

Wonder, Touch, and Subjectivity in Scève's *Délie*.

In Maurice Scève's expression of awe, 'Admirant sa mirable merveille' (Dizain 7, l. 6)¹ there may be a trace of Plato's 'utterly beautiful and amazing' *agalma aretes* (*Symposium* 217a), the wondrous source of desire.² In the *Symposium*, moreover, these are 'images of virtue' (222a): so, for both Alcibiades and Scève's poet-lover, is the beloved the 'objet de plus haulte vertu'? For Aristotle, wonder initiates inquiry.³ For Descartes likewise: it is the first of his 'passions', it 'alters the subject's intimacy but reveals it at the same time',⁴ and triggers the desire for virtue.⁵ Philosophy, virtue, and this love poetry all begin with the affect and effect of wonder. However,

¹ All references are to Maurice Scève, *Délie: object de plus haulte vertu*, ed. by Gérard Defaux, 2 vols (Geneva: Droz, 2004).

² Plato, *Symposium*, trans. by Christopher Gill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), p. 56.

³ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. by W. D. Ross (Adelaide: University of Adelaide, 2015): 'For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize' (Book 1, 2).

<<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle/metaphysics/book1.html>> [accessed 21 December 2015].

⁴ Catherine Malabou, 'Go Wonder: Subjectivity and Affects in Neurobiological Times' in Adrian Johnston and Catherine Malabou, *Self and Emotional Life: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Neuroscience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 9.

⁵ See René Descartes, *Les Passions de l'âme*, ed. by Benoît Timmermans (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1990), §§ 69-75, pp. 84-88.

philosophical inquiry traditionally severs itself from affect, although without wonder's alteration thinking may not begin. Scève and Plato are uneasy companions, for Plato requires a choice between philosophy and love, and seems no lover of poetry. Petrarch, then, may be more compatible when embarking on a *poetic* venture into love and knowledge. Yet the *Délie* starts with wonder, marking an initial difference between the *Délie* and the *Canzoniere*. The Petrarchan tropes which abound in Scève's text do not place wonder in pole position, and if Scève's narrative begins with the *innamoramento*, his version also differs from Petrarch's in its emphasis on love's touch as much as its look.

The long textual prehistory of that look of love returns us to Plato and Aristotle, via, among others, Marot, Ficino, and Augustine. Familiarity with such intertexts may make Scève's text more accessible,⁶ but its relationship with its precursors feels peripheral to our enjoyment. Take Dizain 231's opening lines: 'mes deux flancs malades' (l. 2) echoes Ovid's trope of the body sick with love, and there is a trace of Ficino's vital spirits in 'mortelz espritz' (ibid); the sighs and tears of the martyr to love, 'mon grief martyre' (l. 1), are familiar from both Petrarch and troubadour poets. Yet these are mere footings for what is exciting in the *dizain*: the

⁶ See, for instance, the editions of the text by I. D. McFarlane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966) and Defaux, and, to name just a few of the studies that illuminate this dimension, Doranne Fenoaltea, 'The Final Dizains of Scève's *Délie* and the *Dialogo d'Amore* of Sperone Speroni', *Studi Francesi*, 59 (1976), 201-25; François Rigolot, 'L'Intertexte du dizain scévian', *Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Études Françaises*, 32 (1980), 93-106; and JoAnn DellaNeva, *Song and Counter-Song: Scève's 'Délie' and Petrarch's 'Rime'* (Lexington: French Forum, 1983).

lexis of affect, the working through of the radical consequences of a passion that begins with wonder's blinding flash. No moping Petrarchan lover, this poet-lover battles his way to an uncanny new knowledge of his being: 'de moy je m'espouvante' (l. 10). Conventional sighs and tears are 'trop desgoustément fades' (l. 5), insipid and disgusting; worse, hope arrives to reduce him to 'perplexité' and 'anxiété' (ll. 7, 9). Out of this disorientation insight emerges. With horror he confronts his – disgusting, undead ('mortelz espritz') – core, his mortality. 'Perplexité', 'anxiété', 'desgoust', and 'espouvanter': this is a new poetics of affect, speaking of a version of subjectivity more visceral and dissonant than love lyric's accustomed forms.

Unsurprisingly, the *Délie*'s initial *dizains* attract critical attention;⁷ it all begins with that look, and the poet-lover here has been described as 'tout œil'.⁸ Eyes, look, gaze, and vision are fundamental to this representation; these inherited tropes speak of the values of love lyric and their philosophical underpinnings. The work of vision is 'the meeting of subject and object':⁹ this neat abstraction reminds us of vision's significance beyond lyric's representation of love (subject encounters object

⁷ See for instance Lance K. Donaldson-Evans, 'Love's Fatal Glance: Eye Imagery in Maurice Scève's *Délie*', *Neophilologus*, 62 (1978), 201-11, and Terence Cave, 'Scève's *Délie*: Correcting Petrarch's Errors', in *Pre-Pléiade Poetry*, ed. by Jerry C. Nash (Lexington: French Forum, 1985), pp. 111-24.

⁸ Hans Staub, *Le Curieux Désir: Scève et Peletier du Mans, poètes de la connaissance* (Geneva: Droz, 1967), p. 37.

⁹ See Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil: Optical Theory and Medieval Allegory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), p. 22.

of desire).¹⁰ After Plato, in Western philosophy vision can seem synonymous with knowing (subject ‘sees’ object of knowledge), which may give vision particular credence in this text saturated with the desire to know the beloved and the ‘truth’ of love.¹¹

Despite familiar tropes and prevalent mood, the text remains challenging. If in the thick of the *Délie*’s obscurities we derive some clarity from vision, thereby implicitly settling the narrative within certain traditions, this may be at the expense of its specifics: vision’s touch and association with wonder. In Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* it is *love*’s arrows that open the attack: Laura’s eyes bind him (Sonnet 3), but only later will they assault (Sonnet 39), strike, and wound him (Sonnet 75); her gaze is initially more benign.¹² The *Délie*’s emphasis on *Délie*’s (deadly) gaze’s tactile (piercing, penetrating) force brings new questions about the nature of embodiment and about perception, emotion, and cognition into the narrative, as does the affect of wonder (in *Dizains* 2 and 7). Wonder and touch are interesting in their own right; so, too, is the relationship between them. After all, touch’s associations with the body and contiguity seem in tension with wonder’s distal, disembodied qualities.

How does the moon that is the beloved (source of light and, indirectly, reflection) become ‘infuse dans mes veines’ (*Dizain* 22, l. 7), or astonish his soul:

¹⁰ David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) explores the long history of the subject.

¹¹ For a survey of the persistent ocularcentrism of Western thought and art see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

¹² F. Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. by G. Contini (Einaudi: Turin, 1964)

<http://www.letteraturaitaliana.net/pdf/Volume_2/t319.pdf> [accessed 26 May 2016].

‘M’estonna l’Ame’ (Dizain 6, l. 6)? Such metaphors belong to established narrative, philosophical, and figural conventions originating in early Greek philosophy and optics. We could also read instances of vision’s touch as purely figurative. But are they? Their occurrence suggests an interest in embodied experience and understanding that vision, sight, or the gaze alone do not foster, and which remains largely unexplored by scholars.¹³ For instance, the eye’s penetrating action is a form of touch whose violent effects exceed the vestiges of Platonist theories of sight and the familiar topoi of Petrarchan poetry relating to the *innamoramento*, and what Donaldson-Evans names the ‘aggressive eye topos’.¹⁴ His interpretation illuminates the force of the gaze, but not its tactile nature, or the conceptualization of the body that subtends Scève’s development of the trope: for Donaldson-Evans, *Délie* as ‘l’Idée’, *Idein* (she who is seen) prevails (see 206).¹⁵

The authoritative Aristotelian hierarchy of the senses inherited by sixteenth-century humanists established vision’s distance from touch; the former is associated with mind and spirit, the latter with the body. Vision holds the privilege of distance; touch, the problem of contiguity. So what if vision and touch are contiguous – a

¹³ Dizain 291’s thematization of the limits of visual representation suggests a desire for a poetics of sensation and perception beyond the visual. See Ann Rosalind Jones and H. Bruce von Ohlen, “‘Si doux et attrayant subject’: Scève’s *Délie* and Four Modern Critics’, *Romanic Review*, 68 (1977), 85-102 (p. 101).

¹⁴ See ‘Love’s fatal glance’, p. 201.

¹⁵ Notable exceptions to a tendency in studies of the *Délie* to focus on abstraction and ascesis are Simone Perrier, ‘A la recherche d’un corps imaginaire’, *Cahiers Textuels*, 34 (1987), 27-33, and Thomas Hunkeler, *Le Vif du sens: corps et poésie selon Maurice Scève*, (Geneva: Droz, 2003).

piercing or wounding look? We may declare the adjective metaphorical, but its associations with sensation and fleshy matter do not dematerialize. The part played in the *Délie* by touch and the versions of embodiment it evokes is not congruous with many of its intertexts, least of all those informed by Ficino's disembodied Neoplatonism. When Petrarchan and other love lyric arcs from the sensual to the spiritual, justifying love as a gateway to transcendent truth, here the body, and with it, touch persist. Embodied desire may be dramatized by the poet-lover's bitter complaint against 'aimer honnestement' (Dizain 41, l. 5) which embargoes touch, or accepted: witness the final *dizain*'s 'peu de difference | Entre l'ardeur [...] | Et la vertu' (Dizain 449, ll. 5-7). Affect, thought, and embodiment seem to remain interrelated, as, ultimately, the juniper remains rooted in earth ('Nostre Genevre [...] vivra' (Dizain 449, l. 9)). To trace this through from beginning to end is beyond the reach of this discussion; its focus is primarily on early *dizains* and their staging of both wonder and touch, and on significant instances of touch's later recurrence.

'Sa poignant' veue'

As Dizains 2, 6, and 7 insist, wonder transfixes and transforms the (future) poet-lover, who declares: 'M'estonna l'âme' (Dizain 6, l. 6), 'tellement tient mes esprits ravis, | En admirant sa mirable merveille' (Dizain 7, ll. 5-6).¹⁶ Conventionally, wonder surprises the subject into having a feeling about himself and into thinking about what he is feeling; the advent / event of wonder holds feeling and thinking together, but will give thinking priority. Here, instead, we find embodied thinking, through which

¹⁶ Dizain 7 includes all six of what will be the Cartesian 'passions de l'âme': wonder, love, hate, desire, joy, and sadness.

affect and desire pulse: for instance, ‘Je me dissous en ioyes, & en pleurs’ (Dizain 4, l. 10). Already by the end of Dizain 6, her beauty has astonished him into enslavement and new awareness of his *mortality*. Wonder’s association with touch (via the ‘poignant’ veue’) and therefore with contiguity and the flesh forces it away from the purity and distance associated with vision, and raises questions bearing, not least, on the relationship between ‘l’ardeur’ and ‘la vertu’. What form of desire for truth and knowledge is prompted by this encounter with the beloved?

Because of its associations with knowledge since Antiquity, vision has tended to operate as the underlying structure of Western subjectivity.¹⁷ To rethink the relationship between vision and touch is to allow a different version of both subjectivity and knowledge. This is evident in the work of feminist thinkers such as Luce Irigaray and Rosi Braidotti, and recent theorists of haptics,¹⁸ and, in the field of early modern studies, in Elizabeth Harvey’s *Sensible Flesh*,¹⁹ a collection of essays exploring ‘how tactility has organized knowledge and defined human subjectivity’ (p. 2). My ambit is more limited: the poetic valence of touch, and its powerful ambiguity as sensation, emotional resonance, or both. Vision may have been that ‘underlying structure’ for Scève and his poetic predecessors. His poems do not displace vision so

¹⁷ On the concepts inherited by sixteenth-century thinkers, see for instance Akbari, *Seeing Through the Veil*, chapters 1 and 2.

¹⁸ See, for example Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux: capitalisme et schizophrénie* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), and Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Durham NJ: Duke University Press, 2000).

¹⁹ *Sensible Flesh: On Touch in Early Modern Culture*, ed. by Elizabeth Harvey (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

much as explore ways in which, just as love disrupts the desire for ‘pure’ knowledge, so vision is unsettled by contiguity with touch (and hence, flesh), and contiguity (touch’s mode) competes with distance (sight’s prerogative, along with hearing’s). That vision and touch lean on each other suggests the coexistence of different conceptualizations of the relationship between body and mind, sense and intellect. Touch’s pivotal presence becomes clearer if we add to it and to wonder two other initial key terms: the wound and wandering.

Enter the careless wanderer – the aimless, not-yet-thinking subject. A metonymic eye (the first word of the first *dizain*) represents his being; however, this eye is far from aligned with mind, knowledge, or insight. The beloved-to-be’s gaze transforms him: her beauty will reveal his mortality to him in a blinding flash (Dizains 6 and 7). He will lose his illusory bearings – which have their basis in a fantasy of being whole and intact. For not only does her gaze penetrate and wound him: ‘sa poignant’ veue [...] | Vint penetrer’ (Dizain 1, ll. 4-6); it (therefore, she) awakens him to his previously unacknowledged dejected dark core: ‘plus m’allume et plus, dont m’esmerveille, | Elle m’abysme en profondes tenebres’ (Dizain 7, ll. 9-10). Much later, he returns to this, in that moment of self-horror: ‘de moy je m’espouvante’ (Dizain 231, l. 10). This is the price of becoming the poet-lover, a man of words, but initially, it remains a source of wonder; it is not yet horror, but tinged with incoherence and anxiety.

Initially, his sense of embodied being, awakened by her beauty and his desire, is stylized as ‘Corps, Coeur, Raison’ (Dizain 1, l. 5), voice (Dizain 5), sight, and all

his other senses.²⁰ However, a more idiosyncratic representation will develop. I shall pursue the analysis of embodiment shortly, but first shall focus on what emerges in the early *dizains* where the unorthodox presence of touch unsettles familiar tropes and structures.

Where correspondence or consonance had operated between ‘physiology’ and ‘psychology’ and between texts, here, dissonance and gaps seem to prevail, whether in the conventionalized disjunction (therefore heuristic conjunction), between her beauty (therefore goodness) and her cruelty or ambiguity: ‘ton oeil cruellement benin’ (Dizain 372, l. 3), or in terms of his own embodied being, as the contrast between the heady wandering of the first *dizain* and the confused wanderings of Dizain 164 suggests. Both *dizains* represent intense emotion, but the latter conveys the effects of being subject to excessive pleasure and pain beyond enduring. Here he is submerged in love’s fathomless turmoil (‘Gouffre amer’ (l. 3)), dying of love (‘je perissois’ (l. 8)); wandering no longer connotes light-heartedness but evokes the wave-driven drift of a corpse: ‘Comme corps mort vaguant en haute Mer [...] | J’errois’ (ll. 1-3). His feelings are so conflicted – now hope, now bitter despair – that: ‘Tout estourdy point ne me congnoissoys’ (l. 10). Anxiety, love, acute awareness of mortality are dislocated from a body, which signifies, instead, as the denaturalized body of analogy (‘Comme corps mort vaguant en haute Mer’ (l. 1)) – an analogy, moreover, derived

²⁰ On the apparent – culturally orthodox – correspondence between physiology and psychology in the text, see Jean Céard, ‘Sens, coeur, raison, mémoire dans *Délie*: la psychologie de Scève’, *Cahiers Textuels*, 34 (1987), 15-25.

from an existing prestigious source (Virgil, *Aeneid*, III, ll. 192-208),²¹ thus markedly removed from specific embodied existence. The body's lifelessness is at odds with the poet-lover's turbulent passions, and his capacity to understand what he feels is adrift from those feelings. The mere sound of her name ('Soubdain au nom d'elle' (l. 7)) casts him from inertness into a state of confusion magnified by 'estourdy's' contradictory connotations of both turbulence and numbness.²² However, to drift free from the overwhelming corporeal experience of desire results in loss of being. The first-person subject pronoun appears only twice, with the verbs 'errer' and périr'; the *dizain's* last words of self-loss 'point ne me congnoysois' enact this through their elision of pronominal identity. If his beloved holds out hope to him, he does not recognize that hope as his; if his feelings seem tempestuous, at their heart, the last line's self-estrangement implies, is a void.

Dissonance, breach, and wound: such is the embodied subjectivity precipitated by the touch of love together with its more visual element, the gaze. The gaze arouses wonder, while touch animates awareness of embodiment, acting simultaneously as both a bridge and a severance: a bridge between thought, feeling, and a form of corporeality, but a severance from both the organic and symbolically mediated body. If this poet-lover represents his experience of love more viscerally than his predecessors, this still offers only a simulacrum of unmediated, organic corporeality.

²¹ P. Vergili Maronis *Æneidos Liber Tertius*

<<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/vergil/aen3.shtml>> [accessed 26 May 2016].

²² See Randle Cotgrave, *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (1611),

<<http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/cotgrave/search/410r.html>> [accessed 23 March 2016].

The tempest analogy represents the effects of passionate desire, which disturbs the poet-lover's illusion of having a body that is unified and intact, representable simply and adequately as 'Corps'. It also conveys the extremity of the disorientation and disillusionment experienced: less an expression of an inner emotional state than a suggestion of radical loss of an identity which could still be imagined as being spatially boundaried, for the tempest both engulfs him and surges inside him. Not that the 'outside' expresses the 'inside'; this would presume conceptually inappropriate models of meaning, such as a depth model or a correspondence model, resting on the notion that inner emotion precedes expression. Instead, here the embodied self is produced and experienced as an effect of the intensities of desire, the movements of which produce the effect of depth or interiority, rather than emanating from them.

Scève captures acutely, firstly, the unpredictable simultaneity of articulation / gesture, and emotion, and understanding, or the disjunction between them. Second, while the poet-lover laments his loss of self and orientation, and feels imperilled, we may read this loss as a movement from one form of wandering to another, not a loss of self so much as a painful realization of the illusory nature of his former coherence. Peril may produce painful / transformative lucidity.

This is not a recovery of a more immediately experienced embodiment; rather, it is a recognition of the already denaturalized nature of embodied human 'nature'. This, or so my argument goes, is a form of the work done by touch in this text's rewriting of love's tropes and structures, as readings of a number of *dizains* will demonstrate. At stake are not only the touch of love's look but also other instances of touch, as both sensation and affect. However, touch's violent occurrence at the outset, which is so different from the beginning of Petrarch's representation, has dramatic significance in the context of that 'essential' trope, the look of love. Where the look

had become familiar, its figurative deadly power bypassing questions of embodied subjectivity and instead, privileging re-presented emotions, now look's touch, and with it, fleshy associations, bring embodiment back into play, together with questions about the physiology of vision and its relationship with desire: still questions today, if currently for neuroscience quite as much as for a range of art forms.

The touch of love

Aristotle's *De Anima* and *De Sensu* informed the conceptualization of sensation inherited by Scève's generation. Contributions over time by philosophers both pagan and Christian (including Plato, Plotinus, Stoics, Augustine, and Boethius) built on Aristotle's categorizing approach, and his hierarchy of the senses remained constant. Eye and ear, the supposedly more distal senses, took precedence. The remaining three – smell, taste, and last, touch – followed, as more proximate sensations, judged bound to the body. Yet touch was valued as the first sense to form *in utero*, and as necessary for survival;²³ and, paradoxically, as a preminent source of information about the material world, a source of precision, in which 'we far excel all other species in exactness of discrimination',²⁴ despite being the most diffuse of sensations, in its physiological location and as experienced – as theorists of haptics remind us.²⁵

²³ Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. by J. A. Smith, Book III, 12, 434b

<<http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Aristotle/De-anima/de-anima3.htm>> [accessed 7 August 2015].

²⁴ *De Anima*, Book II, 9, 421a.

²⁵ See, for instance, Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) and Mark Paterson,

The gap between eye and touch is clear in Ficino's Neoplatonism: 'de ses six puissances de l'ame [he includes reason], trois y en a qui appartiennent au corps & matiere, sçavoir est, l'attouchement, le gout & le sentiment, & les trois aultres, asçavoir raison, le [sic] veue, & l'ouye, à l'esprit'.²⁶ Scève's representation is not dualist; while aspects of Neoplatonism run through the *Délie*, it does not end in Neoplatonist transcendence; touch is neither denigrated nor a stable signifier. Moreover, as the beloved's 'chair tendre' (Dizain 237, l. 3) reminds us, as does the violent fantasy of her, naked in her husband's arms allowing his touch: 'Hà [...] il la touche' (Dizain 161, l. 5), the body from which Ficino seeks distance is the erotic body, desired and desiring flesh. Touch and sex went hand in hand in theories of sensation.

Whatever the limits of Aristotle's ideas – an inadequate contact theory, constrained by available physiological models – they still set the agenda, not least touch's inferiority by association with contiguity, in contrast to distal sight. Contiguity bespeaks intimacy and moreover, erroneously, an immediacy that vision lacked. Distance was identified with clear and distinct perception and thence understanding, but touch as a means of collapsing distance was, nonetheless, valued by some theorists after Aristotle. This supposedly unmediated aspect shaped touch's

Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies (London: Bloomsbury, 2007). The range of interest galvanized by virtual reality and information technology is too vast to do other than indicate here.

²⁶ Marsilio Ficino, *Le Commentaire de Marsille Ficin, Florentin: sur le Banquet d'Amour de Platon: faict Francois par Symon Sylvius, dit J. de la Haye*, (Poitiers, 1546), Oraison Cinquiesme chap. II, xxxviii v^o-xl v^o, cited in *Délie*, ed. by Defaux, II, 394-95.

later function as a source of certainty, supplementing sight – witness Doubting Thomas. This is not its significance in the *Délie*, however: no sensation (touch or other), no thinking or reasoning, offers certain understanding or material proof of the meaning of the poet-lover's experience of love and desire, except in its dislocated, dislocating instances, such as the marital coupling which stings him ('Je me vultre en l'Ortie' (Dizain 161, l. 3)) into viscerally certain awareness of his abject suffering.

This absence of fixed meaning is enhanced by the diffuseness of touch: the organ of touch is skin, or more precisely flesh, rather than a precise orifice such as the eye; it is experienced diffusely over the skin's surface at the same time as at the point of contact.²⁷ This diffuseness maps seamlessly onto the – untouchable – beloved, who in the poet-lover's representations has no centre but is all centre, as well as being centre of, and everywhere in, his world. Moreover, touch is both sensation and source of affect, for example: 'Touchant sa chair precieusement vive' (Dizain 349, l. 3), 'Qui si au vif iusques au coeur me touche' (Dizain 233, l. 4), and 'Te cours à moy, quand mon erreur me touche' (Dizain 57, l. 3). It also conveys the eye's agency, the 'poignant' veue' that penetrates his soul. The part touch plays in this look of love – *poignant*, *perçant*, *penetrer* – violently dramatizes the *desire* to enter, get under the skin, to reach, and thereby know – or so some fantasize – the 'innermost' being ('l'Ame de mon Ame' (Dizain 1, l. 6)).

²⁷ However remote Aristotelian physiology is from twenty-first-century ideas, here Aristotle's thinking resonates with the current view that touch receptors are located between dermis and epidermis – somewhat akin to Ambroise Paré's: 'le toucher [...] est fait [...] en une peau nerveuse disposee par tout le corps, & mise sous la peau' (*Œuvres*: Paris, 1633), p. 21.

Love's knowledge

Cuidant ma dame un rayon de miel prendre,
 Sort une Guêpe, âpre comme la Mort,
 Qui l'aiguillon lui fiche en sa chair tendre
 Dont de douleur le visage tout mort,
 "Ha, ce n'est pas, dit-elle, qui me mord
 Si durement, cette petite Mouche;
 J'ai peur qu'amour sur moi ne s'escarmouche.

– Mais que crains-tu? Lui dis-je brièvement,
 Ce n'est point lui, Belle: car quand il touche,
 Il point plus doux, aussi plus grièvement." (Dizain 237)

In this playful *dizain*, in a scene perhaps originating in Theocritus's *Idyll* XIX,²⁸ in which Cupid was stung by a bee, a wasp stings the beloved. A pain so sharp must be love's sting, she fears. In Theocritus's poem Cupid's mother, smiling, enlightens him: the bee's sting was like his own. Scève displaces love: it is not Cupid who is stung, not love in the form of Venus who knows what's what. His version plays on the homophony of bites and death, 'Mort', 'mord', and 'mort', a verbal confusion setting up a dialogue in which the poet-lover is cast as the one who knows – expert in love, unlike Délie. Love's sting is both sweeter and worse than the insect's, he says; that he can differentiate between the two is an example of embodied, affective knowledge.

²⁸ See Theocritus, *Idyll* XIX, trans. By J. M. Edmonds

<http://www.theoi.com/Text/TheocritusIdylls1.html> [accessed 26 May 2016].

Scève's retelling plays with love's knowledge: Theocritus's themes are displaced from mother and son, embodiments of love, onto the beloved and the poet-lover.²⁹ The *dizain* combines the theme of recognition and the reader's pleasure in play and recognition enabled by reliable intertexts. That love's impact (and hence knowledge of it) is felt through touch here, is more than a commonplace. In Theocritus (and in Strozzi's and Marot's versions), Venus smiles or laughs as she enlightens her son; here the poet-lover speaks 'brièvement', concisely, without the mollification of a smile. Instead, he emphasizes the paradox that Délie should recognize: love's sting is both sweeter and more pleasant, and more painful than the wasp's. This paradox has little reach, it seems, for Délie will remain apparently unmoved by love for many *dizains* to come. Nor does the 'Mort'/'mort'/'mord' play disturb the reader: no one will really die. What *is* unsettling here is the rare focus on Délie's embodiment, her 'chair tendre', and her sensual appetite (the honey-thief), rather than the poet-lover's – though he is allowed the veiled expression of his desire to sting / touch her, rather than simply speak of it to her.

Délie's more abiding associations are with the power of her eyes and her presence as a 'merveilleux spectacle' (Dizain 97, l. 1), and with her radiance (an ascribed quality, diffused over the skin): so far so conventional. Her flesh is only explicitly mentioned once more (Dizain 349), in another oblique instance of the poet-lover's desire to touch her. This being love-lyric, we read more about the poet-lover's self-preoccupation than about the beloved's attributes, other than largely symbolic surface detail: eyebrows, occasionally mouth, and above all, eyes, with their divine and deadly power. Her presence may be more than surface, but if she has a mind and heart, that heart is, crucially, 'impenetrable' (Dizain 330, l. 1) – unlike his.

²⁹ See Defaux, *Délie*, II, 276-77.

Occasionally physical details feature, but what matters is their absence. If Délie (even) has a body, it is not her own: there is no distracting matter, only an absence in keeping with his desire – for what is absent. Her represented ‘body’ is primarily an empty space for his desire to fill, constructed by his desire (as well as by all the poetic intertexts which echo intermittently here) – a reminder, if we think back to the body represented in *Dizain* 164, that the embodied self is produced and experienced – as an effect of the intensities of drives and desire, whose pulses produce the effect of depth or interiority.

By contrast, the poet-lover seems strongly embodied. Senses, heart, mind, and memory are recurrent aspects of his psycho-physiological representation – apparently a symbolic, somewhat dematerialized body, corresponding to states of mind and feeling. Nevertheless a more organic, though no less imaginary, body makes its presence felt in references to the poet-lover’s neck, breast, armpit, hips, flank, and pulse, blood, veins, kidneys, entrails, bones, skin, and bones piercing skin. Several of these organic substances offend the conventional poetics of the body in love lyric; moreover, this is not a simple correspondence of outside and inside, or the clear antithesis of her impenetrability and untouchability. While she, ‘celestement humaine’ (*Dizain* 372, l. 7), epitomizes an ideal whereby the body seems not to encumber the soul, his embodiment persists, neither neatly corresponding to pre-existing codes, nor as a stable site of identity. The body is wounded, assaulted (*Dizain* 206), breached, penetrated, suffocated, hyperaroused; sweating, fevered, itching, weeping ... an imperilled body, ‘violenté’ (*Dizain* 398, l. 1). Terms – such as ‘fièvre’ – have interchangeably literal and figurative functions, unpredictably conflating bodily states, emotional turmoil, and metaphor. Imaginary the body may be, but its corporeality is

abiding, even while written over by language, in a representation of which discrepancy or gap rather than correspondence is the mark.

A late *dizain*, 439, presents an analogy between the poet-lover's sense of self and a sponge. It draws on Speroni's *Dialogo*,³⁰ in which the lover wants to be fused with the beloved like water in a sponge. Scève's poet-lover (not Speroni's generalized 'lo amante') absorbs Speroni's sponge image, and gives it a more aggressive twist than is already implicit in a verb such as 'pénétrer' (l. 4):

Alimenté est le sens du doux songe
 De vain plaisir, qui en tous lieux m'entame,
 Me penetrant comme l'eau en l'éponge,
 Dedans lequel il m'abysme et me plonge,
 Me suffoquant toute vigueur intime. (ll. 2-6)

As a variation on the theme of the struggle between flesh and spirit, Scève's version dwells more on and in the body than does its source. Speroni's expression of desire (for libidinous desire to be quashed for the spirit to ascend free), quickly moves from desire to penetrate the beloved to his point of comparison, whereas here embodiment persists, as befits sticky desire ('desir si glueux' (Dizain 276, l. 5)). The force and physicality of the verbs conveying desire's overwhelming power, 'penetrer' and 'abysmer', are freighted with resonances which accumulate across the *Délie*.³¹

³⁰ See Defaux, II, 473-74, and Fenoaltea, 'The final dizains of Scève's *Délie*, pp. 215-16.

³¹ Parts of the verb 'penetrer' occur twelve times, and of 'abysmer' or 's'abysmer', seven times across the text.

Suffocation, penetration, a sponge dramatize the defenceless permeability of the embodied subject; suffocation and penetration convey a tactile, biomaterial representation of corporeality, perhaps – but he is cut off from that matter even when it ‘feels’ acutely his, and it also lacks coherent narrative or linguistic identity. In contrast both to *Délie* – a surface, or collection of symbolic details – and to prevailing representations of the body as a stable array of symbolic attributes, and also in contrast to the distance upheld between subject and object when vision is primary, here the poet-lover’s embodied identity is marked by the dissolution of its presupposed boundaries, as effected and figured by the touch of love, which breaches the imaginary enclosure of the body, penetrating both heart and soul. Even when, initially, Scève works with vision, he brings touch into play; syntactically – the ‘poignant’ *veue*’ of *Dizain* 1 – and conceptually, vision and touch are contiguous, and touch can function as a metaphor for gaining access to what feels as if it is inside, conveying both erotic and epistemological desire.

The touch of love: taken by surprise?

Dizain 237 seems an inconsequential interlude, but it brings home the power of touch. Theocritus’s tale culminated in Venus’s comparison between the bee’s sting and Cupid’s darts. Here, instead, comparison (between the wasp’s and love’s sting) generates the narrative, and now *Délie*, not Cupid, is the honey-thief – and she is already associated with all that is (bitter)sweet. Also, the original comparison has become a metaphor; rather than comparing sting and dart, we move from the sting to love’s touch which stings (‘*point*’). These conversions attest the secure multivalency of touch, denoting now sensation, now affect, or ambiguously both.

The verb *chatouiller*, to tickle or excite, which occurs six times in the *Délie*, allows us to consider touch and skin, or, as here, tender flesh, together. Both meanings of *chatouiller* are ambiguously literal and figurative, tactile and affective; moreover, tickling is a paradigm of eroticized touch. As such, it is worth exploring as a potentially illuminating example of early modern epistemologies of the body and interest in what can be known via the body in a philosophically problematic state. That is, the erotically and passionately enlivened body, which may disrupt habitual thought-patterns and object relations and, together with the thoughts inspired by love, surprise the poet-lover into new self-understanding. Sixteenth-century debates about the reliability of sense-perception imply that humans do not coincide with their organic corporeality. Whilst vision allows, and is valued for allowing, the illusion of distance between mind and body, touch and being touched acknowledge embodiment and invite the illusion of immediate coincidence. In the *Délie*, *chatouiller*'s ambiguities convey an implied continuity between the sensation and experience of eroticized touch and being affected, and also have the capacity to represent that physiological and emotional event, which might seem to suggest that 'Corps, Coeur, et Raison' are experienced as being on a continuum rather than in conflict, even to the extent that erotic desire can coexist with virtuous desire: 'Corps, Coeur, et Raison [...] [et] l'Ame'. If this is the case, it still remains to explore the complexities, and cost, of such embodied and affective thinking.

The narrative of love begins with the surprise that accompanies wonder: in Dizain 6 the poet-lover remembers: 'l'œil [...] | Se veit surpris de la douce presence | Qui par sa haulte, et divine excellence | M'estonna l'Ame, et le sens' (ll. 3-6). Love takes us by surprise. Tickling also surprises in that it may be a first, unexpected experience of pleasure becoming too much and thus pain. Poets surprise readers with

their use of this verb, giving us the pleasure of exploring which significance prevails: tactile or affective – or both? In the *Délie*, both love and tickling keep surprising: there are numerous recurrences and variants of the *innamoramento* (for instance Dizains 1-7, 30, 42, 145, and 147), and numerous instances of *chatouiller*, each unexpected and different. For Scève, as three of these suggest, the vivid connotations of this form of touch, used in relation to (vain) hope (Dizain 99), to desire which is erotic but also aspires to virtue (Dizain 118), and to emotional pain (Dizain 258), accrue, enrich each other, and resonate together over the text's time and space. Its connotations keep body and mind together, and amplify our understanding of the experience that the poet-lover is at pains to articulate and thereby understand for himself.

Dizain 99's mood is bitter: to love is to live certain only of uncertainty; this would be suffering enough, were he not to hope against hope for eventual release from such 'fiebvre' (l. 6) – into what? Certain happiness? Scève here gives a material edge to the disease of love topos with a vivid tactile, unpoetic analogy. 'Je dy, qu'esper est la grand' prurison | Qui nous chatouille à toute chose extreme' (ll. 7-8): hope is an inflamed rash which drives us, scarcely distinguishing the pain from the pleasure of its itch, to the most illusory beliefs – not least, that the pain might end in pleasure. Touch in this *dizain* seems to bear out Aristotle's identification of it as the sensation furthest from mind – but notwithstanding, it functions a source of self-knowledge. However, in Dizain 118 its relationship with mind and soul has more compass and tense ambiguity:

Le hault penser de mes frailes desirs

Me chatouilloit à plus haulte entreprise,

Me desrobant moy mesme à mes plaisirs,
 Pour destourner la memoire surprise
 Du bien auquel l'Ame demoura prise;
 Dont, comme neige au Soleil, je me fondz,
 Et mes souspirs dès leurs centres profondz
 Si haultement eslevent leurs voix vives
 Que, plongeant l'Ame et la mémoire au fondz
 Tout je m'abysme en oublieuses rives.

We might read here a conventionalized struggle between flesh and spirit. However, ambiguity sutures the two desires in play: one erotic, one for that which is 'hault [...] plus haulte' – first and last, the 'plus haulte vertu' of the text's title. *Chatouiller*, to excite, yokes body and mind, connects 'penser', 'desirs', 'plaisirs', 'mémoire', 'bien', and 'Ame', stimulating both pleasure and the desire to go beyond it, 'à plus haulte entreprise': this is not dichotomy but continuum, even if that continuum speaks of human frailty. However, in lines 6-10 the cost of high aspiration emerges: it leads to melting of identity and abyssal loss of self. Set on a continuum with the material analogy of snow melting in the sun and the dramatic physicality of such verbs as 'plonger' and 's'abymer', the intimations of 'chatouilloit', 'desrobant', and 'prise' (the last two of which point up the more aggressive potential of tickling / exciting) become clearer. 'Prise', as a term in a sequence of verbs with physical connotations, lends material substance to the spirit. The final despairing self-loss reveals what has touched (as well as excited) the poet-lover: the glimpse of a continuity between body and spirit, realized in erotic love, to depart from which would be violent self-destruction. The choice of the apparently nonchalant verb 'chatouilloit' which plays

between ‘pensers’, ‘desirs’, and ‘Ame’ conceals the extent to which the higher, virtuous desire does violence to the poet-lover’s embodied being, and also, it is hinted, endangers the soul, by capturing it with force, ‘prise’. Freedom from the body (that Petrarchan ‘good’), here seems to bring the spirit unfreedom.

In Dizain 258, by contrast, we are on firmer narrative and tropological ground:

Le Coeur, de soy foiblement resoulu,
 Souffroit asses la chatouillant’ poincture
 Que le traict d’or, fraichement esmoulu,
 Luy avoit fait sans aulcune ouverture. (ll. 1-4)

Cupid’s golden dart (l. 9) pierced the poet-lover’s heart without an entry wound. This is an old story, which we could read conventionally, figuratively – despite remembering many more instances of his body (with all its organic substance such as flank, kidneys, and entrails) being breached and his heart wounded. Nonetheless, the adjective ‘chatouillant’ lends the telling more texture, rescuing the body from the hold of purely figurative convention, and reminding the reader of the physiological effects of love and desire – as do many other *dizains* (such as 108, 125, and 155) with which Dizain 258 thus resonates. This *dizain*’s unsettling effects reprise the seismic disturbance of the first encounter with love. Again it conveys a way of thinking about the experience to which the poet-lover is subject (‘souffroit’) that exceeds representational conventions, and is one instance among many in which erotic touch is both a source of new insight and an acknowledgement that a material, albeit mediated, body persists. His countervailing desire for freedom (from love) (ll. 5-8) is

no match for it; and there is no mention, even, of will, spirit, or soul in this *dizain* – they are out of the game.

Despite the different tones of *Dizains* 118 and 258, in both the touch of love involves loss of boundaries. In the latter, the ‘chatouillant’ *poincture*’ is suffered, and in the former, even more radical loss of being: ‘je me fondz’, ‘je m’abysme’. The lack of boundaries is echoed in *Dizain* 439, which represents the lover as a sponge, the poet as a sponge in a sea of intertexts, and the poet-lover lost in the deeps of a sea of pleasure (only) dreamt of. A puncture-wound penetration becomes fathomless self-loss; that the wound tickles activates a latent association of the experience of being tickled, which takes us to the edge of pleasure. This wound (*Dizain* 258, l. 4) does not penetrate; or does it? The helpless laughter that tickling provokes turns in a split-second into a tight-chested ache and tears which accompany the switch from pleasure to anxious pain. Exciting touch elicits laughter, pain, pleasure-and-pain, and tears simultaneous with laughter; touch excites skin, laughter bursts forth, and tears flow in a commingling of external and internal breaches of the body’s imaginary boundaries. This confusion and threat of excess conveys something of the excitable ambivalence with which we may encounter an object of desire. Desire tickles the poet-lover into more acute awareness of his corporeality and its relationship with his mind and spirit.

As the poet-lover in the *Délie* repeats, love surprises, amazes, and violently disorients him, as is evident in the rhetoric of the love-object as the source of both life and death, of her being Pandora, of love being sacrificial, of his self-dissolution, and her ‘abyssing’ him. These traumatic losses of coherence all originate in the look that touches and breaches not his body but his heart (*Dizain* 5), and in his own desire: ‘la clarté de mes desirs funebres’ (*Dizain* 7, l. 8). So is this a purely metaphorical look and touch? Is this a rhetoric which ensures that analogies such as ‘comme Lune infuse

dans mes veines' (Dizain 22, l. 8) make sense? Perhaps; however, the sense of wonder that her beauty arouses is more than the pure wonder that prompts not only worship but also an intellectual pursuit of truth, for these *dizains* are punctuated by material-metaphorical verbs, such as 'je me dissous' and 'elle m'abysme' as well as by the piercing, penetrating look of love. Wonder there is, but the insistent claim of sense being suggests that a different, more embodied form of thinking can now take shape – at the same time as the presumed shape of the body is called into question. The body which can be represented in terms of being breached or unbreached, firmly substantial and bounded rather than dissolving, is a habitual imaginary body, which the encounter with desire throws into disarray. The conventionally symbolic 'Corps, Coeur, et Raison [...] Ame' (Dizain 1) are overwhelmed, and overthrown by desire, but the physiological body, heart, and brain are none the less affected. The body's visceral register is inseparable from, to take just one example, doubt being experienced as 'perilleuse' (Dizain 220, l. 2) and, when aroused by hope, vacillating (Dizain 362). Confronted by the beloved's unpredictability, the poet-lover agitatedly reels between hoping for a welcome and doubting his own hope, unable to believe any evidence he may have had of her desire. 'Le vaciller du doute' (l. 10) sends him reeling, and feels life-threatening; in the context of a spatially imagined self, this conveys the physiological impact on the poet-lover of extreme doubt, at the same time as confirming the presence of an imaginary body that is different from its lyric intertexts. This poet-lover is particularly preoccupied with the effects of being breached and with the realization, prompted by this form of touch, that stability was a fantasy. This is not altogether dissonant with the sixteenth-century notion that physiology and psychology constitute each other. However, it reminds us that this constitution was not metaphor-free, and demonstrates touch's power (because of its ambiguity as

sensation and affect) to unsettle correspondences and contours and, while seeming part of that normative model of the convergence of physiology and psychology, to reveal an embodiment produced by the intensities of both drives and desires. This is a body which is at once material and imaginary, and which signifies. The touch of love, be it literal or figurative, surprises us out of our habits and into this awareness, and when Scève uses it figuratively, paradoxically, it reactivates the body's materiality.

Touch may have been deemed the sensation furthest from imagination and memory as well as intellect, but its potential as a source of insight and effective means of communicating that insight is strong, and its figurative valence indicates its durable potency in both imagination and memory. It is no less potent as a reminder of the fluidity and permeability of the body's boundaries. That the idea of a fixed distinction between inside and outside the body is a fiction, indeed is more significant as a metaphor than as a physiological or psychological reality, is exemplified by the representation of the beloved as impenetrably intact, in contrast to the poet-lover's skin, which breathes.

The touch of love, be it a look that touches or literally a touch – prohibited and therefore constantly fantasized about or yearned for – on or through the skin, is integral to the kind of thinking to which love gives rise, in which accustomed distinctions and oppositions lose their hold.

Si de sa main ma fatale ennemye
 Et neantmoins delices de mon Ame,
 Me touche un rien, ma pensée endormye
 Plus que le mort soubz sa pesante lame
 Tressaulte en moy, comme si d'ardent flamme

L'on me touchoit, dormant profondement.
 Adonc l'esprit, poulsant hors roidement,
 La veult fuyr et moy son plus affin
 Et en ce point (à parler rondement)
 Fuyant ma mort, j'accelere ma fin. (Dizain 159)

Touch on skin materializes thought: over the space of three lines, thought's abrupt awakening is described in deliberately corporeal terms, including its elaboration via a physical analogy, which simultaneously conjures love's metaphorical 'ardent flamme' as well as the sadistic prospect of searing flesh to wake a person. These lines are more vigorous than the terms of the paradox which the *dizain* reprises; the beloved is both his heart's delight and his enemy, but the violence of her effect is nonetheless palpable in the last four lines, thanks to the energetic physicality of the description of the spirit's response: 'poulsant hors roidement | La veult fuyr'. This is both a spirit fleeing the body to preserve itself and an embodied spirit, even before the poet-lover thinks to join it: again the physicality of the verbs is striking, 'Fuyant [...] j'accelere ma fin'. He can neither live with, nor without her; he can save his spirit from the deadly lure of the flesh, but die trying; or, muscling both of these to one side, he can recognize the aporia that the spirit seems a material phenomenon. This reinvigorates the conventional life and death rhetoric of love; this lover's thinking is embodied and he indicates that without love, he imagines he will literally not survive. The vigour of this *dizain* stems from the use of touch, the most inescapably corporeal sense, necessary for survival. Paradoxically, it simultaneously reminds us that no matter how close the poet-lover comes to the core of things – namely, that love will not save him from his dreaded mortality, but, if anything, makes him more acutely aware of it (that

comparison between his thinking and the entombed corpse (ll. 3-4) is not for nothing). Moreover, there is still a gap between the experience of that core and his real body, and touch's function in the *Délie*, for all its corporeal associations, is never pure bodily gesture or sensation.

Here the merest touch ('me touche un rien' (l. 3)) awakens not senses but thought: for Plato and Ficino the senses are entombed in the body; here it is thought that lies entombed but for the beloved's touch. In the opening *dizain*, it is the touch of the sight of the beloved that moves the poet-lover from his wandering ('mes jeunes erreurs' (l. 1)) to worship and wonder; here it is touch that astonishes. In both, his spirit takes flight ('l'esprit devie' (Dizain 1, l. 8), 'l'esprit poussant hors roidement' (Dizain 159, l. 7)). In both, also, touch plays its part in disrupting the poet-lover's sense of himself – surprising him out of deadening habit (the imperfect tense of 'girouettoit' in Dizain 1, or the death-like slumber of his capacity to think in Dizain 159) – and confronting him with a more dissonant, incoherent version of that self: 'Fuyant ma mort, j'accelere ma fin'.

For Cusa, Bouelles, and Ebreo, whose ideas were attractive to Scève, desire is 'an experience that unites man with the world in an effort to comprehend and assimilate it',³² which implies that there is a sense of reliable connection between the internal world and the environment – inside and outside. This holds, if we equate the beloved with the 'world' (as the cosmic symbolism allows), and if we understand desire as a coherent force – quite an 'if', given the vacillations, confusions, and conflict of the poet-lover's desire. This 'uniting' may be a significant aspect of his experience of desire, but it does not occur without initial disruption of an existing sense of union (wandering is still a form of union) and recurring threats of dislocation,

³² See Jones and von Ohlen, "Si doux et attrayant subject", p. 93.

precariousness, and self-loss: ‘Tout ie m’abysme aux oblieuses rives’ (Dizain 118, l. 10). Nor does it occur without writing and the kind of creative thinking that *poetic* form and language make possible. For Ann Rosalind Jones and H. Bruce von Ohlen, ‘Scève is concerned with a poetic *savoir* which outlasts passing states of confusion and wandering precisely because it is validated by them’.³³ Perhaps: but that the *savoir* we encounter is embodied seems to have been elided in this statement. This becomes more evident if we explore further the relationship between touch and wonder – and its concomitants here, confusion and wandering (a form of wondering).

The poet-lover is and remains a wanderer / in error, and although the causes of his wandering / error mutate, his desire is constant. His error is associated with isolation and alienation as well as with false belief and self-deception, as in Dizain 57, which grows from the realization (‘Je cours à moy’ (l. 3)) that it is his beloved (ll. 5-8) who misleads him, towards his speechless awareness that he will once again fall into self-deception (ll. 9-10). ‘Error’ connotes primarily existential, psychological, or moral / ethical wandering, rather than physical wandering; yet the materiality of verbs such as *girouetter*, *courir*, and *toucher* is no accident: the loss of existential or ethical compass described brings powerfully felt physical dislocation.

Between wander and wonder, the hinge is touch: the touch of love incites wonder, and the touch of error (‘mon erreur me touche’ (l. 3)) that is wandering incites a return to (misplaced or lost) self and with it, a realization of the ‘truth’ of the effects of love and desire. Even when the poet-lover then falls back into the self-blinding ‘error’ of abject devotion, he does so with knowledge – at the cost of wonder. Wonder may initiate inquiry, but desire’s knowledge brings only intermittent self-awareness, as the frequent association of desire and thought now with light, now with

³³ Ibid, p. 102.

deadly darkness, or both, suggests: ‘en la clarté de mes desirs funesbres’ (Dizain 7, l. 8). The object of his desire, the beloved – Délie, ‘comme lune’ (Dizain 22, l. 9) – casts both light (associated with wonder – enlightenment) and shadow. On the other hand, without desire and love’s knowledge, to wander may be to drift and spin in muted existence. This knowledge, painfully won, intermittent, and unreliable though it may be (‘le confus de mes vaines merveilles’ (Dizain 164, l. 6)) along the way to a place of resolution, is more acutely enlivening and enlightening than the forms of knowledge available to the wanderer before his first faltering steps towards becoming the poet-lover.

Before the touch of love, the wanderer lacked wonder – as the insistence on surprise, marvel, and admiration (that is, wonder) suggests. However, this form of wonder initiates not dispassionate intellectual inquiry but a more problematic and less charted exploration / venture. Rather than the poet-lover embarking in hope of positive gain (truth or understanding – *savoir*), he embarks in ambivalence, confusion, and self-endangering doubt. For this is embodied wonder and, contrary to both philosophical inquiry and the Neoplatonists’ ideal of spiritual transcendence, the poet-lover’s body will persist (and with it the threat of mortality); mind and body coexist even as the very nature of self is thrown into question.

This helps us understand why the epiphany of the final *dizain* is so late and fragile; the penultimate *dizain* is riven by doubts about the wisdom of persisting in so dangerous and unreasonable a thing as love. But what is the poet-lover’s alternative? The versions of what is good and right that ‘raison’ and ‘devoir’ dictate have lost meaning for him, and at least love’s effect has been to awaken a tenacious desire for greater understanding and self-understanding – dismantling his sense of identity and worth. Lost, too, are the versions of the ideal ending dictated by the genre; here the

narrative ends not in spiritual transcendence but in a sense that human love cannot reach its greatest spiritual potential without honouring embodied desire.

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