or, as Wright puts it, an “excellent stir-passion”) engaging body, mind, and soul.⁶⁰ Addressing some additional remarks to those striving to become accomplished “passion movers,” such as poets and orators, Wright advises them to bear in mind the potentially hazardous impact of their words, and to “imitate herein the common practice of prudent physitians, who apply their medicine to the same maladies with particular respect and consideration of the patients temper.”⁶¹ Wright therefore suggests that reading can harm moral, emotional, and physical

⁵⁶ See especially *The Textuality and Materiality of Reading in Early Modern England*, ed. Jennifer Richards and Fred Schurink, *Huntington Library Quarterly* (special issue), 73.3 (2010), 345–552. The quotation is found in Helen Smith’s essay “‘More Swete vnto the Eare / Than Holsome for ye Mynde’: Embodying Early Modern Women’s Reading,” 413–32, 414.

⁵⁷ William Fennor, *A Treatise Of the Affections, or The Soules Pulse* (1651), sig. M1v.

⁵⁸ Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (1601), sig. B1v.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, sigs. Y7r, E2r and B2v.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, sig. N5r. ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, sigs. N4r–N4v.

wholeness, but also hints at its capacity to heal if properly directed and applied. This two-fold reputation of poetry as both corrosive and medicinal lies at the heart of early modern conversations about literature's affective properties.

Writers dedicated to vernacular poetics also addressed the nature of the passions as an ungovernable force, and deliberated on how the sensations aroused by words could inform ethical judgment. In *A Discourse of English Poetry* (1586), William Webbe notes that "no man should dare to practise an art that is dangerous, especially before he have learned the same perfectly ... A poet should be no less skilful in dealing with the affects of the mind than a tumbler or juggler should be ready in his art."⁶² Even the most robust defenses of English versification, such as Puttenham's, acknowledged the unpredictability of the passions, arguing that poetry (compared to ordinary speech) "sooner enveigleth the judgment of man and carrieth his opinion this way and that, whithersoever the heart by impression of the ear shall be most affectionately bent and directed."⁶³ Puttenham turns the waywardness of the affections into a rough-minded defense of poetry, proposing that the sensations involved in reading and writing could contribute in important ways to a distinctively English poetics. The transformative power of poetry here does not involve *hedone* or *voluptas*, but instead offers the opportunity to foster self-mastery. In his discussion of elegy, for example, Puttenham explains that poets work by stirring up extreme feelings of grief in order finally to cure them:

This was a very necessary device of the poet and a fine: besides his poetry to play also the physician, and not only by applying a medicine to the ordinary sickness of mankind, but by making the grief it self (in part) cure of the disease ... not with any medicament of a contrary temper, as the Galenists use to cure *contraria contrariis* but as the Paracelsians, who cure *similia similibus*, making one dolor to expel another.

Lamentations work therapeutically on mourners not simply by relieving strong emotion, then, but by sympathetically eliciting a different form of "long and grievous sorrow."⁶⁴ Central to *The Art of English Poesy*, indeed, is the rhetorical property of vividness, or *energeia*, which functions by "inwardly working a stir to the mind." Puttenham therefore describes the bodies of his imagined readers as "tender and queasy"

⁶² William Webbe, "A Discourse of English Poetrie" (1586), in *Ancient Critical Essays Upon Poets and Poësy*, ed. Joseph Haslewood, 2 vols. (London: Robert Triphook, 1815), 15–95, 92.

⁶³ George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy: A Critical Edition*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 98.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 136–37.

enough to accommodate such feelings in order finally to experience their appeasement.⁶⁵

Puttenham's understanding of affect was indebted to ancient theories of rhetoric, mediated through humanist scholarship. Cicero, Ovid, and Quintilian had all noted that poets and orators used similar techniques to move their audiences, and theories of poetry developed alongside theories of rhetoric into the early modern period.⁶⁶ Classical rhetoricians taught self-expression by way of the affective triad of *docere*, *delectare*, and *movere* (teach, delight, and persuade) first formulated by Cicero in *De Oratore* and *Orator* and refined by Horace in *Ars Poetica*. Of these three parts, *movere* was perhaps the most important and complex, as it considered methods of persuasion through affect. Latin oratorical writings on this topic were indebted to the second book of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, which explored the usefulness to orators of emotional psychology, and applied the process of logical reasoning, or *techné*, to the art of persuasion. An audience must be suitably pre-disposed to feeling certain things, Aristotle argued, and must be exposed to the appropriate verbal and visual stimuli in order to experience particular feelings.⁶⁷

To this tradition, early modern writers added the particular pressures of Christian morality. Ben Jonson argued for "the impossibility of any mans being the good Poet, without first being a good man," and discussions of passionate reading touched on the importance of aspiring towards private and public virtue.⁶⁸ Theorists of rhetoric such as Thomas Wilson and Thomas Elyot, as well as literary theorists such as Puttenham, Webbe, and Sidney, all tested the emotional, appetitive or complexional feelings stirred by words against the imperative to live well. The desire to combine virtue with feeling embraces the Horatian principle of *utile et dulce*, or being both useful and sweet, according to which words should work by "helping the ear with the acquaintance of sweet numbers, but also raising the mind to a more high and lofty conceit."⁶⁹ Readers were

⁶⁵ Ibid., 227. On the "supreme animation in language" characteristic of rhetorical *energeia*, see Joseph R. Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 25.

⁶⁶ Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 278.

⁶⁷ The role of the passions in rhetoric is also described by Cicero in *De Oratore*, Book 2, and by Quintilian in *Institutio Oratoria*, Book 6. For a survey of how these ideas were received in early modern England, see Robert Cockcroft's *Rhetorical Affect in Early Modern Writing: Renaissance Passions Reconsidered* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003).

⁶⁸ Jonson, "Dedicatory Epistle," 22–23, *Volpone*, in Ben Jonson, ed. Herford, Simpson, and Simpson, vol. 5, 17.

⁶⁹ Thomas Campion, "Observations in the Art of English Poesie" (1602), in *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford University Press, 1999), 428–40 (429).

therefore encouraged to marshal the strong feelings aroused by passionate encounters with literature into exemplary mindfulness and spotless conduct.⁷⁰ The etymology of emotion suggests movement out (*emotare*), and the sensations aroused by encounters with poetry were indeed understood to affect not only individuals but also their interactions with others. As Katherine Rowe and others have argued, early modern emotions were seldom a private affair. Feelings aroused by literature (such as grief, happiness, or pride) all had social scripts, complicating our modern assumption that authentic literary responses are necessarily private and/or spontaneous.⁷¹ The history of literary reception therefore involves uncovering not only the ways in which men and women experienced the written and spoken word, but also how they sounded, looked, and behaved towards each other as they were doing so. It also involves considering a variety of audiences, all of whom encountered different pressures and expectations when they read. For although Jonson's remarks were directed primarily towards men, the instructions he and others offered were received with more or less resistance by readers whose embodied practices were informed, in different ways, by the habits of gender, class, and religion.

The social value of passionate cognition was central to writers on sacred rhetoric, such as Richard Hooker, William Perkins, and Richard Baxter, all of whom deliberated on ways in which preachers could impress upon, or pierce, the hearts of listeners, and inspire them towards shared Christian virtue. Together their writings comprise a theory of spiritual affect, or Christian *movere*, which worked to understand how God's spoken and written word could engage believers' bodies, minds, and souls. Andreas Hyperius was one of many who drew from Hebrews 4:12, noting that "the word of God is very quick and mighty in operation, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and entereth through even to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit, and of the joints and the marrow."⁷² Sermon writers worked to reconcile the awe and wonder of spiritual experience with the overwhelmingly physical sensations aroused by God's Word, wrestling in particular with the balance between powerful feeling and the cultivation of Christian morality.⁷³ Preaching without the inspiration of the

⁷⁰ Brian Vickers has called this process "voluntarist psychology"; see *In Defence of Rhetoric*, 277.

⁷¹ See *Reading the Early Modern Passions*, 12. For a more detailed discussion of "passion's social constitution," see Daniel Gross, *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle's Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), 5 and 41.

⁷² Andreas Hyperius, *The Practis of Preaching* (1577), trans. John Ludham, sig. H1r.

⁷³ Richard Waswo has described how Erasmus and Luther explored how language not only changed the mind but also moved the will, through the engagement of the emotions. "They developed a new kind (and stimulated a new industry) of biblical exegesis in which semantics is

Holy Spirit merely "tickled men's ears, and delighted them with luscious phrases of oratory," and a material vocabulary developed to describe affect which rose above the superficial appeal of sophistry. Preachers knew that "if our words be not sharpened, and pierce not as nails, they will hardly be felt by stony hearts," and drew from the etymological roots of passion in *patior*, to suffer: "The affection of joy makes the spleen to suffer, and anger makes the gall for to suffer, and fear makes the heart for to suffer; yea, the affections make humours, blood, spirits, members, even bones and all the body for to suffer."⁷⁴ The believer therefore "sets his affections upon God," and such affections quickly become legible in the body: fear of God causes trembling, love of God causes weeping, shame makes him blush. Such suffering was a necessary step towards the experience of God's Word as nourishing, healing, and consoling like "the cordiall water, the Methridate."⁷⁵ In their urge towards uniformity, such responses suggest both the problematic heterogeneity of listeners' responses to the sacred Word and the difficulties involved in promoting an introspective practice wholly consistent with Christian humility.

These theories of sacred rhetoric, together with the secular poetics of Puttenham and his contemporaries, all deliberated on the affective experiences of reading and listening. Together they anticipate later seventeenth-century developments in aesthetic theory which further developed connections between affect, civic duty, and moral responsibility. *On the Sublime*, a rhetorical treatise typically attributed to the Greek scholar and statesman Cassius Longinus, began influencing the period's literary theory as early as 1560 when Niccolo da Falgano's Italian translation appeared in manuscript. Further translations into Latin appeared in 1566 and 1572, and John Hall published an English translation, *Of the Height of Eloquence*, in 1652.⁷⁶ Nicolas Boileau's 1674 French translation is well known for its influence on John Dryden, Joseph Addison, and Sir Joshua Reynolds, but the treatise's earlier circulation illuminates Milton's rhetorical immensity in *Paradise Lost* as well as Sidney and Puttenham's

not representational, but affective and performative." See "Theories of Language," *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 3, 25–35, 34.

⁷⁴ See Fenner, *A Treatise Of the Affections*, sigs. N4r and B3v; and Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (1656), sig. 18r.

⁷⁵ Richard Hooker, *Four Learned and Godly Treatises* (1638), 209; quoted in David Leverenz, *The Language of Puritan Feeling: An Exploration in Literature, Psychology, and Social History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1980), 166–67.

⁷⁶ For a summary of the textual history of Longinus, see W. Hamilton Fyfe's introduction to his edition of *On the Sublime* (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), 155.

still earlier discussions of literature's engagement of the passions.⁷⁷ John Hall's translation argued for the importance of sublimity in seventeenth-century rhetorical and literary theory, showing that a rhetor or poet "must not only know very perfectly the agitations of his own mind, but be seen and conversant in those of others." Hall translates sublimity as "height," "transport," or "vividness":

Sublimities do not only *win*, but *astonish* their Hearers, and generally, *high* and *noble* passages smite sooner, and ore-top those others that are rather disposed for persuasion or ornament.⁷⁸

While persuasive words change the minds of those who hear them, and ornaments soothe or bring pleasure, sublime compositions with "force and an *irresistible violence* ... overcome him." In Hall's formulation, the overwhelming impact of words, and the loss of reason that such impact inevitably involves, no longer represent a source of anxiety or shame. Instead they signal superlative rhetorical achievement that is connected with the perfection of man's nature. Hall, with Longinus, aims to teach through sublimity "how we may advance our Natures to some degree of excellency."⁷⁹ If the orator's intellect and emotions are properly developed, and his style and subject matter appropriately grand, his words inspire virtue through the ignition of strong feeling. This idea, among others, was often advanced – and vigorously contested – in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Many were already experimenting with the notion that the powerful sensations aroused by literature could ennoble audiences as well as soften, enervate, or undermine them. Until the later seventeenth century, however, their writings are powerful evidence of a broader cultural struggle to accommodate strong feelings with personal virtue.

SHAKESPEAREAN SENSATIONS

Books and plays, as we have seen, were widely assumed to bring about transformative experiences with a wide range of implications for the private and public lives of readers and theatergoers. In response to the centrality

⁷⁷ For a fuller discussion of Longinus's importance in the history of reading, see Cronk, "Aristotle, Horace, and Longinus," and Colin Burrow, "Combative Criticism: Jonson, Milton, and Classical Literary Criticism in England," in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, 199–204 and 487–99.

⁷⁸ Hall, *Peri Hypsous, or Dionysius Longinus of the Height of Eloquence* (London, 1652), sigs. B3v and C1r–v.

⁷⁹ Hall, *Of the Height of Eloquence*, sigs. C2r and C1v.

of such experiences in early modern debates about literature, this volume opens a scholarly conversation about the kinds of sensations that literature represented, evoked, and interrogated. The essays in this volume do not limit their discussions to Shakespeare, but his plays and poems form their primary focus. Shakespeare offers a particularly rich source of insight into the period's assumptions and anxieties about drama, perhaps because of his extensive involvement with, and investment in, all aspects of the theater business. His plays often reflect on the importance of theater's effects, especially through the device of the play-within-the-play, and deliberate the consequences of reading, and listening to, other sorts of texts and performances. Shakespeare's poems similarly consider the ability of poetry to touch readers – sometimes therapeutically, sometimes dangerously – through ekphrases, internal performances, and embedded stories. This volume brings together new scholarship that addresses these important but under-examined questions. Our contributors' essays explore the ways that early modern texts reflect on their power over, and dependence on, their audiences' emotional and physiological responses.

The volume's first section, "Plays," explores scenes of watching, hearing, and reading in Shakespearean drama. In "Feeling fear in *Macbeth*," Allison P. Hobgood traces the ways that spectatorship involves a contagious transmission of fear and its symptoms. Linking a distinctive "legacy of fear" in *Macbeth* to the play's depiction of emotion as impervious to boundaries, Hobgood raises questions about audiences' sympathetic receptiveness to staged emotion, and the seductiveness of surrendering to overwhelming sensation. Similar questions emerge in "Hearing Iago's withheld confession" in which Allison K. Deutermann explores the conventions through which revengers typically unburden themselves both affectively and physiologically through the act of confession. If confession properly purges both body and mind of pollution, what happens to Iago and his audiences – within and outside the play – when he defies convention by refusing to speak at the play's conclusion? Hobgood and Deutermann both turn to early modern humoral theory to explore the consequences of spectatorship on mental and physical integrity. In "Self-love, spirituality, and the senses in *Twelfth Night*," Douglas Trevor examines religious discourse in order to consider scenes of reading and watching in comedy. Trevor contextualizes Malvolio's responses to Maria's letter and Feste's feigned show within early modern ideas about the role of the senses in mental apprehension, arguing that Malvolio's first audiences would have responded not only with laughter but also with pity and even admiration.

The volume's second section, "Playhouses," explores strategies through which early modern playwrights shaped the responses of audience members in theaters. In "Conceiving tragedy," Tanya Pollard examines references to pregnancy in *Hamlet* as taking part in a long-running literary conversation about tragedy, affect, and the female body. Classical literary and medical models, as well as their early English translations, identify pregnancy with a privileged access to pain and a heightened ability to transmit this pain to audiences. Pollard argues that *Hamlet's* metatheatrical meditations on tragedy confront an inherited understanding of the pregnant body's susceptibility to passionate emotion, and reformulate this model in order to imagine how a male tragic protagonist might effectively move audiences. In "Playing with appetite in early modern comedy," Hillary M. Nunn examines how the representation of hunger and feasting in Shakespeare's comedies works to stimulate spectators' appetites. Nunn argues that inducing hunger serves both a practical and a literary purpose: it encourages sales of playhouse refreshments, while also intensifying audience empathy. In "Notes towards an analysis of early modern applause," Matthew Steggle argues that the noise created by clapping forged an important interface between audience members and actors. Considering a series of epilogues that make explicit appeals for applause, Steggle suggests that plays' endings often involve imagining a productive and energizing collaboration between bodies on and off stage. In "Catharsis as 'purgation' in Shakespearean drama," Thomas Rist explores English versions of catharsis prior to the wide dissemination of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Linking medical and religious thought, Rist suggests that Galenic ideas about physiological purgation became fused with the Catholic concept of purgatory in order to form a model for the spiritual and physiological cleansing that plays offered their audiences.

The volume's third section, "Poems," moves away from the theater to explore depictions of the transformations wrought in readers by epigrams, sonnets, epyllia, and narrative poems. In "Epigrammatic commotions," William Kerwin explores the somatic functions attributed to satiric epigrams – biting, burning, wounding, purging, infecting, and curing – alongside their commitment to urban aggression. Epigrams challenge London's social cohesion by facilitating quarrelsome debate and by imagining new (and newly irascible) versions of social mobility. Wit emerges in Kerwin's discussion as both an inward, humoral attribute and a force capable of acting forcefully – though not civilly – on the urban environment. In "Poetic 'making' and moving the soul," Margaret Healy explores accounts of the poetic imagination in early modern plays, poetry,

literary criticism, and philosophical treatises. Influenced by continental Platonic thought, these writings suggest the importance of the passions, especially supra-rational love, for artistic creativity. Renaissance poetry of meditation links Neoplatonic inspiration with ecstatic devotion, seeking ways to accommodate authorial zeal with spiritual virtue. Despite its associations with pleasurable fantasy and madness, ecstatic *furor* remains at the heart of heightened invention. Michael Schoenfeldt closes this section with "Shakespearean pain" which explores how Shakespeare imagined the consequences of witnessing the pain of others. In *The Rape of Lucrece*, the experience of watching others' suffering through aesthetic encounters is shown to have an analgesic (albeit not curative) value. Schoenfeldt argues that the spectacle of suffering in *King Lear* challenges the audience to remain unmoved and reveals an ethical imperative towards sympathy. Pain may not be redemptive in either of these works, but it enables us nevertheless to appreciate the crucial value of compassion. Bruce Smith's "Afterword: Senses of an ending" draws these three sections' essays together with some further reflections on the status of sensation in the early modern period.

Together, the essays in this volume tease out some of the many ways in which Shakespeare and his contemporaries imagined literature as affecting readers and audiences. These studies are far from being exhaustive or conclusive – rather, they point towards a new area of literary exploration that we hope others will continue to develop. For classical and early modern writers, literature's potent shaping impact on audiences through their minds, emotions, souls, and bodies was its most striking, and most discussed, characteristic. Recent criticism has to a great extent lost sight of this role and its importance, and in doing so has also lost access to an important vocabulary for understanding the period's beliefs about how and why literature mattered, and what sorts of changes it was capable of bringing about. By turning our attention to the vivid and unexpected sensations attributed to literary texts in the early modern period, this volume brings these questions back to the heart of our conversations about reading and watching works of imaginative literature.